



TAKE BACK YOUR TIME
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NEWSLETTER - January/February 2008

"The only truly affluent are those who do not want more than they have."

--Erich Fromm

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BREAKING NEWS

WHAT'S THE ECONOMY FOR ANYWAY?

Conference in D.C. draws 350.

Take Back Your Time played a leading role in organizing the "What's the Economy for, Anyway?" conference as part of the Washington DC GREEN FESTIVAL this past October. About 350 people attended to hear some 90 presenters—a list of the presentations is on our web site at: <http://www.timeday.org/economyconference>. Feedback from the conference was universally positive, despite a smaller-than-hoped-for attendance. The conference was part of the "What's the Economy for, Anyway?" project under the auspices of the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts. The project is supported by a grant from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund.

NEW UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON WEB SITE OFFERS REMARKABLE ACCESS TO RESOURCES ON TOPIC

<http://www.citizeneconomy.org>

University of Washington faculty and students, led by UW Professor Lance Bennett, Teaching Assistant Tim Jones, and Green River Community College faculty member, Lloyd Jansen, have created a wonderful web site as part of the "What's the Economy for, Anyway?" project. The site grew out of a summer school class at the University of Washington and was created with support from the Center for Communication and Civic Engagement, and the Communications, Political Science, and Global Studies departments of the University. It contains various resources for teaching about alternative approaches to economics, studying other indicators of social and economic health, and creating curriculum materials, as well as several power point presentations on the subject. It will also include video and audio recordings of presentations at the DC "What's the Economy for, Anyway?" conference. Check it out! Thanks to UW professor Lance Bennett for mobilizing the resources to make the site possible!

Take Back Your Time Executive Director **John de Graaf** and board member **Nancy Parkes** will be teaching a WHAT'S THE ECONOMY FOR, ANYWAY? class at the Evergreen State College in Olympia, WA, this spring quarter.

A "What's the Economy for, Anyway?" track with nine speaker panels will also be part of the Green Festival in Seattle on April 12th. Information is available at www.greenfestivals.org.

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HOW THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES STAND ON WORK/LIFE BALANCE ISSUES

Take Back Your Time is a member of Take Care Net, a work-life balance coalition organized by professor Bob Drago at Penn State University. Take Care Net has polled the Democratic and Republican candidates about their positions on 26 key work-life balance policy issues, including paid family and sick leave. All Democratic candidates except Dennis Kucinich and Joe Biden responded. None of the Republican candidates responded. We think you'll be interested in the results.

To read the Take Care net press release and the positions of the candidates on each of the 26 issues, go to: <http://www.takecarenet.org/takecarenetsurvey2007.pdf>

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Friends of Take Back Your Time,

One of the many hats I wear is that of Public Relations Officer for Area 7 of Camp Fire USA Heart of Oklahoma Council. This is a joy; we have so many valuable learning activities for kids, and we always need to keep information available to the public. After all, kids grow up, and we need new youngsters coming into the program each year. One difficulty, however, is that sometimes club leaders forget to send me pictures and news! Leaders and parents are working to provide fun and learning experiences for young people, but they are busy and often forget. This can lead to a lack of awareness about a great program for young people.

And guess what! This doesn't only happen with my Camp Fire job! It happened here as well. We need more stories of things TBYT members are doing!

So, send us announcements of lectures and debates, accounts of Take Back Your Time Day events, news from your state legislature, or anything else concerning work/life issues.

We are starting 2008 with a renewed emphasis on member communication. We will publish newsletters on a regular basis, and we are planning to utilize some other forms of communication, too. So, log on and push that SEND button. You can have your chance at stardom!

Sincerely,

Kelley Smith
Editor, Oklahoma City, OK

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TRANSITIONS

JOHN DE GRAAF TO BE INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR TAKE BACK YOUR TIME

These are transitional times for TAKE BACK YOUR TIME. Our Executive Director Lisa Stuebing has resigned to seek full-time employment. TAKE BACK YOUR TIME's co-founder and board president John de Graaf is resigning his board position to become interim Executive Director for the organization.

