



I'm On My Way

By W. Owen Thornton

It struck me as I was riding my bike home through the park that I have spent my entire life on the way to somewhere. That's a sad statement, really. It means one of two things. It means I've always been on my way to do something else I thought was important. Or it might mean that I never really felt comfortable hanging around with the guy who wasn't on his way to do something ... that I wasn't comfortable around ... well ... me. And that says that I may not be okay unless I am doing something. Phew! That's a head trip too. Let's explore these ideas, shall we?

Human kindness sees something wrong with both views. The first one reflects today's common world view that there are just too many things to do and we'll never get them all done. So when we're between assignments, we had better be on our way, smartly, to the next job we have to do. We have seen that when we have too many things or when we're rushed to do them that we're not at our best. Remember the story told by Malcolm Gladwell in his book *The Tipping Point*? Seminars were asked to do an extemporaneous talk about the Good Samaritan story. They chatted them up and then told one half of the group that they were late in delivering their talk. Knowing that they were to talk about the Good Samaritan story, the testers placed a fake homeless person along the student's pathway to where they were to deliver their talk. Many who were 'late' stepped over the body. Few stopped to practice what they were in moments supposedly to preach about. Those who were told they had time before their talk, well a far higher percentage of these folk stopped to help the fake homeless person. So, when we're in a hurry, we fail to do the right thing. And stopping to smell the roses ... or look at the river as we bike through the park ... bah! That's just a waste of time, isn't it?

Don't get me wrong. We all have things to do. Lists are good ways to remember them. The problem is we become a slave to them and we fail to be good to ourselves, and when we fail to be good to ourselves, we fail to be good to others as well. We get things done at our own and other's expense. And for some bizarre reason we never put, "Stop to smell the roses," or "Stop and meditate," on our lists. Those things just

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never seem to be important enough to make the cut. We need to begin to ask ourselves what kind of world we want to live in: one in which things get done or one where we treat ourselves and others with human kindness. These seem to be two different worlds. Sometimes in the doing of some things we are practicing human kindness, but these instances of overlap are far too rare in my life!

Somehow we need to find a real and meaningful way of dealing with the seemingly never-ending tasks on our lists. I remember the story of the aircraft carrier, told, I believe by guru Jack Canfield. Jobs, or things to do, are like launching the planes. We line them up on deck and one after the other we knock them off ... we launch them. When the boss comes in and asks us to do something new, right now, we're supposed to say:

Okay, chief. Here's my current game plan and time-line as already set out by you. You reveal the planes in order of launch sequence (your task list) and approximately how long it will take to realistically do them. I have found as a rule that however long we *think* something will take, that we should add another 50% more time. Next, you ask the relative importance of the new task and

where it should go in the launch sequence, asking if it is okay to delay whatever is already on your list by however long it will take to do this new task. This is not a way to complain or dodge work, only to realistically highlight the previously assigned work and where this new project should go on the list. Bosses sometimes forget what your launch sequence really is, and they may underestimate the real amount of time it takes to get the jobs done right! Upon seeing the reality of the situation, the boss may assign the new task to someone else, may give you a more realistic time-line, or s/he may withdraw another, lesser important plane from your launch sequence to make room for this new one.

Naturally the aircraft carrier scenario works in a sane world, not one where more work is automatically piled on, where the boss says something like, "It sucks to be you!" But, most bosses *are* realistic. And if you've been good to keep them abreast of where you are, and if you go to them when projects explode and seem to take you too long, then they are better prepared to work with you in creating real time lines for work projects.

But this only seems to work when we're either dealing in theory, or when we're dealing with

a sane boss. Often, when the list is our own, we tend to overlook reality and think of ourselves as miracle workers. That list of things to do inside our heads just seems to get longer and longer and that leaves little or no time to think about life, to smell the roses or to sit alongside the river and watch the water go by. Naturally there's a balance with these things too, but we all need some down time to regenerate so that we can once again return to our lists and be effective. Down time is what helps us notice that the person in front of us just dropped a stack of files and that we should stop and help them pick them up.

I think there are a lot of things on our lists which are unimportant but which we think are important. In the weeks to come I'm going to be writing another article from a new slant about our world called the free market economy. Our need to buy things is out of control and when we are buying things, that means we have to work longer to afford them and if we're working longer then we have less time to be with ourselves, our spouses, our kids and we cut them out of our lives to spend the time required to make enough money to buy off our guilty consciences for not spending time with them in the first place. (Phew! That was a



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mouthful!) What that is, is a very ugly cycle!

A way to begin to see our way out of this 'list' mess requires that we examine what we are putting on our lists! Maybe if we placed making love, eating a family dinner mid-week, jotting a note to a friend, buying and sending a *thinking of you* card to someone we care about that these moments would jar us out of our endless to-do lists, in as much as we're doing something for human kindness in the midst of our nutty lists. I know, I know, you can hardly afford the time to do anything more. It does mean cutting something out. We have to start doing that more and more, don't you think? If world knowledge doubles every two years (which suggests if we do nothing to learn over that time period we become one half as knowledgeable about things in relative terms as we were two years ago) then surely the number of things we are expected to do has increased too.

Church evangelists and the Boy Scouts bemoan the competition for time. Dance, hockey, soccer, more school homework, and a host of other things compete for time that was once spent with God or with nature: two great ways of kicking back with God and ourselves and just enjoying the world!

