

RETIRE ON YOUR TERMS!

A GUIDE TO HOLISTIC RETIREMENT



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CHAPTER 1

My Story

If you look at what you have in life, you'll always have more. If you look at what you don't have in life, you'll never have enough.

- Oprah Winfrey

Hello everyone, Thank you for taking some time out to read my book “***Retire on your terms***”. This is a book I had been planning to write ever since I retired from corporate life in 2016. I wanted to showcase to the world why and how I did it. The blueprint was all in my mind but it had not been on paper and so finally after 6.5 years, here it is and I am so happy with it.

Why did I write this book?

Writing your own story, especially by a person who had been an introvert during the early years of life (more on that later) can be difficult. You have to be vulnerable, talking about yourself and letting everyone know everything about you, your life, preferences, values, fears, hopes, and dreams. When I was working on the layout of this book, I decided to include a chapter about my story in the book and decided to have it placed somewhere inside the book. But my talk with Mr Amit Trivedi, who is an author, speaker and trainer, brought in a completely different perspective. He asked me a very pointed question - Why are you writing this book? I responded by saying that after my interactions with so many people as part of my new profession, I understand that many of them want to retire early and I tell them my story that if I can, then anybody can. With my interpersonal interactions, I can reach out to only a small set of people. Writing this book will give me an opportunity to reach out to a larger audience. And then he said, "Why do you want to hide your story somewhere in the middle of the book?" Getting it right there upfront in the first chapter is important to emphasise the purpose that retirement needs to be planned in terms of both financial and non-financial aspects before the plunge is taken. This is 'retirement' from doing

something which you don't want to do but still have to do. This 'retirement' is leading the life which you want to lead and not what society and everyone expect you to lead. So, here is my story, as the first chapter of this book!

My initial years

I was born in 1971 in Dehradun as the youngest of four children. How we settled in Dehradun is also a story by itself. My parents were staying in Saharanpur in a joint family along with my grandparents and my paternal uncle and his family. They were having a flourishing wholesale cloth business and a great reputation in the city. But there was a problem. My father did not want to get into this business which was already very successful, and secretly applied for a position in ONGC, a leading Public Sector Unit, and got selected! After the initial melodrama and emotional conversations, my parents were finally permitted to move to Dehradun, the headquarters of ONGC. This was my father's first job in 1962 and also his last job when he retired in June 1995, incidentally also the same month when I started working.

I did most of my schooling in Dehradun. This is a city well known for very good schools and I was fortunate to study in one of them, Cambrian Hall. I had been an introverted person in school and had very limited friends. I had a speech impairment wherein even saying a few sentences in front of everyone was a challenge by itself for which I had to struggle. The confidence level was low and in those days there were not too many speech therapists. Ironically, when I now look back, I am now in a profession where in the whole day I am either on the phone or taking educational sessions with large gatherings, with relative ease. We have to overcome our weaknesses to get on with life! Anyways, coming back to School, one skill for which I was known and very popular in School was Arithmetics. This was one subject where it was very tough to beat me and I was the favourite of my mathematics teachers. I even took up the challenge of beating a calculator with my high-speed calculations in front of my schoolmates. We had a set of about 25 numbers. The task was who would add these faster, someone feeding this into the calculator or would I do it mentally and calculate it faster? I remember having won the challenge. This skill slowly got into oblivion with the advent of calculators being used far more than ever and later of course with the arrival of computers.

High schooling & college years

The turning point for us was the year 1984. My father got transferred to Bombay (now Mumbai) and we relocated from a small town to a metropolitan city. This turned out to be a blessing in

disguise for me, as in those days, Dehradun was popular only for schools but not beyond that. Once in Bombay, I completed my schooling and then junior college (twelfth standard) at Wilson College, one of the reputed colleges in Bombay and the oldest (almost 200 years old now!). Since I was not a very academically bright student, I did not get into an engineering college of my choice in Mumbai. My grandfather gave me the offer to come to Saharanpur and join him in his cloth business if I did not want to study further. I certainly did not want to do that and this turned out to be my inspiration to start studying more seriously! I decided to go for engineering in South India, in Bijapur, at the advice of my neighbour, who was studying there. I was worried about the affordability, but when I discussed it with my father, he said he would manage it as getting proper education is important and we should not compromise on it. I am so thankful for this perspective which I have carried along with me.

So here I was moving to a new city, far away from home, all by myself. I remember when I was in my final year of engineering, I had expressed to my batchmates that I will pursue MBA after engineering. There were negative vibes and I was being dissuaded from even thinking about it. The fact that even the university toppers from private institutes were not able to make it to premier management institutes was shown as a record to me. Anyways, I finished my engineering in 1992 finishing amongst the top 10 students in the college. I was amongst the few students in college who managed to complete engineering within the stipulated four years.