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LETTER TO MEMBERS FROM NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR JOHN DE GRAAF

First of all, I want to wish all of you a Happy New Year! I want you to see with this newsletter that TAKE BACK YOUR TIME is alive and very well. Our vacation campaign is progressing rapidly, and we continue to be talked about frequently in the media. In the past few months, stories about our work have appeared in many publications, including NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELER (Nov./Dec. 2007).

I want to thank all of you who gave generously to our end of 2007 fundraising campaign. Our organizational transition has delayed sending notes of thanks to all of you; I intend to correct this within the next month. Your support is still essential to our work—if you haven't contributed recently, please consider making a tax-deductible donation.



I also want to thank Lisa Stuebing for her year of service to Take Back Your Time. Lisa's final report contained a number of useful suggestions that I want to follow to improve our work together. It is my hope that I will not remain in this position for long, but that I can achieve some new clarity of purpose and action for the organization, with the help of all of you, of course.

One of the things I am trying to do is to keep our board active and refreshed with new members, who can bring commitment, time and expertise to our work. As a consequence, I have invited Anmarie Widener and Debra Dinnocenzo to join our board. You will find their bios at timeday.org/board. Please welcome these new board members. **If you are interested in being a member of our board, please let me know.**

We are creating four committees of the board—if you wish to volunteer to help any of these committees please let me know that as well. **You need not be a board member to assist these committees.** The committees (which will meet through monthly conference calls) are as follows:

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE--Soon, we will have an Executive Committee elected by the board, which will have key decision-making powers. We are simply too large to do everything by consensus. Cecile Andrews will chair this committee.

CAMPAIGN COMMITTEE--This committee will take the lead with our priority vacation campaign. Its work will include reaching out to other organizations, speaking to media, advising on decisions involving the campaign, and other strategic tasks. It will continue to promote our broader TIME TO CARE agenda, but for all of 2008 at least, we will continue to focus on our vacation efforts, which are starting to bear some impressive fruit. Joe Robinson will chair this committee. This committee can focus on how to use Take Back Your Time Day to effectively bring new energy to our work and reach out in ways that add to the vacation campaign and promote our larger mission of challenging over-work, over-scheduling, and time poverty.

COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE--This committee will help restore our once consistent communication with members and the media, which we've neglected over the past year. This committee will assist our talented newsletter editor, Kelley Smith, in getting out a regular letter, with a consistent look and template, well-written articles, letters from our members (which we receive in large numbers), a regular vacation campaign update, ways to get involved and perhaps, a regular poll or survey. It is my goal to have this come out each month. Members of this committee will write articles, review books and other web sites, suggest ideas and otherwise assist Kelley. We will also return to a policy of consistent press releases, as they have proven invaluable in getting our message out in the media. Kelley Smith will chair this committee.

I will be hiring an assistant for a few hours a week to update our web site, send out releases, newsletters, update our member data base, and otherwise assist with on-line communications to our members and media. I also have some young volunteers who are interested in helping us getting our message out through such venues as YouTube, MySpace and Facebook.

FUNDRAISING COMMITTEE--We have fallen down on fundraising. This committee will re-think our strategy and seek out possible foundation supporters, corporate partners, and ways to more actively engage our members. Allen Hancock will chair this committee.

In the next few weeks, I plan to draft a strategic plan for Take Back Your Time as I see it. It will include a timeline. As we gain momentum, we will be adding other committees to assist in our work and seeking participation on those committees beyond the board itself. I will also lay out a wish list for increased professional staffing for the organization that we can then include in our fundraising efforts. I will suggest some basic by-laws by which we can make future important decisions.

