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What Rush?

by Linda M. Clement

originally published in *Penninsula News Review*,
January 25, 2006

Standing in the dessert line of a buffet recently, chatting with a friend and putting a selection of desserts onto a plate for my seatmates, I encountered the Hurried Woman. I've seen her in grocery lines, discount department store lines, traffic, and, oddly enough, playgrounds. This specimen of the Hurried Generation was huffing and grunting inarticulately in order to prod me (imagining I was paying enough attention to her while I was visibly doing three things at once) to go faster, because she was having an emergency of some variety that required, apparently, the serving utensil.

Why do parents hustle their kids through their lives? Is there some firm, underlying belief that if they aren't rushed through their dinner, their potty training, their reading skills acquisition and their playtime those same children will *never* turn nine, or 20?

Benjamin Hoff, author of *The Te of Piglet* (the sequel for *The Tao of Pooh*) describes these rushers as Educating Eeyores – with the firm belief that the problem of education isn't that it starts before kids can understand the material, or involves too many components, or even that it's compiled of disjointed past information that is largely obsolete by the time it gets into the curriculum, but rather the *whole* problem of education failure is that it doesn't start *early* enough.

Children have to start *sooner* in order to get to the end of high school with a complete education. If it's not enough to go to university, start a university prep school. If kids aren't ready for university prep, start a grammar school. If they aren't ready for grammar school, start pre-school. If they aren't ready for pre-school, start flashcards at two and Baby Einstein™ at a year... no, 6 months, no in utero.... will we be educating our gonads soon, to ensure pre-conception instruction, so they'll have a head start?

This pervasive belief has jumped from education to every aspect of life. To compound the Puritanical 'constant work is the only right way to live,' ethic, now we have a 'work faster, more efficiently, 24/7' mindset that, frankly, gives children heart attacks.

Which brings me to a columnist whose name I have forgotten, who wrote recently about getting agitated and frantic whenever her boss came with another 'emergency' for her. She questioned her own overreaction like this:

What does he need, a defibrillator?

No. No, he needs a report. Just a report? Yes. This is an emergency how?

Now, in the face of her boss's panic, she simply asks, 'defibrillator?' to see if it is a real emergency, or just another imaginary one. They are not 'defibrillator-demanding' emergencies, pretty much ever.

So, I ask the Hurried Woman in the dessert line (and the customers

fuming in lines... and the frantic drivers, and the parents trying to hurry the child down the slide) 'do you need a defibrillator?' Obviously, not out loud, because I value my life, but in a way to re-balance my own growing impatience or urge to frantically rush. Does the child require critical medical attention? Do I have 18 minutes to finish raising this child, or nearly 18 years?

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It is a question that doesn't get asked often enough, in the all-day, every-day, never-ending, non-stop world of modern western life: is faster better?

Is efficiency the only important issue worth consideration? Or are there some more important values you would like live? Maybe respect, or peace, or joy. Oh, and is there an emergency that can be fixed with a dessert lifter?

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