

Free Is a Very Good Price

by Michael Westrich

Write Around Portland workshop participant at Independent Living Resources

I became disabled five years ago. I am a cancer survivor and have already been told by doctors I will get cancer again and again in the future. I have diabetes; fibromyalgia; gout; need a right knee replacement; and am 120 pounds overweight. Naturopathic medicine keeps me in pretty good shape, considering all I have wrong with me.

I now live on \$705 a month from Social Security disability. I used to have money and vacation one and a half months each year. I have traveled in eighteen foreign countries and throughout all fifty states of the USA. I have already spent my entire pension and savings just trying to survive. I am lucky my home and cars are paid for or I would probably be homeless, pushing around a shopping cart full of junk. I used to live in a small town in North Dakota, but now I live in the big city of Portland, Oregon.

It has been quite an adjustment going from somewhat rich to poor, small town to big city, and good health to really bad health. But, I am now officially poor, through no fault of my own. I finally figured out I am never going to be able to afford to travel again, so I started looking for free things to do.

The Around the Sun blog emails me every Friday and lists lots of free things to do on the weekends. Also on the web, there's Portland on the Cheap, Portland Events Calendar, and Portland Parks and Recreation. Powell's Books has authors speaking about their books. I saw Howard Dean and went to an anarchist meeting there. The libraries have lots of free events. Some websites give away passes to free screenings of new movies. I also go to events at the colleges like Portland State University (they have a lot) and Lewis & Clark College.

I go out practically every night and attend free movies; concerts; art exhibits; lectures; fairs; festivals; plays; sporting events; car shows; have free meals, beer or wine, and on and on. The further out of my comfort zone the better.

That's how I found the Write Around Portland workshop. I attended the published book reading in a church last year. I also joined another writer's workshop. I hope to write and publish a series of books on my life called *Trailer Trash*.

I started going to free events in June 2009. I attended 150 free things between June and December 31, 2009. I have attended 177 events in 2010 as of the date I am writing this, which is April 6, 2010. I am actually starting to like Portland.

My record for attending events in one day is seven and I have done it on more than one occasion. I bring a brown bag lunch, snacks, and my own bottled (tap) water. I have to really push myself to go to a lot of things in the first place and then really struggle to walk to get to or to get around at the events. I usually ache from head to toe at the end of the day, but it is worth it. I love attending totally new and foreign things just to experience them. I actually feel sorry for people who never get out of their own little clique or peer group or neighborhood. I am packing in all the living I can do into each day, despite the fact that I am poor and in bad health.