



# TAKE BACK YOUR TIME

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## NEWSLETTER - June 2008

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

Happy Father's Day! We've said this every year, but the best thing this country could do to honor fathers (and mothers) is to give them more time to spend with their families. That's why we've supported the wonderful work done by groups like Momsrising.org, the National Partnership for Women and Families, and Take Care Net, among others, to give American parents paid time to spend with newborn children or take care of sick or elderly relatives. And that's why we are working so hard to win a law mandating minimum paid vacations in the United States.

I'm thrilled to let you know that we'll soon have a whole section on our Web site, where you can find content of all kinds to help you help us with this campaign, including dozens of humorous and powerful posters you can download and put up wherever possible, encouraging people to visit our new Web pages by going to [www.right2vacation.com](http://www.right2vacation.com). A couple of the posters are already on the site. Our incredibly talented new intern, Tom Bugert, a student at Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington, did all the graphic work on the posters. We are so lucky to have him on board!

In mid-May, I went to Washington DC, to meet with staff members for several senators who are interested in the paid vacation bill. I was joined by our terrific new board member, Anmarie Widener, whose knowledge helped make my

arguments stronger. I also met with representatives of several non-profit groups who are supportive of our initiative and with some representatives of the travel industry. We are hoping to build support for vacation time with a National VACATION MATTERS Summit next spring—let us know if you want to help!

We have been getting lots of new news coverage for our campaign—all of it positive (see the IN THE NEWS section below). Even the New York Times did a very supportive and lengthy piece, which appeared in the Saturday, June 7<sup>th</sup> edition. While I was in DC, the conservative Washington Times also ran an extensive (and totally positive) article about our campaign! We are on the move!

**IF THOMAS JEFFERSON WERE WRITING NOW.**

*“Life,  
liberty,  
And the  
pursuit of...  
Aw, forget it!”*

It's hard to find happiness when  
you're working all the time.

The United States is the only industrial country  
without a law guaranteeing paid vacations.

**WE CAN CHANGE THAT!**  
[www.right2vacation.org](http://www.right2vacation.org)

Keep your letters coming and get ready for the launch of our great new Web pages at: [www.timeday.org/right2vacation](http://www.timeday.org/right2vacation). Thanks to our dependable and capable Web guy, Jay Turney, for all his work on the site.

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**LETTER FROM THE EDITOR - KELLEY SMITH**

Just last week our auspicious city newspaper ran an article explaining how employers are adopting policies to help employees deal with high gasoline prices. You guessed it— car pools, half price bus tickets, (and these can certainly help with commuting costs!) but this time, something new. There was a mention of four-day weeks of ten-hour workdays, and nine-hour days with a day off every two weeks, as well as telecommuting. What strikes me as odd is that legions of employees have wished for these options for years. The employees' objectives were probably not so much fuel cost savings, but rather time management and time savings from reduced commuting.

Why are employers, who won't budge an inch to adopt a policy that helps employees with time management, willing to make changes to save gasoline expenses? Are executives really crying their eyes out thinking about children going without shoes while their parents buy gasoline for commuting?

I'm thinking that fuel costs really hurt a company's bottom line. Executives and managers are unable to escape the impact of high fuel prices for company vehicles, shipping, and utilities.

So, we can all be pleased to see any movement toward more flexible workplace schedules that save fuel and time. And perhaps there is a clue here. We seem unable to bring ourselves to see time management as a genuine societal problem, but when the objectives of time-starved employees can find common ground with a bottom-line objective, there is hope for change.

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## INTRODUCING CAROLINE LI, OUR NEWEST BOARD MEMBER!



Caroline Li is a Seattle journalist and founder of Earthwalkers Magazine, a culture/travel magazine that promotes traveling with a purpose and building compassion by learning from other people's perspectives. She is an advocate for social, minority and youth issues.

Caroline has written the following essay, sharing her perspective on the importance of TAKE BACK YOUR TIME:

*The idea of taking something back, the concept of time, is something of special interest to me because time offers so much more. Time is priceless and should be treasured, but it has been taken for granted by American society. It's been absent for so long that we no longer miss it. Some of us, like myself, have never had the joy of really possessing it. At 25, I've grown up in a generation of fast movers, quick fixes and dinners in front of the television.*

*As a first generation Asian American growing up in low-income status, I've seen those who used to have time and the effects of having it taken away. For low-income and minority populations, many things have been taken away from us in order for others to survive. When immigrants come to the United States they are asked, sometimes forced, to assimilate. In result, they lose their culture. Yet they are still subjected to prejudice and racism by those who they are supposed to take lead from. As result, our pride is also taken away, subjected to being second-rate citizens via zoning and immigration laws and racial profiling. But the most important thing that has been taken away from us is our time- time spent with family and friends, and ourselves.*

