
TOO BUSY TO SAVE THE WORLD ?

by

Valerie Stevenson

Recently an intelligent young woman attended a Beyond War Orientation, a three-hour educational presentation on the new mode of thinking required to survive the nuclear age. She responded sincerely to the social imperative to act, and described the evening's format as a unique, extremely useful tool for understanding the nuclear crisis and what she as an individual might do about it. She declared herself ready to work.

Today I received from her a note offering heartfelt gratitude for all the work being done, but due to her own "mad" schedule, she said, she was unable to help at this time.

I thought her choice of the word **mad** was interesting and appropriate. In political and military jargon, **mad** is an acronym for the policy of **mutually assured destruction**. It seems that citizens, too, can have their own **mad** policies.

For me it raises a simple question: How does one get too busy to help save the planet and perhaps all life on Earth? How can that possibly happen? Do people with life threatening illnesses get too busy for medical treatment? Could a person bleeding to death be too busy to rush to the emergency room?

It is time for every thinking person to examine his or her own busyness and make some intelligent choices. In the face of the threat of (as Jonathan Schell calls it) "no birth", how much sense does it make to buy season tickets to the Raiders' games? How much time does it take to earn the money to buy those tickets and then use them? How many social events are sufficient for a full life? How many movies? Golf games? Tennis games? Gourmet meals? How many afternoons of browsing the malls, how many miles of jogging, and how many hours of TV are enough? What degree of personal ambition and money-making in pursuit of the good life is defensible? A 55-hour work week and an MBA may be good for a career, but anyone can see that nuclear war would be bad for business.

One earnest, middle-aged man told me that he worked as hard as he did so that he would have something to leave his children. He fails to realize that the birthright of all future generations, including his family's, is at stake, and that the threat to that inheritance dwarfs the interests of any single family. Besides, his children will have to be alive and living in a context of social order to inherit his money, and right

now they cannot be assured of either. First things first, as my mother used to say.

Nothing is particularly wrong or evil in any one of these activities, but the cumulative effect is that people are too busy to deal with the most serious problem humanity has ever faced. In light of this reality we do indeed keep mad schedules.

Of course, even with the nuclear threat we will have dental appointments. Livings must be earned, cars serviced, clothes laundered, bills paid. Our children deserve their childhood (especially since we cannot guarantee their adulthood), and so there are birthday parties, soccer games, and Scout meetings to attend. Families need to maintain bonds. Friends need to share evenings. Minds and bodies need to be cared for with relaxation and exercise. Souls need to touch God in worship.

If the stakes were less than meaningful survival for the planet, it might be presumptuous to ask

people to rearrange their lives drastically. But the stakes aren't less and it's not presumptuous - it is necessary. Our chronic national busyness is irresponsible. It is time we recognize the narcotic, addictive effects of our leisure and consumer activities. Every life is threatened, and every able adult must be personally responsible for working toward solutions. We do not all need to do the same thing, but we do all need to do something.

Last week, in the hope of awakening a friend to the urgency of the crisis, I described the ways in which some individuals are working for peace. She recognized that she had been lax, and saw the need to assume her share of the responsibility. She wondered where or how she might start. I told her about a coming evening that was designed to introduce people to the issues and help them figure out what they might do. She brightened. That sounded just right. When was it? I told her. "Oh, I can't", she shrugged. "Thursday nights are my piano lessons".

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