There are more things to do out there than there used to be. Life is far more than Forest Gump's box of chocolates! It's Twizzlers, and jube-jubes, and gummy worms, and sours, and gum drops and ... we can't do it all. We are finite creatures in an infinite world who tend to want to believe we *are* infinite creatures. And therein lay another tale. We must begin to see ourselves in realistic terms. We cannot be it all. We cannot do it all. To think otherwise enters us into the realm of fantasy.

And I haven't even begun to write about what's wrong with the guy I might be sitting with along that river side! Why don't I want to spend time with him? Am I afraid to get to know him? Maybe I think I do know him and he's boring. Maybe he can only be complete when he's doing something. That old adage, we are human beings, not human doings rears its ugly head again! One of the simple reasons why I might not want to spend time with myself is that because I have been so busy I don't know myself. Do you spend time with people you don't know? Of course not! The problem is, the only way we can come to know ourselves and thereby begin to practice human kindness is to slow down long enough to take time to get to know that person ... which seems uncomfortable at the least and a big

time-waster at best. Somehow we think we should have intimate knowledge of ourselves because we're with us all the time. But if we think we're about human kindness and we can still walk past the homeless the moment we're busy, I would suggest we do NOT come to know ourselves through being busy. We are not ourselves when we're busy. We're not Owen, or John, or Beth or Jan, we're Busy Owen, and Busy John, Busy Beth and Busy Jan. We know who we are when we're busy, but not when we're calm, at peace ... relaxed.

Maybe I only exist when I'm doing something! Maybe that is the problem. And the moment I'm not doing something is the moment I become a nothing. Certainly if that's the way we're feeling there's no incentive to stop and get to know ourselves: stopping means ceasing to exist! Yikes! If that's where we are, we have to take a much closer look at the society we've created! We have seen in these pages examples of how we treat ourselves as a species. Given an exercise to create a list of our gifts and our flaws, many lists will be about our flaws and often, there is none or only a very few things listed on our gifted column. Churches liked to have a list of giftedness of their parishioners so that if a skill is required at church, they know who to call.

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When one church undertook to get a complete list of these skills, some people didn't want to fill out the form for worry that they didn't have any skills to offer. Faith ... religion may have many problems, but at their core none of them would accept that we are skill-less ... that we have nothing to offer the world. A place to begin to find yourself, may be in the nearest place of loving worshippers. Just remember. Some of those folk are more advanced in their faith than others. Some get it. Some are struggling to get it. We are all saints who sin occasionally, and if you find someone who is a sinner first and a saint second, keep on searching for a person who is deeper into their faith than that!

Now here's a really ugly reason why we might not be spending time with ourselves. With 25 percent of the population being an addict to something, whether it is a substance or a process, and with 25 percent of the population being abused, whether it is sexual, physical, verbal or emotional (and there is a great deal of overlap in the addict/abuse groups) we are raising a great many children to become dysfunctional adults. I define being addicted to a process as gambling, workaholism, even the process of earning money or greed could be an addiction to a

process. Whether they become addicts or abusers and continue the cycle or whether they struggle to never be like what they saw as a child both are emotional time bombs waiting to decompress some day in the future when life becomes too much to bear. Why are they time bombs? Both groups do not believe they are worthy of ... well, in a nutshell ... of life! They think they are nothings. Perhaps they think they are worse than nothings, and where there is a void anything will rush in and fill that void and work and to-do lists seem to fit the bill because there is a false sort of identity in 'being what you do.'

Only those who find successful therapy will make it out of these traps. Having come from these two groups and having had successful therapy, I know whereof I speak! Undoubtedly, a part of my unwillingness to sit quiet with myself stems from these things. And what's easier to do that pay attention to the ache inside of yourself, is to go out and do something because at least then you have accomplished something ... been something ... done something. And you can see where the problem begins with attaching the wrong kinds of things to ourselves when we assess our individuality. Doing something becomes who

we are. And therefore, stopping to sit and watch the river flow by, to sit and meditate on God ... these things affirm our nothingness, rather than building us up to face the day.

Here's a startling fact, then. Every single person in North America is surrounded by, and influenced by the two dysfunctional groups of the population who are either addicted to something or are abusing their children or who have grown up abused. Next time you're in a meeting somewhere, look around. One in every four people is seriously battling a problem they may not even know they have. A problem which is readily answered as to who they are, by replacing that void with what they do! That's a scary thought for two reasons. One, on the simpler level, it is no wonder it's a challenge to communicate with folk when 25 per cent of them haven't been given the emotional processes to make them fully adult human beings. Two, on the more complicated level, what does it say about a society that we A: have created a place where life seems better addicted or abusive and B: that we continue to ignore these facts and let it continue? That's a question for the ages, isn't it? One we don't have time for here, I'm afraid.



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Oh, yeah! And where did all this start? With me riding my bike past the beauty of the river because I was on my way to do something ... something important ... something that might help define me and who I am ... an act that is not just about me but is typical for

most of us. So you'll forgive me if I stop writing now, and go and read from my good Book and spend some quality time meditating and listening for the word of God. Suddenly ... I don't know why ... but that just became really important to me!

God Bless

Practice human kindness and be good to one another out there, eh?

Owen