*Everything starts with the family. Children grow up watching television instead of real life role models, they lose or never learn their native languages and family values. They become ashamed of who they are because they can't figure out what makes them different, other than the color of their skin. The truth is, there aren't any different, they just never learned to be confident.*

*It takes time alone to find your inner strength. Most immigrants who come to the United States think life will be easier for them here. My father has been here for over two decades. He lived through the Cultural Revolution in China and its effects. As a young boy he left his village to find work in the city streets. There were times when he went without food*

*for days. Yet, reflecting on his journey to America, he has told me that living in the United States has been harder than it would have ever been if he had stayed in China with his friends.*

*Being blue collar, regardless of what race you are, is not easy. Feeling like he always had to play catch up on finances has worn my father out. Sacrificing time and rest for simple things like the heating bill has made him age too fast. And possibly the most heart breaking effect of my father's and other immigrant parents' sacrifices of time is seeing their children turn into ungrateful, naive, individuals because there was never time to teach values or share stories about family histories.*

*I've spent my journalism career reporting on minority communities, which is why I support the Paid Vacation Initiative. Such a law would affect low-income and minority communities in tremendous ways, paving the way for positive long-term effects on our society. I feel that this is a fight not only for low-income and minority populations but any citizen that is interested in a better, healthier future for the next generation- a generation that is more compassionate because they have time to get to know and learn from their neighbors; a generation that is healthier because they have time to learn good eating habits and get proper rest; a generation that is knowledgeable about international issues and global politics because they have time to read, to debate and travel to other parts of the world; a generation that is more politically active because they have time to participate in community organizations, form local neighborhood and special interest committees; a generation that finds the value in time rather than in materialistic things; a generation that, rather than sending get well cards and gifts in the mail, delivers themselves in person with real hugs.*

*Some say we are living on borrowed time, when in fact time was actually stolen from us. I think it's time to take back our time!*

---Caroline Li

WELCOME ON BOARD THE BOARD, CAROLINE!

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## **BREAKING NEWS - A NEW CANADIAN STUDY SHOWS THE VALUE OF FAMILY VACATIONS**

From Sue Shaw, Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada

### **FAMILY VACATIONS: IMPORTANT FOR PARENTS, CHILDREN, AND FAMILIES**

A recent study of family vacations by a team of researchers at the University of Waterloo, Canada, focused on the experiences, values, and meanings associated with this highly significant aspect of family life. The study involved 15 families with school-aged children from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. The mothers, fathers and children all had the opportunity to be involved with the study, and a series of interviews were conducted with family members before and after their summer vacation.

Perhaps not surprisingly, most of the children were enthusiastic about their family vacations. While some aspects (particularly traveling long distances by car) were seen to be "boring", the children enjoyed almost all vacation activities, including such things as camping, boating, fishing, playing games, eating out, visiting friends and family, and historical and cultural activities. They liked novel activities, and the increased freedom and independence they often enjoyed while on holiday, but they also liked the comfort and security of familiar vacation routines.

For the parents, and especially for the mothers, the planning, organization and facilitation of family vacations and vacation activities involved considerable work and effort. At the same time, however, vacations provided an escape from the stresses, strains, and busy schedules of everyday work and family life, and an opportunity to spend extended time with their children in more relaxed surroundings. One of the most significant aspects, from the parents' perspective, was the potential for vacations to provide positive memories for their children, and thus to strengthen family ties, contribute to a collective "sense of family", and enhance family well-being.

For more information on this study see:

Shaw, S.M., Havitz, M.E., & Delamere, F.M. (2008). "I decided to invest in my kids' memories": Family vacations, memories, and the social construction of the family. *Tourism, Culture & Communication*, 8(1), 13-26.

Hilbrech, M., Shaw, S.M., Delamere, F.M., Havitz, M.E. (in press). "We just ran around and had fun": Experiences, perspectives and the meanings of family vacations for children". *Leisure/Loisir*.

Copies of these publications are also available from Dr. Sue Shaw, Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G1 (email: [sshaw@healthy.uwaterloo.ca](mailto:sshaw@healthy.uwaterloo.ca)).

THANKS FOR SENDING US THIS, SUE. AND KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK!