SPEAKERS' BUREAU. This is a priority for me, both as a way of communicating our ideas and raising limited operating funds for TAKE BACK YOUR TIME. The Simplicity Forum, which spawned our organization, has such a bureau. **If you are an experienced speaker, please let me know if you are interested in being included in our speakers' bureau.** You can set your own fees. People looking for speakers about work-life balance issues would find you on our site and contact us to contract with you to speak. We would receive 25% of your fee, deducting any expenses you have that your fee does not cover. We will also send mailings to various institutions promoting you as speakers. Our web site would list you as a possible speaker, include a bio and photo and outline the subjects you wish to speak about. We have thought about doing this for a long time. I want to start now. Please let me know if you wish to be part of this bureau.

Happy 2008!

John de Graaf, Interim ED, Seattle, WA
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HAPPENINGS

Acclaimed Academy Award winning cinematographer and Take Back Your Time supporter Haskell Wexler reports good progress in his campaign to restore the "**Lost Weekend**" to the Hollywood film industry. Wexler is fighting to win a 48 hour break for cinema talent and crews after five days on the job. His powerful documentary WHO NEEDS SLEEP?, on the issue of overwork in the film industry and the United States generally, is available at: www.whoneedssleep.net.

PBS to Air New Series on Inequality and Health

by Courtney McNamara

The US is the richest, most powerful country in the world, and nobody can say we haven't worked hard for our status. As a nation our levels of productivity have never been higher. In fact compared to our European counterparts, we work increasingly longer hours and take far less time off for vacations. Between 1980 and 2004 the average pay of CEOs

increased 743%! The rest of us haven't seen any real change in our hourly wage and continue to wait for the fruits of our labor to trickle down. As we diligently toil away for our position of dominance we also continue to pay for it. Although our GDP sings our praises, our health as a nation continues to decline behind the likes of Chile and Singapore (we now hover at 29th in the world for life expectancy) and while we strive to work harder, benefits such as health insurance, family leave, sick pay, vacation time, and job security continue to disappear. Perhaps we've waited long enough; perhaps its time to Take Back our Time, our Health and our Lives. This March PBS will broadcast a short series called UnNatural Causes. This 4 part film will show us how the social conditions in which we live impact our health as a nation. If you think you deserve more than a pat on the back, and want to learn how America's standards for living can match our standards of hard work, visit www.unnaturalcauses.org or check your local PBS listings for showtimes.

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IN THE NEWS

An interview with TAKE BACK YOUR TIME's new Executive Director John de Graaf has been published on the Work and Family Balance web site of the Saskatchewan, Canada Department of Labor. See <http://www.workandfamilybalance.com/coming-events-calendar.htm>

NO-VACATION NATION, an article about why vacations matter by TBYT Executive Director John de Graaf will appear in the March issue of Experience Life Magazine. www.experiencelifemag.com

A peer-reviewed academic article published in the November, 2005 issue of THE ECONOMIC JOURNAL argues persuasively that growing inequality is behind the increase in work hours in the United States. Paper is available for download at

http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=856711-PaperDownloadPaperDownload.

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MARKETPLACE

We are interested in providing limited advertising space in this newsletter to any of you who want to sell books or other goods and services related to reducing time pressure. We will be establishing a rate structure. Our newsletter currently reaches approximately 7,000 members. Please contact ED John de Graaf if you are interested in advertising here: jodg@comcast.net.

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YOUR LETTERS

FROM A 23-YEAR OLD SUPPORTER OF TAKE BACK YOUR TIME

I realize what it is that has always made me uneasy, angry, and hopeless about American culture. We view our economy solely as a means and measure of our consumer power and determine our national wellbeing by how much we can buy and own. Logically, as a culture, we have learned to measure our individual self-worth by these same standards, and we are willing to work more and more hours each year to maintain our wealth.

