



# TAKE BACK YOUR TIME

OCTOBER 24 WWW.TIMEDAY.ORG

## NEWSLETTER - August-September 2008

"Everywhere is walking distance if you have the time." - Steven Wright

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### LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR - JOHN DE GRAAF

Dear TAKE BACK YOUR TIME supporters:

I hope you've been enjoying the summer and that you've gotten in a little vacation time. I'm just back from Yosemite, a trip that combined work with pleasure. With support from the Sierra Club, I'm working on a documentary about Americans' need for vacation time. First of all, I'll be producing a short (8-10 minute) piece on the subject for the KCTS Television public affairs program, KCTS Connects. We'll provide a link to the program on this Web site so you can watch it online after it airs on September 19th. It will also be available on the Web site of Sierra Club Productions. My camera crew and I spent six days in Yosemite, three backpacking and three watching tourists in Yosemite Valley. We met some great people, including the amazing ranger, Shelton Johnson, who will be one of the "stars" of Ken Burns' series on the national parks, premiering next year on PBS. Ranger Johnson talked to visitors about what vacations mean to them while we were videotaping.

Interest in our vacation campaign is growing and we hope the media will take even greater interest when Labor Day rolls around. If you haven't already been there, I invite you to visit our vacation

Web pages ([www.right2vacation.org](http://www.right2vacation.org)). I hope you'll pay special attention to the nearly forty posters available there, designed by our terrific intern Tom Bugert, who has now, unfortunately, had to leave us to return to college for his senior year. Photographs of recognizable individuals in the posters were taken by Ritzy Ryciak and Maria Bruce. Maria has now joined our campaign as an intern as well.

**PLEASE think about doing the following things to support our campaign:**

1. Download and print your favorites among our many posters on the site and put them up wherever you can to bring people to the Web site.
2. Send the press release, which you'll receive in another email from us to your local press. Encourage them to write about the need for more vacation time. Use the facts on our site to write your own op-eds for your local newspapers. For an example, see the piece I wrote for the San Francisco Chronicle, below:  
<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2008/08/17/TRP11224CU.DTL>

Don't be shy. Write your own. And do it now because newspapers will lose interest in vacations after Labor Day.

3. Plan a TAKE BACK YOUR TIME DAY event for your community for Friday, October 24<sup>th</sup>. It's the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passage of the Fair Labor Standards Act, which included the forty hour week and the minimum wage. It was originally also supposed to include vacation time but that part of the bill got dropped to assure passage. It's time to put it back in! Let us know if you can plan an event and we'll be glad to help—write me at [jodg@comcast.net](mailto:jodg@comcast.net).
4. Contribute to TAKE BACK YOUR TIME. We can't run this campaign without your support.



5. Sign our petition-- <http://www.timeday.org/right2vacation/petition.asp>

And most of all, enjoy the rest of the summer!

John

PS: We've had a lot of interest in our reaction to proposed suggestions for four-day workweeks, as many municipalities and the state of Utah have been adopting compressed workweeks of 10-hour days. In next month's newsletter, we'll explore this issue in depth.

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## **LETTER FROM THE EDITOR - KELLEY SMITH**

Dear readers:

An article arrived in my in-box this week that seemed to describe our times perfectly for me. I quote Virginia Stem Owens:

The advances in social justice and economic equity of the past two centuries have been in almost directly inverse proportion to the steadiness and reliability of familial relationships. [T]he family, the basic human experience, lives in an atmosphere of disaster.

Provided with the world's most luxurious accommodations, our families live an interior life of poorer quality than refugees among rubble. Their existence has that impermanent, hand-to-mouth nature usually associated with poverty — only now it grows out of wealth. Convenience food, easy access to entertainment, disposable dishes and diapers, the quick call, the fast getaway. Yet half of all marriages end in divorce. We are at war with one another on the home front. And the heart is ripped open as surely as by shrapnel and left to heal as best it can. The only balm seems to be a friendly pat on the back from the secular media: *There, there. It happens to everyone these days. Buck up. It's only a trend.*

It seems to describe my mental picture of the society in which we live. I was somewhat surprised to see that she wrote these words thirty years ago! She acknowledges the positive social changes that have occurred, but describes a situation of incomplete social transformation. If only more of us had realized the impact of her words at that time! Today, the situation for families and children is more dire, and by a considerable magnitude, than when Owens first penned these words. How different might things be today if more citizens and policy makers had listened to her voice and the voice of others who have fought for policies that support families? It does no good now to dwell on missed opportunities of the past. So, I'm resolving to remind myself of these words when I'm tempted to simply give up on the idea of working for social change. I hope you will too.

