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## The Rest Of My Life

by Lesley Dawson

I am not sure that I exist, actually. Since I retired, I don't know who I am. All my life I have seen myself as this professional person. Even today when anyone asks me what I do/did for a living I find myself saying, "I am a physiotherapist". Recently I have been learning to say, "in a previous life I was a physiotherapist."

So who am I now? Am I more than my profession? I have to be more or there is no life for me now that I no longer do that work? People tend to orient themselves in terms of their job or their family. I can't say I am the mother of four boys, all grown up and doing well in their lives, but I am not an orphan, I am a member of a family. I have a role that cannot be taken away from me, but do I see myself in that role?

The day I retired, I looked at my diary. It showed a clear division between my leaf before and after. Up to this day my life was full of activity, as recorded in what was written down on the page. After today there is just a big white silence. No activities recorded there at all. It will just as if I have stopped existing, no more present, no more important. I am just one more white-haired old woman pushing her trolley round the supermarket buying meals for one.

I am no longer important. Being important obviously means a lot to me. My importance is what defines me. No longer being seen as important means I do not know who I am, I have become a non-person. I am nobody. I have been blotted out from the page of life. I no longer exist.

The alarm wakes me up at seven as usual. That is the time programmed on my clock radio. I jump out of bed ready to dash to the shower. I just have time to eat breakfast before I need to get in the car and drive to work. On my way to the bathroom, I stop, and the realization comes over me that I am not expected at the university today, or any other day from now on.

Should I make a cup of coffee and go back to bed now I don't have to rush? In fact what am I going to do with myself now? Now that I am upright, I might as well stay that way, but making coffee is a good idea. Time for scrambled egg on toast today. What a treat. Even time to wash up if I didn't have a policy that I only washed up once a day – in the evening. Is this a policy I now need to re-examine? Naw, leave it. I have plenty of time to do it later.

Sitting on a bench on the seafront I watch the fishing boats offloading their catches on the dock. It is peaceful and makes you feel slightly guilty to be so relaxed. I see my next-door-but-one neighbour approaching with his black scottie dog straining at the lead as she tries to chase the seagulls. He sits next to me on the bench and congratulates me on my freedom from the rat race.

I ask why he is not at work and he turns to smile at my confusion. "I am still on sick leave after my heart surgery," he reminds me, "this is my last day before I have to go back on what they call a phased return to work." After a big sigh he explains, "I have just got used to being myself instead of my job and now I have to go back to the grind. You are so lucky to have the rest of your life as yourself."

He nods farewell and sets off back home. I look around me and realise that he could be right. I do have the rest of my life as myself.