I was born in 1984 into a free-market world, raised by parents who each worked at least 50 hours a week and expected that I would eventually do the same. After graduating college I started my first full-time, professional job, and within two weeks I had a serious identity meltdown. My vacation package gave me less than two weeks off for a full year's work and my paid sick leave was non-existent. I left for work in the dark, came home in the dark, and was physically and emotionally drained from the long and repetitive days. Weekends were spent drinking to unravel from the week and catching up on errands and chores. I quickly realized that it would be impossible to maintain most of my intellectual, social, or physical interests. With the memory of feeling like a well-rounded, active, and spontaneous person still fresh in my mind, I developed the idea that my best hope for regaining a feeling of freedom and ownership over my life was to

work hard and retire as early as possible. I noticed myself measuring my own worth by my income and setting plans and goals that were aimed at making more money. I felt that only with wealth could I enjoy a lifestyle that included time for leisure and time to pursue my interests beyond work (which are many).

When I saw John de Graaf speak, a light bulb went on in my head: It doesn't have to be this way. Vacation time, leave for family affairs and shorter work weeks are simple ways that we, as individuals and as a society, can know ourselves again. I truly believe that if we are given the time and chance to seek enjoyment outside of consumption- with hobbies and activities that cannot be purchased and do not have to be accomplished between the time we leave for work and the time dinner must be on the table, our identity as a society will change for the better. Perhaps we'll find the time to notice the world around us and do more to preserve it. Perhaps we'll find the time to vote.

Examples of other nations have already shown that reversing time poverty is not a threat to the productivity that Americans hold so dear. My generation was raised with the notion that the economy is for one thing only- to support our ability to buy. We have never known a world where time is cherished over money, but it may be the time for us to create one.

By Alexandra L. Davis

FROM PHILADELPHIA, PA

I have been writing my representatives urging them to support four weeks of paid vacation. Your vacation campaign is great news, however, I believe we need to continue to raise awareness until this bill is introduced. I understand that the goal is three weeks, not four. While I would support any change at this time, I am concerned that once the legislation is put in place it will be difficult to get support to increase it to the levels it should be, i.e. the standard 4 weeks of the European Community which is supposed to be our societal equal.

I don't think it hurts the cause to have people primed for supporting the legislation, even if they are asking for more than what will be on the bill. It may serve to make the politicians see that they are getting off easy with three weeks. I am reminded of a Calvin and Hobbes cartoon where Calvin asks for a tank, then a flamethrower, before asking his mother for a cookie. The relieved mother leaps at the cookie. Calvin had the wisdom to understand the psychology of starting the bargaining at a price higher than what he wanted.

Thought you may want to know that I have also sent emails to John Stossel, Oprah, even Michael Moore, Ben Stein, and my local radio station in hopes that they would help raise awareness. I am not sure if you are aware of the site www.congress.org that allows you to easily track legislation and email letters of support or non-support to your representatives. They have a means of creating an alert to make more people aware of issues. It is relatively inexpensive (\$9/mo) and may be a good way of getting support for the legislation once it is introduced.

I also notice that there is legislation to pass a seven-day minimum sick leave bill, HR.1542 and S.910. HR.1542 is in committee but has 78 cosponsors to date, eleven of which have been added in the past three months. So it is very active. S.910 has 24 cosponsors. We should encourage people to support this legislation as well. This in conjunction with guaranteed vacation can make a real impact.

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SPECIAL FEATURES

This marvelous speech was delivered by Take Back Your Time board member Cathy O'Keefe, a professor at the University of South Alabama. We believe it will inspire all of our readers.

THE GOLD METCALF LECTURE ON TIME POVERTY

November 2, 2007

Cathy O'Keefe, M.Ed.
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Plato once said that it is the job of the teacher to introduce his students to the best possible circle of friends. A great teacher is capable of making the ideas of wise and interesting people, living or dead, come to life so brilliantly and imaginatively that students actually feel they know them. Many people in this room knew Gold Metcalf. They admired his enthusiasm for life and love of nature. Like Plato, they want to keep his ideas alive for you. And through this lecture series, they want to introduce you to others who are equally passionate and full of enthusiasm for life. Had technology been as good sixty years ago as it is today, we could have preserved his lectures and been able to listen to his own unique voice for the magic and inspiration that made his students and colleagues so want to honor him.

