

Readings for Summer Service of 26 July 2015

From *The Virtues of Aging* by Jimmy Carter:

READING #1 (pp. 1-3):

“I was just fifty-six years old when I was involuntarily retired from my position in the White House. [...] What had been our flourishing farm supply business was now more than a million dollars in debt. [...] Our despair was even more acute because we realized that our daughter, Amy, would soon be going off to school, leaving just the two of us alone. [...]”

“There were other reasons as well why moving from Washington back to our home in Plains was not a pleasant experience. It was not easy to forget about the past, overcome the fear of the future, and concentrate on the present. In this small and tranquil place, it was natural for us to assume—like other retirees—that our productive lives were about over. Like many other involuntary retirees, we had to overcome our distress and make the best of the situation.”

“When one of our friends pointed out that more than a third of American men in my age group were retired, and that we could expect to live until we were eighty years old, I had one disturbing question: What was I going to do with the next twenty-five years?”

READING #2 (pp. 11-13):

“The status of older people in America has varied dramatically down through the centuries [...]. Until the nineteenth century the few who survived were especially admired and respected. [...]”

“However, with the coming of the industrial revolution there was a shift from home and farm employment to work in factories, with more competition for jobs and a premium on workers who were stronger and more adept. Older citizens either could not compete or were seen as taking jobs from younger breadwinners. The result is that they came to be considered a burden on families and society in general.”

“The status of the elderly reached a low point during the Great Depression, when poverty was prevalent and jobs were scarce. [...]The] non-productive elderly, some still in their fifties or sixties, were often a hardship, even an embarrassment, for a family. I remember the disgraceful status of old folks' homes [...], where the old and destitute sat on the porch or, if able, scabbled to produce a meager crop in adjacent gardens or fields. [...]”

“Then in 1935 Social Security legislation was passed. This gave older people a subsistence income and, at the same time, removed them from competing in the workplace for scarce jobs. Since then the lives of older Americans have changed dramatically. [...] With this relative affluence and enormous political power, respect for us older people has reached a new high.”

READING #3 (pp. 54-56):

“As with most other couples, profound changes have taken place between Rosalynn and me, and as we've moved into our retirement years we've had to continue reconciling our inherent personal differences. It has not always been easy. [...]”

“I was dominant when we were a young married couple. [...] This has changed. The sharper differences faded during the fifty-two years that Rosalynn and I have spent together. Of necessity, we each had to accommodate the preferences of the other. [...] This evolutionary trend was accelerated when I was no longer president and we were more on equal terms in every aspect of life.”