*For those who would like to see Owens' article, you can find it at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/julyweb-only/131-21.0.html?start=1>. Her theme was that of a mother's reflection on parenting, in light of her Presbyterian faith.*

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## **Contributions from the TAKE BACK YOUR TIME board**

### **SACRED TIME** **By** **Cathy O'Keefe**

In September, 1983, I attended a public talk by Dr. Elizabeth Kubler Ross, famous for her book, *Death and Dying*, and her pioneering work with the terminally ill. It changed my life! She talked about the precious gift of time against the backdrop of pending death that her patients faced. Those who shared their feelings kept coming back to an extraordinary awareness of the value of time. Some devoted themselves feverishly to what was called *unfinished business*, activities that could somehow compensate for, or tidy up, financial or relational loose ends.

Of course, the fact is that we are all living limited physical lives. As Robin Williams said in his portrayal of Patch Adams, "We're all dying, Truman. Our job is to increase health. Do you know what that means? That means improving the quality of life, not just delaying death." Those who are hyper-aware of the great limitation of time are, as I see them, the fortunate ones. Another book, *If I Should Wake Before I Die*, gives a clever twist to the familiar bedtime prayer and illuminates the paradox of waking up in time to get ready for the big sleep. *The Bucket List* recently visited this theme in a lighthearted but serious way, as well. The bottom line: how can we make life satisfying and meaningful in the limited time we have?

In 1984, as a response to what I learned from Dr. Kubler Ross, I began to draw with children and parents who were in that singular group of patients facing life-threatening illness. When asked to draw their families doing something together (called the *kinetic family drawing* in art therapy circles), mothers often drew the family eating together. No wonder! With all the time that moms traditionally put toward feeding their families, this wasn't a surprise. It was more difficult to pull images from dads. Maybe the unfamiliarity with expressing themselves through art was a problem – or maybe they had difficulty conjuring images of togetherness because their own time with family was limited. But the kids' drawings were almost exclusively in one direction – the family playing together!

It was extremely moving to watch children whom I knew would be dead very soon draw such enthusiastic pictures of their families playing. Some were at parks, others, the beach, but all were of joyful recreations of memories that meant a great deal to the children. After all, kids are concrete thinkers. They thrive on experiences that make values easily seen. They learn from what they do more than from what we say. And since play is essentially an experience of the human spirit, it has, more than most experiences, the potential to lift us up where we find those higher and deeper kinds of emotions, values, and thoughts.

Take Back Your Time gave me a vehicle to wage my own personal campaign to wake people up to the value of the time we have. If you were to sit with your own children and all draw a picture of your family doing something together, would the pictures say that you had enough time, that you made the essential memories for yourself and your family, and that life was good, no matter how short or long? Would your work have been meaningful, too? Would the time that you spent at it be described in the same way as leisure, that is, freely chosen, aided by your own competence and feelings of self-determination, and intrinsically motivating? Could you respond to Robert Frost's great line, "Oh, that my vocation and my avocation were the same!" with the words, "Mine were!"

I've had the privilege of accompanying a number of people in their last weeks and days. One woman's story stands out the most. She was 35 and dying from metastatic cancer leaving a husband and four young children. When I met her, she estimated that she had only 10 – 12 weeks to live, so I invited her to make videos for all her loved ones. She grabbed the chance to do it, and over the subsequent weeks as she declined, she made videos for each child, her husband, her parents and siblings, and another about her life in general. She noted that she wasn't afraid of dying, but she was overwhelmingly despaired about the loss of time with her family. The worst, she said, was not being there with her children as they grew up. I suggested that we make decorative containers filled with cards and gifts for special occasions. She even put a candle in each child's box to light when they married as a sign of her presence. By the end of the ten weeks she was in hospice, still putting the finishing touches on her special boxes. When she died, they were neatly stacked in the corner of the room, ready to carry the message of her love forward in time to her family. In the coming years, her husband will open the boxes and share the contents with their children. Her hope is that they will know that while time may have been limited, love has no bounds.

We can talk all day about strategies for shortening the work week or creating more vacation time for people, but without the passion for time, it will be easy to give up against forces that will surely resist social change. We all need to wake up! We must be passionately aware of the gift of time and the precious memories that we create with it. If we are truly aware that time is the essential ingredient in making these memories, we might more readily resist the cultural messages to work more, buy more, use more, and do more.