I read the statement attributed to Gold on the school website. I saw his picture. I watched the DVD tribute to him. I wished he'd been my uncle, or my teacher. But he can still be my friend – and yours if we can just listen. So, be very still and quiet for just a moment and then I will read his words to you, the next generation of children he so passionately wanted to reach. And Gold said:

we must bequeath to our children the exuberant joy of being able to breathe fresh air, to drink clean water, to scent trailing arbutus, to hear breezes in the top of a grove of white pines and the magic of the song of a hermit thrush in cathedral towers of red spruce, and to find individuals living in harmony with the land and with each other.

Thank you, Gold, for adding your voice to that of countless other heroes from Muir to Mather, and from Thoreau to Thomas Berry. Every older professional in this room is part of that chorus, too. We are the background singers who have kept the beat going with classes of our own and causes that defend what we and Gold believe is sacred...time, place, and relationships.

I am a city girl. I was raised in a narrow row house in Baltimore City. I never saw, as a child, the wide open spaces, the expanse of stars, or many of the things that Gold so loved. The first expanse of green grass that I ever saw was at Baltimore's Memorial Stadium when I was lucky enough to get to see the Orioles play on that beautifully mowed, bright green field.

I was formed and informed by the sixties, a child of hope from a generation that wanted world peace, and human rights, and an end to poverty. We protested and claimed that we loved truth and justice more than money, but my generation quickly fell silent, slipping into our private worlds of property, prosperity, and safety. We grew hungry for stuff. We parlayed our parent's work ethic to a level of success that afforded the opportunity to have more and more if we were willing to work the extra hours to get it. We now purchase goods at a rate that is unprecedented in human history. We cast off perfectly good things simply because we tire of them. We are a throw-away people who mistake titillation for joy and activity for leisure. Some might say that we sold out. Others would claim that we grew tired and cynical, withdrawing into a philosophy of self-interest. There have remained enough of us, however, who are faithful to values that we believe are timeless.

My husband, Dennis, and I have five children, ages 31-21. We are parents and teachers, of four boys and a girl. We want to introduce them to the best possible circle of friends whose wisdom can carry them through all the current crises that face your generation. Today I am going to talk to you about one of those crises – time poverty. My hope is that you will have, by the end of my short visit with you, an awakening, however small, that could impact the remainder of your life.

I'm sure you know that from time to time over history there have been people who carried placards or shouted in town squares that the end was near, that time was running out. The message of these individuals has classically been that we must turn our lives around, repent, so to speak, and wake up. Admonitions of doom often accompanied the message as people used whatever means they had to persuade or frighten their fellow citizens into looking at themselves more critically.

We now know from modern physics that time isn't at all what we think it is. It is one of many dimensions of reality, but it is a purely man-made invention of convenience that ordered society and helped it manage the ordinary activities of life, especially industrialized work. An understanding of time allowed us to sequence our human history and that of the

planet. But time is still a human invention, one that may have seemed helpful at the outset but has taken on a life of its own.

Once electricity was invented, and the lights could stay on day and night, the rhythm of the day produced naturally by sunrise and sunset gave way to an endless day, limited only by our human inability to remain perpetually conscious, that is, our need to sleep. Unfortunately, human evolution hasn't moved quickly enough to keep pace with the race to pack more into the day, so we are a country and culture that is chronically sleep deprived. We are sleep deprived because we can't create more time than our clocks and calendars allow. So, to compensate, we simply push the envelope to its breaking point, snatching time from one event or activity of daily living to shore up a gap of need in another area.