With engineering done, I returned to Mumbai. The question that confronted me was “What was next after this?”. I was clear that I do not want to straight away get into a job which may not do justice to what I am capable of. I decided to take a break for a year and study exclusively for management entrance exams. Subsequently, I was able to get through the entrance exams, but then during the group discussion and interview stage, faced challenges. One reason was not being an IIT and the REC (now known as NITs) pass-out. The other was not being able to make it into these stressful conversations considering the speech impairment I mentioned earlier. And then there was a pleasant surprise! In the Common Admission Test for Mumbai University, I stood 6th amongst the 12,000 students who had applied! I applied for interviews at six out of the seven MBA colleges which were in Mumbai at that time and got selected for all of them. I finally joined the best amongst them - Jamnalal Bajaj Institute of Management Studies (JBIMS) in 1993. I was probably the first ever from my university to get admission into a prestigious college like JBIMS. My parents had applied for a transfer to Dehradun while I was preparing for the management entrance exams. Perhaps they may not have anticipated that I would be able to make it. But then,

when I did, my father withdrew the application and the family stayed back in Mumbai so that I could be at home during these two years of the course. I completed my MBA in Finance in 1995. The two-year stint at college was uneventful, but I was in a very different league and the experience gained in two years was valuable and unmatched.

Getting into corporate life

We had campus interviews and I was selected to join the ICICI Group of companies. That was also the time my father was retiring and relocating back to Dehradun. So, I was provided with shared accommodation by the company where I stayed for 2 years. Then I asked for a transfer to New Delhi so that I could be closer to my home town. Now that the job was steady and the company had provided me with independent accommodation, and therefore “settled”, I married Lalita. Both of us were working, trying to create a mark for ourselves in corporate life. All was fine till 2000 which was a year for the Y2K. That’s when the IT bug bit me too and we decided to relocate to Chennai where I was offered a job at Polaris Software. Moving to South India was a completely different experience for us and we had never imagined that we would be there for more than 21 years. Our son, Shreyas was born while we were in Chennai. There were better career opportunities in Bangalore and I worked with DSL Software (a subsidiary of Deutsche Bank which was later acquired by HCL Technologies) and briefly with Wipro Technologies. Then there was this exciting opportunity with Franklin Templeton at Hyderabad and we relocated once again. Our daughter, Shailja was born while we were in Hyderabad. Franklin Templeton gave me a completely different perspective on Finance, specifically Mutual Funds. This is one of the leading companies Globally in investment management and I learnt a lot about business and investing.

Money habits and investing

I have believed in saving money to an extent from the first year of working. Though I wouldn’t rate myself as a good investor at that time. I have made quite a few mistakes. One such mistake was in my first year of working wherein I purchased a money-back insurance policy. If someone were to ask me now, why did I buy life insurance when I was a bachelor with no dependents, I do not have the right answer. I did this to save some meager amount of taxes at that time. Imagine, if I had put that Rs 10,000 annually in a stock like Reliance or Infosys or a good diversified mutual fund, I would have been a multi-millionaire by now. All I received was a money-back amount every 5 years and then just about Rs 3 lakhs at the end of the maturity period of 25 years. The mistakes

did not end there. Over the years, I purchased a few Unit Linked Insurance Plans (ULIPs) without any purpose or goal and a few New Fund Offerings (NFOs) sold by agents as “best” funds, only to be asked to redeem them after a few months with another better fund (read NFO) in the market. Not understanding that there was a bigger incentive for them to “recommend” those funds to me. When I look at these past decisions, I feel that if even someone with a finance specialisation could also make such investing mistakes, then with so low financial literacy in India, what mistakes would others not from similar backgrounds make? My over a decade-long experience with Franklin Templeton and the Certified Financial Planner (CFP) certification done in 2014 has evolved me into a person with a comprehensive understanding of personal finances.

When I realised my mistakes, I was bold enough to admit them and started making the right investments based on my goals and risk profile. A high-paying job in the last ten years of my corporate life also meant that I could save more. I closed off my home loan early by making timely payments and saving a lot of interest. I have been debt free since 2012, which meant that I had more disposable income for investments. The power of compounding started working in my favour due to the mutual fund investments which have been done since 2000. In 2016, I worked out detailed calculations and figured out that I had achieved financial freedom. So, in November 2016, I decided to bid farewell to my corporate career.