I want memories of long, slow evenings with my family. If I'd had the technology available in the 70's, I'd have videotaped my family around the dinner table, talking about the day's activities. Had I

done that once every six months for 18 years, I'd have a wonderful compilation of ordinary time made sacred by the sharing of a meal and good conversation. I could see my five children growing before my eyes but captured in that most common of memories for mothers. My kids' scrapbooks are filled with photos of our play together, and I know these will nurture their idea of family togetherness and spill over to their own parenting one day. My message to them and everyone – play more! Be silly with your children so they remember you as playful and happy. Make great memories together, and honor the ordinary that is made extraordinary simply by the awareness of the brevity of physical life. And take my dying friend's advice to heart – time is the precious gift that allows us to nurture the timeless emotions of love and joy.

*Cathy O'Keefe is a therapeutic recreation specialist who works with hospice patients in her sacred (not spare) time. She also teaches at the University of South Alabama in Mobile.*

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## **HAPPENINGS**

### **DC MEETING TO PLAN VACATION SUMMIT**

Take Back Your Time is working with the TIA, the Travel Industry Association of America, a major trade association representing the travel industry, to formulate plans for our national Vacation Matters Summit, to be held (tentatively) late next spring in the Washington DC area. You can find more information at <http://www.timeday.org/right2vacation/vacation.asp>. Representatives of several organizations will convene at TIA's DC headquarters on the afternoon of September 10<sup>th</sup> to lay the groundwork for the conference. If you're in the DC area and want to be part of planning this historic event, please call me at 206 443-6747 or email me at [jodg@comcast.net](mailto:jodg@comcast.net).

**If you're planning an event for Take Back Your Time Day, PLEASE let us know as soon as possible so we can spread the word and help you increase attendance and support!!!**

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## **SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS**

Take Back Your Time Executive Director (formerly National Coordinator, if you're confused) John de Graaf will be speaking at Sam Houston State University (Texas) on October 1 and 2, at Ball State University (Indiana) and October 6 and 7, at the University of South Alabama on October 20 and at Southern Mississippi University on October 21. Please let us know if you'll be speaking anytime about our cause and especially about our vacation campaign so we can let people know! Many of our board members and other members would be wonderful speakers for events you might want to plan!

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## **IN THE NEWS**

Concerned about family time and how to take it back? Check out this article in the September edition of EXPERIENCE LIFE magazine:

<http://www.experiencelifemag.com/issues/september-2008/whole-life/time-for-health-how-to-schedule-or-unschedule-your-family-well.html>

The story profiles the efforts of Jennifer Pelton of Baltimore, Maryland, and features comments by several Take Back Your Time members.

## STUDENTS PRODUCE YOU-TUBE VIDEO ABOUT VACATIONS

This new YouTube video,

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P63RZLkXv6g>

inspired by our *right2vacation* campaign, was produced by Antioch University, Seattle, students Aimie Vallat, Kevin Inouye, Larry Lorkowski and Jessica Brockish. Aimie Vallat has also interned with Take Back Your Time. Thanks to all of them and to Antioch University faculty member BJ Bullert for encouraging them to do this.

We encourage you to produce your own short videos for our vacation campaign. Send them to us to put on YouTube or put them up yourself and let us know. Let creativity blossom!!

## GOOGLE ALERTS REVEALS SURGE OF NEW TAKE BACK YOUR TIME STORIES

As you can see by the Google Alerts news references below, our vacation campaign and our other work have attracted even more media attention over this summer, even internationally, as the bottom story reveals (if you can read Arabic, of course!). Check these out and spread the word. Write your own op ed or letter to the editor.

### [In the US, we don't take enough vacations - really](#)

San Francisco Chronicle, USA - Aug 15, 2008

John de Graaf is the co-author of "Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic" and executive director of **Take Back Your Time** ( [www.timeday.org](http://www.timeday.org)). ...



[The Canadian Press](#)

### [Need a break? Here's how to get more vacation time](#)

The Canadian Press - Aug 14, 2008

De Graaf, the national co-ordinator of **Take Back Your Time** Day, based his figures on the number of religious holidays peasants took off to eat, ...



[New York Post](#)

### [WHEN IT COMES TO TAKING VACATIONS, AMERICANS ARE THE WORLD'S LOSERS](#)

New York Post, NY - Aug 11, 2008

Robinson's group, Work to Live, and another called **Take Back Your Time** are campaigning for a federal law that would require employers to provide three weeks ...



