**Time**

**Day, n.** A period of 24 hours, mostly misspent.  

- Ambrose Bierce -

Time has crept stealthily away and left me alone with my tasks ... Annual Report, Speech Day, Christmas chores. The end of year brings an uncomfortable inquisition and a realisation that I have not done half the things I wanted to do. I need more time. This predicament is in curious contrast to the young, who often want less time, because it stands as a hostile barrier between them and adulthood. So they kill time or severely wound it by wasting it on the trivial and unproductive.

We need to persuade our sons to savour their youth and not rush through it. Heaven does not lie in a 2.00 am bedtime, increased access to social drugs and a semi-reliable car! They need to luxuriate in the gift of life, to enjoy the present, to roll and splash and shriek and play in the shallows. There will be time enough to swim in deeper waters for we are all eventually borne to the deep and our inevitable burial at sea.

It can be difficult to get the young to understand the value of time. When I see time being wasted by a boy, I want to take him to the Westmead Cancer Clinic in the morning. This is when they treat the children. Frightened shaved heads are put in webbed cages and bolted to platforms. The child is then left alone as the radiation machine tries to win them a little more time.

Each day is a gift that allows us to see another sunrise, walk on dewed grass and listen to the trill of painted birds. Each night offers gatherings at tables and a chance to laugh candlelit smiles at family and friends. We need to recognise the joy there is in the present rather than hanker for the pleasures of the future.

There is no magical incantation that will guarantee **more time**, but there are things we can do to give ourselves a **better time**.

- **Dine at the table in the evening.** Switch off the TV and talk. Prepare not only the food, but also the mood. Let the preparation of the meal, the eating the meal and the cleaning up afterwards, be a family affair.
- **Do unusual things that tickle the senses.** This does not mean experimenting with hallucinatory drugs or jetting off to Acapulco. It can as simple as having a BBQ on the driveway, dancing under a sprinkler or spending a night in the tent in the garden.
- **Set goals.** Someone once said, “If you aim at nothing, you will hit it!” What do you want to achieve these month? How do you want to improve? What are your ambitions for the New Year? Write them down. Build a gate:

  **G**  **GOALS** - Academic, social and physical.

  **A**  **ACTIVITIES** – What are you going to do to reach these goals?

  **T**  **TIMETABLE** – When are you going to do these activities?

  **E**  **EVALUATION** – How will you check you are on track?

- **Adopt a cause, a charity, a calling.** Sacrifice your comfort to the wellbeing of another. It is a curious thing; the more we do to make another’s life better, the better we feel ourselves. Let’s litter our life with kindness.

- **Reconnect with nature.** This sounds a bit New Age, but because we spend most of our time in a synthetic world, we can lose touch of what is real. Go for walks in the local park, stroll along a river or a beach. Stand in the rain, talk to trees, grow some vegies. These are the sorts of activities that can heal the soul.
Commit to health. Watch the diet. Eat smaller portions. Have AFDs. Go for a low-carb intake. Plan moments of quiet, of meditation and reflection. Try exercising a little more. If you spend 10 minutes in the morning stretching, make it 15, and walk the dog an extra block.

There are many things that can contribute to a better time. Some of these things also translate into giving you more time.

At birth they wheel you into life’s great slot machine arcade;
At death your epitaph describes the kind of game you’ve played.
But gravestones hide not just a corpse, they cover countless sins,
And lie about achievements in a game where no one wins.
A man sits in the ‘change’ kiosk – the kind of change he pays
Is months for years, or weeks for months, or moments for our days.
Some games cost just a moment, others cost a day per try;
The younger punters act as though each year was worth a dime,
And fail to see death waiting for the fools who play with time.

- Gordon Bailey, *Plastic World*, 1971 -

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