

I have never had a “bucket list.” The idea of a list of new activities and experiences I would like to enjoy while I am alive, or before I “kick the bucket,” as the old saying goes, makes no sense to me. But, I recently read something that seems a lot more interesting and useful. Instead of a “bucket list,” why not a “chuck-it list,” choosing things to quit doing, thinking about, worrying about, or concerning oneself with?

That makes a lot of sense to me. People go through decade after decade doing, saying, listening to, and keeping silent about all kinds of things that they really don't care about having in their lives. That seems like a colossal waste of time.

Considering what I might think worthy of “chucking” I realized I had already done a good deal of getting rid of things that just didn't mean that much. It has been many, many years since I kept a checkbook reconciliation. I quit going to most social events before Covid made it a wise practice for all of us. I no longer have any trouble whatsoever saying “no” to requests for participation in some project. I no longer attend class reunions. I was not much involved in teenagers' activities when I was in high school. There does not seem much reason to revisit those times now.

I have quit worrying (if I ever did) about whether my activities are age-appropriate or not. I don't wear shorts anymore, but that is not due to concern about how I might look in them. Instead, I am belatedly following the dermatologist's advice.

Other things I “chucked” a very long time ago. I gave up curtains except for shading the sun on summer days. I quit using any makeup after a few short years when I was trying to look a bit older than the high school kids to whom I was trying to teach English. Thankfully, for them and for me, I gave up that job in short order, too.

I chucked academia after understanding, while pursuing a PhD. in history that I wanted no part of that life, that I wanted to come back to this farm where my great-grandparents homesteaded in the 1870s. I saw more value, for me, in following in their footsteps than in a career at a university.

But, having a chuck-it list does not mean one is making life less meaningful. Rather, it sweeps away the detritus with which we all can so easily muddy our lives and gives us time for the things that matter to us. For instance, writing does not contribute substantially to our economic lives here at Coe Creek, though it

does keep me in “new book money.” But, since I was a young child, it has been a necessary and enjoyable part of my life. Sitting at the family rolltop desk, I pulled out that writing shelf that so handily slides out for convenience, I proceeded to make columns on a sheet of plain paper and write the family newspaper. Later, essays and written reports became the most satisfying part of the school experience. And, writing continues to fulfill that need for communication today.

In my early twenties, I was fortunate enough to learn to make yarn on a spinning wheel. Anna, my dad’s cousin in Sweden, taught me that ancient craft when I lived on the next farm to hers as a newlywed. That skill remains with me today, and it is one of the most enjoyable and useful crafts I can imagine. Many years later, here on the farm, Runo put up with my questions and needs for advice as I learned to shear sheep at about the age when many people begin to think of retirement. This, too, remains a strenuous, but very enjoyable job.

Other activities that are part necessity and part hobby endure for a lifetime. For anyone who cannot envision eating store bread, baking is good work. And the cookies, rolls, cakes, and pies that inevitably become part of the routine add to the pleasure of work with flour.

So, thinking about what to put on a chuck-it list these days doesn’t leave many options, I guess I have already scrubbed my life of all those things I once considered necessary or, at least, moderately enjoyable or useful but didn’t really want to pursue any longer. At least for now, that is. Something else that is unnecessary to my life may come to the forefront in the future.