[Pittsburgh Post Gazette](#)

### [Workzone: Organization backs bill that would mandate 3 weeks of ...](#)

Pittsburgh Post Gazette, PA - Aug 3, 2008

The group, a consortium of academics, business leaders, labor leaders and others working under the name **Take Back Your Time**, wants to have the act placed on ...

## [A Future of Less](#)

Miller-McCune.com, CA - Aug 15, 2008

John de Graff, co-author of the book and PBS documentary *Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic*, is national coordinator of "**Take Back Your Time**," a ...

## [Taking the kids: Bridge the generations with a road trip](#)

MiamiHerald.com, FL - Jul 27, 2008

"The process should really be more important than the destination," says Bonnie Michaels, a leader of "**Take Back Your Time**," a campaign dedicated to ...

## [The Fabric of America Is Fraying as the Economic Downturn Continues](#)

AlterNet, CA - Jul 26, 2008

Especially eye-opening is data compiled by John de Graaf, director of the non-profit **Take Back Your Time**, which advocates legislative and lifestyle changes ...



## [كثيرة مزاي ابد لمق ق ل ديلة عمل إجازات .. الأمبرك يون](#)

الذنيا, Lebanon - Jul 30, 2008

الكوند غرس نطلاب منظمة وهي **Take Back Your Time** أو "وقد نك اسد نعد": بمنظمة مؤسس غراف دي جون أما ... 3 لمدة مدف وعة إجازات والعمال الاموظ ف ين ب منح العمل أرباب ب لإزام

[الذنيا](#)

**New!** Get the [latest news on TAKE-BACK-YOUR-TIME](#) with Google Alerts.

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### MARKETPLACE

Recently, especially due to an Associated Press story that featured our MEDIEVAL PEASANTS WORKED LESS THAN YOU DO T-shirts, we've been getting a number of requests for them. Let us know if you're interested and if there is sufficient demand we'll have more made. Also let us know if you think any of our new vacation posters would make a good T-shirt!

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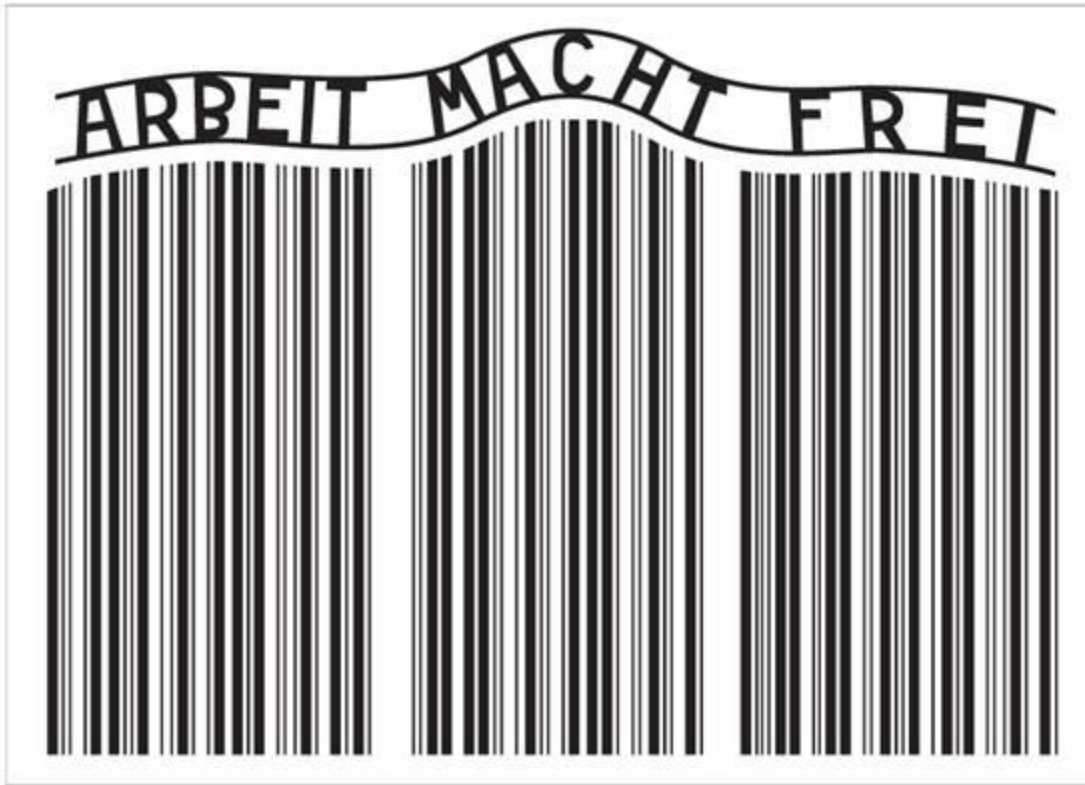
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### YOUR LETTERS

This is just a sampling. We have been getting many email letters this summer, too many to print them all. Also, hundreds of people have signed our vacation petition or our Time To Care Agenda statement. Thanks to all of you!

