

BODY, MIND & SPIRIT

Hyperculture

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Contributing Writer

I first experienced life's speed while riding my red banana-seat bike Bradley Hill for the first time. Trees and houses whipped by me as I struggled to maintain control. I stepped hard on the coaster brake, but the momentum I'd built up shot me far down the road. When I finally rolled to a halt, I felt exhilarated and strangely drained.

Like kids on out-of-control bicycles, most of us live our lives at a tremendous pace. Stimulating experiences, fast-talking advertisers, and galaxies of electronic information compete for our attention everywhere we go.

Stephen Bertman, author of *Hyperculture: The Human Cost of Speed*, writes that we live at "a velocity that can warp our behavior and our most basic values...a velocity generated by our own inner need and sustained by the powerful technology at our touch, a velocity sanctioned by a society committed to speed."

Living a fast-paced life does have its advantages — it's often exciting, and we can accomplish more, learn more, and experience more than was ever possible before. Yet we who speed through life must also pay a high price: the sacrifice of quality for quantity. Because of our velocity, memorable moments stream by us in a blur.

Overloaded by the quick-dial phones and hypertext of our work environments, most of us feel rushed to accomplish as much as possible in the short time that's left for leisure. Meaningful relationships evolve into hurried e-mail exchanges, and we substitute once-savory meals for fast-food breakfasts and microwave burritos.

The psychological effects of information overload can be devastating. Many of us feel paralyzed by all the available choices. We're numbed by the constant bom-

bardment of so many available possibilities and opportunities. When our lives are so jammed that we can't afford to stop, we often begin to suffer a lack of meaning in life, a sense of isolation, a loss of self. Our relationships, in turn, may deteriorate from a lack of intimacy. As Dr. Daniel Kuntz, author of *Stopping: How To Be Still When You Have To Keep Going*, puts it, when we're burdened with too much to do, we change from human beings to "human doings."

Pam Wilson, child development specialist at Capitol Hill Elementary School in Portland, expresses concern about how speed affects young people. "Our society continually demands that children keep learning more, at younger ages. They're often not allowed the luxury of learning things at their own pace, and are increasingly judged for what they are, not who they are. This can create anxiety; as a result, we are seeing more psychological disorders in young people, including depression, ADHD and school violence." Bertman agrees that the increased speed of life negatively impacts young people.

He writes, "Acceleration corrupts the very meaning of childhood. Children born in a microwave culture absorb its tempo internally and "mature" too fast, precociously experimenting with behaviors ranging from spending money to having sex, while lacking the judgement that only gradual maturation can provide."

Dr. Kuntz suggests taking advantage of "stillpoints" in life as simple way of applying the brakes to an overpaced life. To experience a stillpoint, he writes, "Stop doing whatever you're doing, sit or stand, take a deep breath with your eyes open or closed, focus your attention inward, and remember what you need to remember." According to him, these moments can hap-



Photo Credit: Carlos Cervantes/
Straight Shooting

pen anywhere — under a full moon, in the shower, or in a business meeting.

Dr. Hill suggests placing several "tune in" reminders (she recommends little self-stick dots) in your home and work environment to help with stillpoints. She says, "Every time you see a dot, you take a deep breath and concentrate on releasing tension. It's an easy habit to learn, and very self-reinforcing."

Taking time for stillpoints is enormously important, because they help to disconnect us from the peace of life and reconnect us with life itself.

Through stillpoints, we become aware of the precious details of our existence. T.S. Eliot catches the spirit of the exercise in his *Four Quartets*:

"Except for the point, the still point,

There would be no dance,
And there is only the dance."

Laura Chisholm, M.P.H., owns Chisholm Communication, a Portland-based writing service specializing in topics related to mind/body health, women's health, and fitness.

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