Over the years while working in the company, I enjoyed giving informal advice to my friends and colleagues on personal finance which I had gained during my CFP certification. I knew that this is what I want to do in the second phase of my career and set up Financial Radiance. My mission is to help people globally achieve financial freedom. But having monetary financial freedom is not everything. Just like how I had a purpose for what I would do after I leave corporate life, I feel everyone should have a purpose. I have dedicated most of the chapters in this book to this theme. Having a purpose in life for a happy retirement life - a combination of self, health and wealth.

My shift from salaried to an entrepreneur

As I look back to my over 21 years of corporate life, I feel I have been very fortunate to get good bosses during most of my career. I learnt a lot from everyone. I did drift in between when I made the shift from finance to the technology industry, though even there I was working from the business perspective and not as a technical person. But I must admit that in serious technical conversations, I did feel lost which prompted my decision to come back into finance in the latter

part of my career. Nothing in education and experience go to waste. The technology experience has given me a good perspective to see things differently and when I set up Financial Radiance, I set it up leveraging technology to the fullest. I am still learning but I am proud to say that it is a 100% digital setup with a lot of automation and innovations.

Towards the latter part of my career in Franklin Templeton, I moved into a Global role of setting up a new offshore team in India. This involved interacting with the leadership across geographies and time zones. I could be attending calls sometimes at 1 am, or at 6 am, to cater across time zones. That started affecting my health due to the changing lifestyle and food habits. I started having high cholesterol and blood sugar levels. I knew that the contribution that I was making to the organisation was constructive, and held a lot of value, but at what cost? I was not satisfied at the end of the day and deteriorating health issues made the matter worse. I knew that I had to make some serious changes and that triggered the thought of following my passion.

Life after corporate life

The last six and a half years have been a roller coaster life as an entrepreneur, but a lot more satisfying as I have found the purpose of my life. I love writing a blog on every work anniversary year to share my perspectives and learnings. If you wish to read them, you may want to check out www.financialradiance.com/blog. Now, I enjoy my work and feel deeply gratified when working with clients from all around the world. I strive to understand their aspirations and act as a catalyst in helping them achieve their dreams and goals.

Coming back to the health issue which I mentioned in the previous section. I used to visit one of the most reputed diabetic doctors In Hyderabad and I shared with him that I would like to get rid of the 5 tablets I had been taking every day for sugar and cholesterol. I was dejected when he mentioned that I need to start living with it and tablets would be my companion throughout life. My wife, Lalita is one person who does not take things for granted easily and is always looking for solutions. One fine day, during the pandemic days, she came to me and persuaded me to join an introductory session by Dr Pramod Tripathi, founder of Freedom from Diabetes. After having attended this session, I decided to take the plunge and enrolled in the annual program. The worst that could happen was that I would lose the fees for the year-long program. This was a digital program and I was assigned a doctor, an exercise expert and a dietician who would guide me through the entire process. I remember when the doctor called me for the first time, his first

question was “Are you stressed?” I responded that I used to when I was employed and now I don’t. He replied, “I assure you that you will get rid of your medicines if you follow our routine diligently”. Thus began a big change in my diet. There are substitutes for what I earlier used to eat and that transition has not been very difficult. I was asked to lose weight. I wasn’t overweight even at that time, just that some weight was in the wrong places and had converted into fat!. I was able to achieve the desired weight loss easier, but then when I had to bring it back, I just couldn’t. That has always been a challenge for me, to gain weight which I wouldn’t say is a bad challenge to have. I have never been an exercise person in my life, but I did bring back the routine of a daily walk which was missing earlier. After following a strict routine, I am pleased to share that I stopped taking medication for both diabetes and cholesterol. It feels good to prove my Hyderabad doctor wrong. I am among the 14000+ people whom this organisation has helped, to be free from diabetes. They do have an event called Muktotsav wherein those who have been able to get free from diabetes are required to undergo certain laboratory tests and those passing successfully are given awards and recognition. I have not formally done that but may consider some time in the future.

My Values

I come from a normal middle-class background where money has its prominence and is encouraged not to waste money unnecessarily. There are certain investments however which are not compromised. Like how my father did not compromise on providing the best education, whatever was possible within the means, I too believe the same. My children have been getting the education which would make them better citizens and eventually independent. I will not compromise. There can be however other kinds of expenses about which I do not care and would not want to spend even if I have money. I feel everyone needs to have clarity of their needs and wants. If a bigger car or a bigger house is their need, by all means, they should go ahead and plan for it. Likewise for other materialistic items.

Writing this book which you are reading is also a mission in itself. I have always wanted to write a book for the past four years. But, once I decided to take the plunge, I have been working diligently on the same. At the time of writing this, I have been getting up early a couple of hours every day for the last month and I know that one day, I will get my story out.