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## HAPPENINGS

### NO TIME TO LOSE: THE SEARCH FOR WORK/LIFE BALANCE

A wonderful new artistic exhibit opens this week in Aberdeen, Scotland. It's called No Time to Lose: The Search for Work/Life Balance. The Curator, who brought the entire project together, Milena Placentile, of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, tells us she was inspired to do the project by Carl Honore's writings about the slow life and by Take Back Your Time. Here's some basic information about the exhibit:

#### **No Time to Lose: The Search for Work/Life Balance**

Peacock Visual Arts, Aberdeen, Scotland ([peacockvisualarts.co.uk](http://peacockvisualarts.co.uk))

June 13 – July 26, 2008 // Preview on Thursday, June 12 from 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Admission free for all

**Curated by:** Milena Placentile (Canada)

**Featuring work by:** Amy Alexander (USA), Cathy Busby (Canada), Anja Hertenberger (Germany/Netherlands) & Anja Steidinger (Germany/Spain), Saki Satom (Japan/UK), Abigail Schoneboom (UK/USA), and Tobaron Waxman (Canada/USA)

**Additional video program featuring work by:** Coleen Finlayson and Cherie Moses (Canada), Emily vey Duke and Cooper Battersby (Canada), Leila Sujir (India/Canada), and Kika Thorne (Canada).

Here is a links to the gallery's website:

<http://www.peacockvisualarts.com/archive/153/coming-up-no-time-to-lose>



And here is what Milena has to say about the project:

My name is Milena Placentile, and I am a freelance writer and curator of contemporary art living in Winnipeg, Canada. For me, work/life balance means more time to volunteer, to share home cooked meals with friends, and it especially means more nights spent dancing instead of working because – no matter how good the playlist – bopping around in a chair while typing just isn't the same thing!

While working on a proposal late at night back in October 2005, I found myself procrastinating by typing the word "overworked" into Google's Blog Search. The engine revealed 22,852 entries. When I typed the phrase "stressed out," an additional 251,125 entries appeared. I thought about all the overworked, stressed out, and exhausted people in the world who don't have the time, means, or interest to blog about it. The thought was discouraging. Now it's May 2008 and I have just queried Google's Blog Search once again to discover that the word "overworked" now generates 523,354 hits. As if day-to-day observations weren't enough, this small indicator (attained through entirely informal methods) does seem to convey a worsening situation.

The North American and Japanese models of work, which value commitment to one's job over personal care, have gone too far. The negative effects are widespread, including health and relationship problems, accidents caused by cutting corners or fatigue, and social and political turmoil caused by decreased civic involvement. Various European countries are striving to establish more humane policies, but there are still many sectors operating at unsustainable and unhealthy levels. Beyond that, the challenge to switch has been great, particularly in the face of economic pressures caused by globalization. Activists, health care professionals, and other concerned citizens around the world are making progress, but there are still numerous discussions to be had and changes to be made. How can we stop living for the economy and by the clock, and start living in ways that are more gratifying and equitable?

*No Time to Lose* joins contemporary artists from countries affected by the phenomenon of overwork to help increase consciousness about the issue, and to offer a few suggestions for change. As an exhibition and series of events, it is envisioned as a contribution to global efforts directed at motivating people to trust their instincts and take back their time. As such, it invites audiences to consider what they are giving up due to overwork, and suggests they decide whether the current economic system that facilitates overwork offers enough in return. It also reveals ways society facilitates overwork, such as through the availability of wireless technology and consumer goods that offer "24-hour action." Additionally, the exhibition strives to empower audiences by revealing how small actions can make a big difference (i.e. humanizing the workplace by regarding each other as people and not merely "employees").

*No Time to Lose* offers new and recent work by senior, mid-career, and emerging artists. Featured media include performance, installation, intervention, video, and new media, as well as interdisciplinary and collaborative projects. On-site, visitors will encounter diverse projects that consider the intersections of work, time, schedules, health, relationships, and personal fulfillment. All of the featured works are multifaceted and encourage viewers to invest personal experience and imagination in the interpretative process. Through various forms of public programming, the gallery will become a hub for exchange between visitors and artists about the personal and civic costs of overwork, and about ways to reclaim time both at an individual level and with a view to affecting public policy.

Off-site projects will be in the form of interventions, one of which is a performance that will be conducted prior to the launch of the exhibition so the artists can gather city-specific data through which to develop an on-site installation.

Audiences from distant cities will also be able to participate through online forums designed to foster solidarity across geographical borders.

A one-night screening of four video projects by six Canadian artists will explore the struggle of work as a means to an end... as individual and distinct as those ends may be.

We are also in the process of scheduling round table discussions, among other events, which we hope will encourage visitors to share personal experiences pertaining to overwork, as well as ideas concerning how to make change for the better.

I've also set up a blog to offer a behind the scenes look at our activities: <http://notimetolose.wordpress.com/>. The idea is to show the work that goes into producing an exhibition, and hopefully that contributes to a demystification of the process. We're not an "institution"—we're a group of people coming together in response to an idea we really care about.