I love the way that language subtly but surely invokes the doomsday message – we have “dead” lines; we complain that we are “dead” tired; we ask if we are willing to “drink the Kool-Aid” for our employer. We extol the virtues of multi-tasking, praising those who can accomplish so much more in a given amount of time. The rest of the country places you all on a pedestal when it declares that something was done in “a New York minute,” while we in the South are perceived as slow, the implication being that we're dim-witted. The abandonment of nature as our chief time-guide has, ironically, led to the infusion of phrases related to nature to explain an ideal kind of time use: we say, “If only we could stop and smell the roses,” or “I just want to have my day in the sun.”

America leads the world, if not in its obsession with time, then at least its need to spend it. What we've called progress in reality is a staggering list of real deficits in quality of life indicators. I asked Joe Robinson, author of *WORK TO LIVE*, to share some facts with us. And I've included some additional notes from John de Graaf that you might want to read. There is a bibliography included, too, that can help you find some great sources for your personal or school library.

I knew about John de Graaf before I met him. A friend had given me a tape of *AFFLUENZA* years earlier. Later, when I learned that John had produced *RUNNING OUT OF TIME*, I bought it to show in my Introduction to Leisure Studies course. I wrote to John to thank him for his dedication to this issue and gave him my views as an educator in the field of recreation. He invited me to be part of a board that he was forming for his organization, *TAKE BACK YOUR TIME*. Ben Hunnicut, from Iowa, who was featured in *RUNNING OUT OF TIME* as the recreation educator who made sure his work did not interfere with time for his daughter, was already involved and had written a chapter for the *TAKE BACK YOUR TIME* book which John edited.

I flew out to Seattle to their conference and met some of the most committed individuals in the country, people from all walks of life, who want to initiate a grass roots change to our culture of time poverty. Picture this – a weekend with top professionals from business, economics, journalism, philosophy, theology, psychology, counseling, and other disciplines who have committed themselves and their resources to support the value of leisure. It was like being in a room full of cheerleaders. So often our field is overlooked – there is was the center of attention because everyone in the movement sees leisure as the missing link to the good life and time poverty as the culprit keeping it at bay.

These individuals, and many others who are affiliated with related social movements, are hoping that the imagination of Americans will be sparked by their efforts to awaken our citizens to this key quality of life issue. Last year John released another video called *THE MOTHERHOOD MANIFESTO* which was viewed here at SUNY on *TAKE BACK YOUR TIME* Day, October 24th. The sad facts illuminated in *THE MOTHERHOOD MANIFESTO* should be the topic of discussion at every women's group in the country. As I watched it, I realized that the concerns I'd been having about my own adult children and their ability to have a work/life balance that could support family life were well documented.

Frankly, I was really frightened. I began to think about more ways to help them reduce their school loan debts, cover their medical needs, and secure some savings for the future. I thought about remodeling my house to make room for any of them who are unable to secure a home for a period of time. Like my parents who lived through The Great Depression of the early 1930s, I want to hedge my bets and store away some resources in case of an economic or natural crisis. I am optimistic but realistic, and ultimately, as a parent and global citizen, very concerned.

The bottom line is that we are a nation that has overstretched itself in terms of the competing demands of work and family. Personal leisure and play, something that we all need at every stage of life, is seriously threatened on several fronts. Time poverty is being matched with real decline in the availability of discretionary income and credit. In his presentations called *What's the Economy For*, John de Graaf notes that Europeans' level of productivity is 95% of Americans'. Yet they work substantially fewer weeks each year. John writes, “We could say that Europeans traded

major portions of their productivity increases for free time instead of money, while Americans – consciously or unconsciously – put all their gains into increasing their per capita gross domestic product.”

John adds that Abraham Maslow noted in the early 70s “that as a society the U.S. had met nearly all its citizens’ physiological and safety needs and was moving to satisfy higher needs as well. Ironically, by such a standard, we have lost ground rather than gained it – we have more citizens living in poverty and a much greater overall sense of insecurity today than we did then, despite more than a 60% increase in GDP per capita.” And, John notes, “For most of the final quarter of the 20th century, Europeans gained relative to Americans in almost every quality of life indicator.”