Okay, so this was a long story from me. Let’s get more serious in the following chapters where we would be discussing the retirement planning strategies, checklists, pros and cons of

retirement, mistakes to avoid, working out numbers with the help of case studies and a lot more.
Stay with me!

PREFACE

Dare to live the life you have dreamed for yourself. Go forward and make your dreams come true.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Who is this book for?

This book is for you. The fact that you are reading this book is validation enough that you want to live a richer, more fulfilling life in your retirement.

This book is different from other retirement planning books. Being ready with money is not just the only thing we need to consider for retirement planning. Retirement is much more than this. You need to think about your purpose in life, your passion and what makes you happy. This book is for those who have retirement at the back of their mind. It could be due to various reasons like job burnout, approaching retirement age, not being happy with the job, or the impending fear of the skillset getting redundant. Retirement is successful, if we are healthy – physically, intellectually, emotionally, socially and spiritually.

This book is also for those who have already retired. Some ideas in this book can trigger a chain of thoughts. It could force a rethink of the current life and make relevant changes to redesign and refine and enjoy life's second innings.

What will you get from this book?

Let me tell you that there are no readymade solutions in this book. What I promise to provide are sparks which can ignite your thinking. It is then up to you to evaluate all or any of these or even come up with your own which you think would be relevant considering your unique and specific situation.

How is this book organised?

This book is organised into 11 Chapters.

Chapter 1 starts with my story. Who I am, how I achieved my financial freedom and then started following my passion. It is a story about how I diligently planned what I wanted to do which would give me tremendous satisfaction. I genuinely feel that if I could achieve my goals, others can also do the same with some guidance. I am hopeful that my story will inspire you to figure out your passion in life and prepare your step-by-step plan to achieve it.

Chapter 2 is an introduction to the book, getting into the basics of why money management is critical in today's life which is so different, as compared to previous generations. The focus is on the importance of retirement planning and the unique challenges and opportunities.

Chapter 3 is about setting retirement goals, defining our vision, making it personalised, setting SMART goals and then prioritising them based on our unique situation and values which are more important.

Chapter 4 forces you to get answers to the basic question - are you ready to retire? It considers various factors like professional accomplishments whether achieved or yet to be achieved, doing what you always wanted to do and making yourself relevant professionally. This Chapter also takes into consideration some social factors like missing the interaction with people once retired and working on SQ, i.e. the Social Quotient. Finally, the Chapter concludes with some warnings for a certain set of people who want to retire, but still should not and perhaps look for a middle ground.

Chapter 5 is about the action strategy for retirement and offers practical and actionable steps which need to be taken as you get ready for retirement. This is one of the most important Chapters in this book.

Chapter 6 is for those who are considering early retirement. It lists the advantages and disadvantages of early retirement.

Chapter 7 is a checklist which we should consider when we are contemplating retirement to ensure that we have objectively evaluated all parameters.

Chapter 8 talks about major retirement mistakes which have been made by people in the past. Many of these can be easily overlooked and therefore this Chapter is a must-read.

Chapter 9 is about frauds where retirees are mainly targetted and must be read especially if you are not very digitally savvy.

Chapter 10 is all about numbers. It explains numerous calculations which need to be done for our retirement readiness, financially speaking. Three case studies have been included to show practical examples.

Chapter 11 is the conclusion of the book.

Some real-life examples have been given in this book. Their names, however, have been changed to protect the identities of the people.

How should you read this book?

My suggested approach would be to go in sequence from Chapter 1 to Chapter 11. But, just like retirement, this is also not a one-size-fits-all approach. If you are a person whose left brain is more dominant (meaning you are analytical) and what bothers you more are the retirement numbers to check your readiness. If that will determine whether you want to read the book or not, then by all means, dive in straight to Chapter 10 before reading other sections of the book. If you are looking for some motivation which can trigger your passion to retire early and get out of the rat race, then you must read my story in Chapter 1 first. Or you can simply go to the Contents page, know what excites you most and then read that Chapter. Once done, return to the Contents page and repeat the process. If you need to prioritise, you must read Chapters 5, 7, 8 and 10 and then come back to other Chapters as you will find some key takeaways in all the Chapters.

Who am I?

