

There is a lot of pressure put on both children and adults in this country that can be summarized in this statement: “Don’t be a quitter.” I wonder why this is such a popular view. Kids are often told that if they start something, they have to finish it. I don’t know if this admonition was ever used with me when I was young, but if so, it didn’t work. I have a long tradition of “quitting” that seemingly has done me little or no harm over the many decades I have practiced it.

I quit drinking milk when I was two. Not a sip has passed my lips since, though I eat a lot of dairy products.

Sometimes, I admit, I was unsuccessful in my quitting. Quitting kindergarten was the top of my list after I found that we were not going to read books at school, that all that was required was a gradual knowledge of the alphabet, correct group behavior, and practice in the art of taking a nap on a rug on the hardwood floor of our classroom. I did succeed in missing a lot of kindergarten, though, as my mother and father gave up on persuading me that it was a five day a week program. I missed more than thirty days that first year of school. I did better in later years, but I was never one of those kids who had perfect attendance.

I dropped a couple of German classes in college not because they were hard, but because the grad assistant who taught them was so unpleasant and prone to tantrums. I didn’t need that in my life.

I know people who read books they do not like because they have started them and cannot quit something in the middle. I can’t even begin to put a number on the total of books I have abandoned partway through. Often, I read the beginning, skip to the last chapter, see how the story ends, and decide if it is worth pursuing. Other times, I see almost immediately that a book is not one I will either enjoy or benefit from in some way. Time to throw it in the bag to take back to the library.

I quit a PhD. program halfway through because I saw that it was going to lead to my living somewhere I did not want to live—namely, somewhere other than this home farm where my great-grandparents homesteaded in the 1870s.

I quit projects, too, things I thought I wanted to do or make until I found out that I didn’t enjoy the process or was unsatisfied with the results. I tried to learn the art of tatting, and I soon quit that.

I can’t sew. I have a sewing machine, and I have taken it out a few times and stitched up a rip or made something simple. But, my skills are lacking, and I don’t even know how to fill the bobbin properly. My mother sewed a lot of our clothes, and my sister is a fine seamstress. I attribute my lack of both ability and desire to a required home economics class in junior high when I was allowed to make something that was much too difficult for me. No more of that!

I have started innumerable articles, essays, and stories that just didn’t work out. If one writes, one must be able to quit when it becomes evident that something is drastically out of order in the composition.

I also quit band in junior high. I was playing the baritone, an instrument I probably chose because my brother had played the same horn in high school several years earlier. I quit band in the middle of the year or maybe even earlier because we had to practice at home, and Duke the old farm collie didn’t like it. I liked Duke much more than I liked the baritone.

My sister and I both quit piano lessons after one summer. That was a blessing

for the lady who taught us, always saying, as she pointed to a song in our sheet music, "Commence here, dear." We were totally without ability.

So, I have to say that I believe that "quitting" has been unduly denigrated. One can whitewash people's fruitless efforts as "determination," but staying with a task isn't always so noble, especially if one has no ability or interest in the activity.

But, even things we like can become onerous. Sometimes, we just have to know that it is time to stop something without belaboring it in the mistaken notion that it matters if we finish it or not.

Right now, though, I am rather tired of this topic. So, I think I will.....