The real question that John asks of the economy is this: “is it possible to have a more just and people friendly economy and compete globally?” All of us who support the cultural critique outlined in TAKE BACK YOUR TIME believe that we must create a shift in thought across cultures in the U.S., toward a better quality of life that is sustainable over the coming decades. What images can be put in front of people’s eyes to present a better way of living, one that allows parents to be more involved in their children’s lives and have time for personal leisure and community involvement? Or, one that encourages everyone to live a life that is slower, more integrated and balanced, more environmentally friendly and respectful of the resources that are needed around the world? What images have always made a connection with the soul?

The National Recreation and Park Association has tried with its new slogan, “It starts in the parks,” to point again to engagement with nature as the benchmark for balance. Like nature, human life requires care and time, and natural environments are great mirrors for a healthy life. By engaging them early and often, we can more clearly see that every person needs a rhythm of life, ample outdoor play, rest, and time for relationships.

I once asked John de Graaf about any sentinel event that moved him toward the commitment he has to quality time. He said that when he was young, his dad took him to the state and national parks and introduced him to nature. He loved it. He saw the depth of beauty there, and it touched his soul. Joe Robinson was similarly moved by the experiences he had as a journalist covering outdoor recreation and leisure. He realized that we must intentionally commit ourselves to make time for play and recreation. Something more dramatic happened to John Muir. He, too, had experienced the beauty of nature, but it wasn’t until he lost most of his sight that he decided to devote his life to helping others “see” that beauty, too.

I am not shy about stating my values publicly, I’d like to live a “timeless” life with experiences so engaging, rewarding, enriching, challenging, and centered on love for others that whatever sense of time I have equals a sense of fullness and joy. I developed my own commitment to time because of a completely different set of experiences. I was 25 when I gave birth prematurely to a set of twins. One was expected to die within a few days from underdeveloped lungs. He hung on, day after day, fighting for life through cardiac arrests and three pneumo-thoraxes, or lung blowouts. He lived, but those few weeks facing possible death embedded in my brain an acute and lasting awareness of the gift that time really is.

In 1997 my husband was diagnosed with cancer. I had always felt that ours was a match made in heaven. Dennis had studied to be a Catholic priest, very satisfied with the vocation involved in pastoral work. But he had a huge sense of emptiness and longing for a family. He delayed ordination for five years, struggling with the decision, and finally left the Paulist Fathers in 1972. We met at that time, and he’s been a spouse who has truly appreciated the value of marriage and family life because of what he had to give up to get it.

This past February, 2007, while I was speaking in Maryland at a conference on psychology and religion, I got a call from my son, the twin who almost died at birth. His wife was about to have a baby, and they learned through a routine ultrasound that the baby had a brain aneurysm. I can’t even describe to you the irony of watching this twin son, who struggled to live 31 years ago, hold his own little boy struggling for life, too. That acute sense of time and its preciousness filled my soul again. The first time I held little Sean Patrick, sleeping so peacefully in my arms, completely unaware of the fragility of his own life, I wanted to stop time altogether and create a safe place where nothing could hurt him.

In May, just two months after the birth of my grandson, I learned that my mother had only a few weeks to live. Leukemia had overtaken her body. On several nights while I cared for her, I lay next to her in bed and asked her to imagine with me a future existence where time was no constraint and she would be free to endlessly enjoy the universe and all its glory. When I asked her what she thought her family would say to her at the pending reunion with them, she said, “They’ll want to know what took me so long to get there.” Time is precious. My husband’s mother said to us on the day

we were married, “Live each day as if it were the only one you have, and you’ll have no regrets.” She was right. Who would ever put on his tombstone, “I wish I’d gone to the office more?”

