What to Do with Your Channel Freedom

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- Were you to quit watching TV (the entertainment kind), what would you do in your newfound free time?
- I would like to encourage you to use that time to “find yourself,” broadly speaking. That is use it, first, to discover your own talents, aptitudes, fields of knowledge, and background experience and, then, to use these personal qualities in one or more leisure activities where they can be routinely expressed and, in many instances, enhanced. A main reward in finding yourself in this way is experiencing deep self-fulfillment: to develop to the fullest your gifts and character, to develop and realize your full potential. Some activities also contribute to physical health, while still others contribute to social involvements, both additional rewards.
- It is equally important to know where you lack talent, aptitude, and the like. There is no need to court disappointment, by choosing leisure you are unable to succeed at, no matter how you try.
- Three forms of leisure activity:
  - Casual leisure: pure enjoyment requiring little or no talent, knowledge, or experience. For example, watching entertainment TV, taking a leisurely stroll in a park, having a nap, reading a comic book.
  - Serious leisure: the activities of amateurs, hobbyists, and highly-qualified volunteers. The amateurs, who have professional counterparts, are found in sport, science, entertainment, and the arts. The hobbyists – they have no professional counterparts – turn up as collectors; makers, breeders or raisers (e.g., furniture, quilts, dogs, flowers); enthusiasts for certain activities, sports, and games, and serious readers in a particular area of literature. The highly-qualified volunteers are knowledgeable, experienced people, who serve in a wide variety of sectors of society (e.g., teacher’s aid, member of a board of directors, museum guide, adolescent mentor, member of a self-help group).
  - Project-based leisure: short-term, moderately complicated, either one-shot or occasional, though infrequent, creative undertaking carried out in free time. It requires considerable planning, effort, and sometimes skill or knowledge, but for all that is not serious leisure nor intended to develop into such. Examples include organizing a wedding reception, serving as a volunteer for an arts festival or major sport competition (e.g., the Olympics), building a rock garden, and preparing a genealogy.
- People find themselves, find fulfillment, not in casual leisure, but in the complex leisure of the serious and project-based variety. But there is a catch. Unlike casual leisure the complex kinds require significant effort and perseverance to build up
the personal skill, knowledge, and experience that, together, help generate a sense of fulfillment.

- In selecting a kind of serious leisure to pursue, it is important to know your talents, aptitudes, fields of knowledge, and experience related to these three.

- How does one discover these four personal qualities?
  - There are professionals (e.g., psychologists, lifestyle counselors), who can assist in such discovery. See “Counselling Services” in the Yellow pages, and inquire about the counselor’s interest in “positive psychology,” which includes a specialization in working with clients to enhance their well-being, happiness, leisure, self-fulfillment, and the like. Many of these services center, some of them exclusively, on “negative psychology,” on solving difficult, unpleasant personal and group problems.
  - On your own you can engage in some introspection: look into your past to learn what you believe you do well, in which you have perhaps have found fulfillment, know a great deal about, or in which you have had extensive experience.
  - On your own you can ask close friends and relatives what they see as your strengths (talents, aptitudes, etc).
  - On your own you can try to envision yourself doing certain complex leisure activities, to see whether this preliminary examination produces an appealing picture for each activity considered.

- One early challenge along the road to self-fulfillment through leisure is to find a reasonably lengthy list of amateur, hobbyist, and volunteer activities to consider for their possible appeal or lack thereof. Suggestions: read R.A. Stebbins. *After work: The search for an optimum leisure lifestyle* (Calgary: Detselig, 1998; WWW.temerondetselig.com); contact Volunteer Calgary (tel.: 265-5633; WWW.volunteerocalgary.ab.ca); visit AOL Hometown on the Web, reached through the Google search engine using <hobbies and interests> and clicking on first entry in the resulting list).

- Conclusions. These remarks show that leisure is by no means always trivial, that the serious and project-based forms can have a profound and positive effect on the person who pursues them, and that, at least in this area of life, people can be masters of their own destiny.