#### **From Ankara, Turkey:**

The artwork below, with the German slogan, Work Makes You Free, is a takeoff on the famous gate at Auschwitz Concentration Camp. It was designed and sent to us by Gozde Karabalik, who lives in Ankara, Turkey, and says he has been inspired by our work. Thanks, Godze! As you can see Take Back Your Time is now recognized the world over.



**From Manchester, Connecticut:**

In addition to the obvious health and productivity benefits; more vacation time would enable Americans to have a better relationship with the rest of the world. Most Americans are quite ignorant about the world outside our borders. Many of us have never traveled outside of our home state! If we had the time and opportunity to venture to other countries and experience other cultures, I believe we'd be more well-liked in the world. I know that if I only had the time off, I'd volunteer abroad.

**From Austria:**

I am sending 40 Dollars to your organization today. The Austrian Trade Union Federation and the Chamber of Labor are publishing a magazine called "Arbeit und Wirtschaft" ( Work and Economy ) and the last number was about "Time". We have placed a link to [timeday.org](http://www.arbeit-wirtschaft.at/) at the end of my article about "Living to work or working to make a living?" You can find the (German only) magazine at : <http://www.arbeit-wirtschaft.at/> With kindest regards from Austria / Europe, Dr. Robert Neunteufel.

**From Nevada:**

I'm lucky. I work for government and in addition to 3 weeks paid annual leave, I also have a comp time benefit that gives me 1.5 hours for every 1 hour I work overtime. I work long hours, but I also take nice vacations. In August, I'm going to Italy for 3 weeks and I'll still have 3 weeks of vacation left to take this year. Sometimes when I tell people about my time benefit, they get jealous and angry b/c they think it's a waste of tax payer dollars. Though understandable, that reaction is the wrong approach. My vacation time allows me to be more productive at my high-stress job and I wish everyone could have what I have. People shouldn't want to take away what I have; they

should want to fight to have what I have. And that is why I support your organization. I want everyone to experience the joy of paid vacation. I think it could go a long way to improving the general mood of our stressed-out, American society.

**From West Chester, Pennsylvania:**

The new Website is great. I would suggest the following additions:

Links to congressmen so people can impulsively respond to the information on the sight, maybe even with an option of an automatic message.

Links to the candidates.

Links to forward articles.

Magnetic bumper stickers for a \$20 donation.

Very pleased to see progress. I was wondering what you think the real chance is of this law happening. I noticed that the sick day bill has been proposed and died in congress several times in the past decade, despite having a healthy number of sponsors (current bill has about 100 but is still lying dormant). With the economy being so bad, politicians will not want to put an added burden on companies, though I think that is exactly when you need to give people more protection. If the corporations think they cannot afford it, they ought to look to the executive bonuses, etc. Besides people with more time spend more money, helping the economy. Some people may think this does not affect them because they are in the type of job that allows them to negotiate more vacation. They should understand that by having this law it means they can negotiate other perks instead. I would just really like to see this country start moving in the right direction before our nation loses its status as one of the best places to live.

**From Jacksonville, Florida:**

Just finished your book and it was wonderful. I am recommending it to others and a close friend of mine is currently reading it.... Didn't you folks publish a sample letter one time that we could use to write our legislators to support the TBYTD initiatives? I wanted to get that started this year. I am pushing for part time work now that I have had my first child. I hope to spend some time supporting TBYTD. Thanks.

**From Irving, Texas:**

I have been a long time supporter of Take Back Your Time. I wanted to point out that while I currently have 2 weeks of vacation this year it is all scheduled around school activities. I wish that in addition vacation time there was either an allotment for parents and school functions or that schools would be required to pay more attention to working parents needs. I cannot leave work at 5 and get my child picked up at home and across town by 5:30 so my vacation time gets used up in child/school support. There is also 3 weeks of band practice and the kids start at 7:00 am and finish at noon. Their participation is required but the schools are not providing transportation. I guess the best way to explain it is that my vacation time is spent driving my too young to drive kid to various school activities. I know that Marching Band is an extra but there has to be a better way.

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