In July, while we were moving my dad into my niece’s home, my brother-in-law had a heart attack. He had just made dinner for everyone on the moving crew before he was rushed to the hospital. He never awakened after open heart surgery. My sister didn’t get to say goodbye. Instead, she had the very sad job of unplugging the life supports. It was the week of their 40th wedding anniversary. Later that week she found a sundial that he’d bought for their patio. On it was an inscription, “Grow old with me – the best is yet to be.” He was 61.

I returned to school in August to find an e-mail from my sister-in-law in Baltimore. My brother was in the ICU at Hopkins apparently dying from a sudden case of pulmonary fibrosis. Basically, his lungs began to turn to scar tissue, unable to exchange any oxygen in the affected parts. We dropped everything and flew up for the Labor Day weekend. He said, “I’m done. I am suffocating, and I need to go.” I was able to recommend a good in-patient hospice for him where he died five days later on September 11th. He was 62. I helped him to plan his funeral during that last week. I asked what music he’d like to have played at his funeral. He said, “I’d like IN THE STILL OF THE NIGHT,” but I don’t think the Church will go for it. If any of you know that song, the lyrics point to a stillness, a stopping of time that happens in the night when two people are enjoying intimacy. I hope that the stillness of death will release my brother’s spirit to exactly the kind of timelessness that the song expresses. It was hard for my sister, who had just lost her husband a few weeks before, to go visit our dying brother. They were sitting together in his hospice room, and public television was playing on the TV. A show came on that featured oldies music, and the show started to play IN THE STILL OF THE NIGHT. My brother and sister sat there, singing and do-whopping together. It was a sacred moment that helped my sister get through a difficult goodbye.

Now my dad is dying in Atlanta. I was reticent about accepting the invitation to give this talk because we could see the decline coming on back in early May before my mom got sick. I was afraid that I couldn’t guarantee being with you here this weekend. But here I am, about to lose my fourth immediate family member and aware that the fifth, my grandson, is a daily living gift. I am hyper aware of the fragility of life as I stand before you. Healthy breathing seems like a miracle to me. This past weekend I was at a retreat where moms or dads could invite a child or a spouse to go along and they could spend the weekend together enjoying the outdoors and listening to talks about relationships. At the wrap-up a tall, thin man approached the stage very slowly. He said that he shouldn’t have been there because ten months ago he was in a plane crash where the pilot and co-pilot died. He survived but was in the hospital with multiple traumas for three months. All that kept him going was a desire to be with his family again. He was crying when he said to the audience, “Being here with my teenage daughter, Jordan, is the greatest gift I could have, and I am painfully aware that two families don’t have their dads because they died that day.” Then he asked the audience to treasure every moment they have with their families; to emphasize what really counts – time together to enjoy each other and experience life, building wonderful and sacred memories.

In conclusion, I want my children’s children to breathe fresh air. I want to take them to the places that display nature’s beauty. I want to point out the swaying limbs of my favorite trees and show them their bright green leaves in springtime against an azure blue sky. I want to catch turtles in a pond with them and walk barefooted in the cool water of running streams. Like Gold Metcalf, I want them to treasure nature because it is an eternal reminder of the treasure that is life itself and because nature views time as it really is, an endless patient cycle of growth and rest that strengthens and renews itself.

Every morning when I walk, I recite this morning prayer written by the poet, EE Cummings:

I thank you god for most this amazing day
for the leaping greenly spirit of trees
for the blue true dream of sky
for everything that is natural, that is infinite, that is yes.

I hope that more of you will come up to me and tell me where you are in your own journey of awareness about this gift of time that I spoke about today. Perhaps one of you will return in years to come to deliver the Gold Metcalf lecture. Each of you, certainly, will have a story, your own pilgrimage of understanding, that I hope spurs you to passionately take up the cause of quality time and a balanced life. Gold would want that for you, and so do I.

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