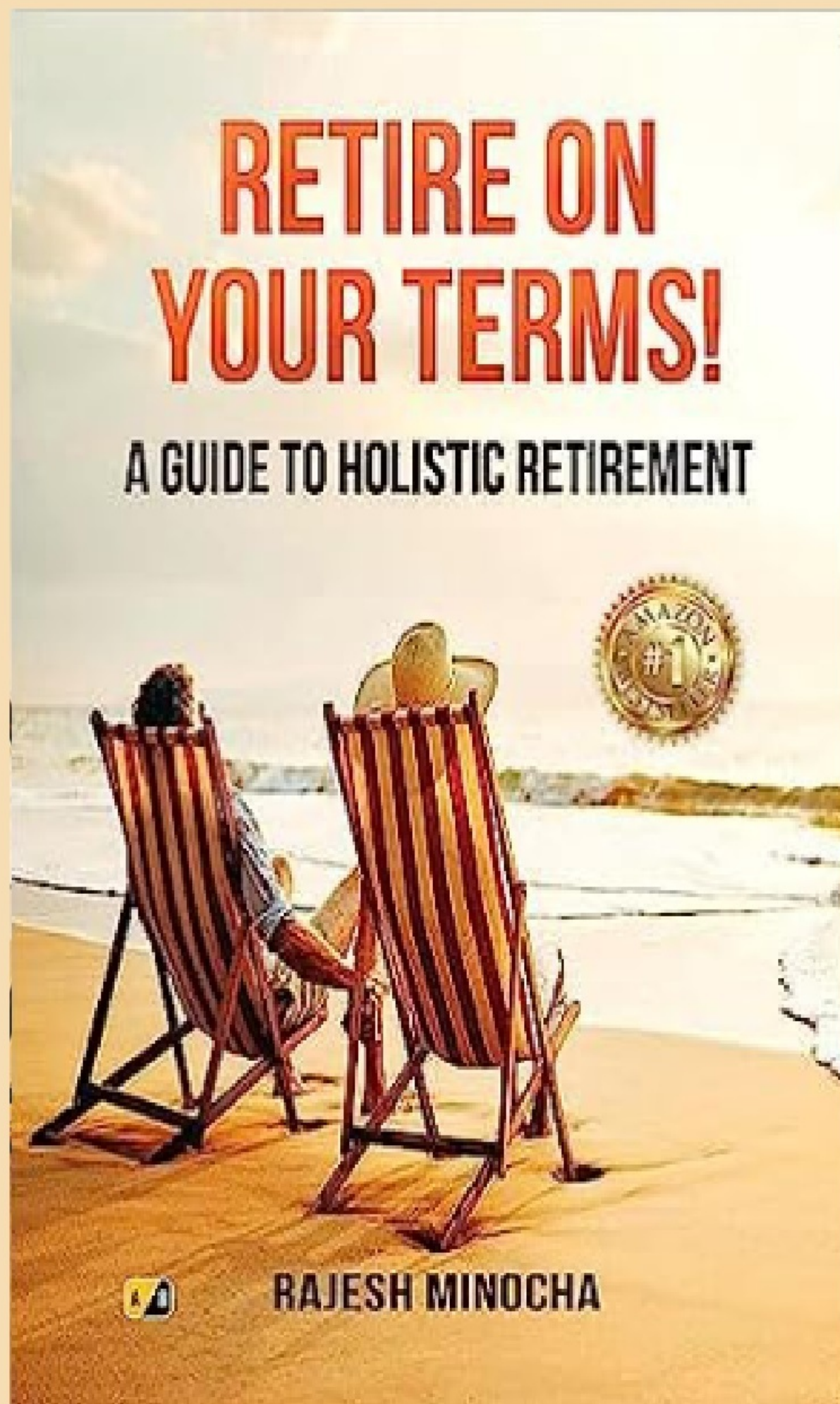
I come from an ordinary middle-class background. My life has been as ordinary as anyone can imagine. But there were a couple of turning points which changed the direction of my life. The

first was during my education when I joined a prestigious management institute. I had never been a topper but an above-average student and therefore when I was selected, it was a huge achievement for me. Subsequently, I worked for over two decades in leading Indian and multinational companies. The second turning point happened at the end of 2016 wherein I decided to break free and follow my passion. You can read more about my story in the first Chapter of this book.

Okay so here we go! Hope you enjoy reading the book, ***Retire on your terms***. By the end of this book, if I can get you prepared for your retirement with a few actionable items, then I think I have achieved my objective. I look forward to keeping in touch with you. Consider me as your sounding board if you are confronted with any challenges. My contact details are provided at the end of Chapter 11.

Here's wishing you all the best.

Retire how you want, not how others want you to



Book available at:
<https://amzn.to/46hwYIU>

To join my broadcast



- Investments - Mutual Funds, Bonds
- Retirement Readiness
- Insurance - Term, Health, Others
- Loans - Home, Business, LAP, Others
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