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## **NATIONAL DOWNSHIFTING WEEK IS JULY 7-13TH**

Conscious Consuming is excited to announce US National Downshifting Week, which Americans will celebrate from July 7-13th. We were inspired to start US National Downshifting Week by the work of Tracey Smith, founder of National Downshifting Week in the UK. Please share this event with your friends and family, and encourage them to visit us at <http://www.consciousconsuming.org> and <http://www.downshiftingweek.com> for information and a forum to share your ideas about how to Slow Down and Green Up!

Thanks to Susan Donohoe of National Downshifting week for this information.

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## **IN THE NEWS**

Here are four recent and wonderful news stories about our vacation campaign:

From the Washington Times: <http://washtimes.com/news/2008/may/04/vacation-doesnt-work/>

From the New York Times:

[http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/07/business/yourmoney/07shortcuts.html?\\_r=1&ref=business&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/07/business/yourmoney/07shortcuts.html?_r=1&ref=business&oref=slogin)

From CNN.com: <http://www.cnn.com/2008/LIVING/worklife/06/06/balance.slow.movement/>

From the Fredericksburg (VA) Free Lance Star:

<http://www.umwbullet.com/News/FLS/2008/052008/05182008/379670>

And here are a couple of other good reads about the issue:

A pertinent article on CNNMoney, showing Americans want their vacations even if they're downsized vacations: [http://money.cnn.com/2008/05/19/pf/summer\\_travel/index.htm?postversion=2008052110](http://money.cnn.com/2008/05/19/pf/summer_travel/index.htm?postversion=2008052110)

Article sent to us by a Canadian reader:

<http://www.alternet.org/healthwellness/86656/>

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### YOUR LETTERS

#### From Hudson, Florida

I read about your group and issue in may/june08 sierra club magazine. I am one of the many (women) workers working for a company that offers no benefits. Last October I quit an international company after 60 days. They did offer 3 weeks vacation. However, what one didn't know going in was the catch for administrative personnel: there were 1-person departments, each person was doing the work of at least 2 people and there was little cross-training. One could not *not* be at work. Company vacation policy was 'use it or lose it', under the guise that they really wanted employees to refresh during being away. Accrued vacation was lost if not taken within a year. In reality, you lost accumulated time because there was no one to do your job in your absence.

#### From Eagle Rock, California

I read the CNN article about your philosophy and completely agree, although I think this over-worked labor force is treated as such as a method of control by those with infinite leisure time. Kinda like "Metropolis," the famous silent flick by German director, Fritz Lang. Well, I always thought that one 3 day weekend per month would do wonders for people. It would stimulate the leisure economy, get everyone well rested, and make that one short week everyone's favorite. That's my idea. Feel free to fight to make it a reality. I'll do my part.

#### From Boston, Massachusetts

I am curious whether you know of any resources for finding work-life balance within the realm of medicine. I am a physician and am struggling to get access to information on how to practice medicine and still have a life. As you probably know, physicians are high on the list of offenders for overworking.

ANYBODY HAVE ANSWERS TO THIS ONE—WE'LL FORWARD THEM TO THE DOCTOR WHO WROTE THIS LETTER.

#### From Somerville, Massachusetts

Hi- I was just reading about this in the Sierra Club magazine. I work for a union and sent them an email about maybe organizing a workshop about this idea and trying to promote 10.24. I was thinking you should put together a petition on the Care2 Website. I don't see anything on your site that people can directly sign. <http://www.care2.com/>. Thanks for doing this!

#### From San Anselmo, California

John, I just listened to your interview on Rick Steves' radio program and checked out your website. I'm so glad to hear this as I think the time off/vacation attitude in America is ridiculous! I am Canadian and work in the film industry doing visual effects, so I've been lucky to be traveling and working in different countries around the world, and have been taking about 3 months off a year. I've recently moved to the San Francisco bay area after living & working in Santa Monica for a year and a half. I'm shocked about the 2 weeks/year vacation people here in the US get, but even more shocked about the general attitude: the typical American feels guilty about taking time off, and also when they do take time off it's always seen as "vacation", not general life balance and socializing and being healthy. I'm passing on your site to others here in the US. Let's spread the message!

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### ENDORSEMENTS

We're getting too many to put in our newsletters. We'll have them all up on the Web site soon...

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### JOKES

#### THE BUSINESSMAN AND THE FISHERMAN ON THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

a humorous piece sent to us by Mike Ballard...

A story is told about a prosperous businessman and a simple village fisherman. The businessman, on one of his real-estate trips down south, dropped anchor off a small, lush village by the sea. The village extended up a hill to command over a magnificent bay, and in the bay, a lone, small rowboat floated idly under the afternoon sun. A tan, youthful man leaned against the bow, his back padded by a folded sail. He wore white cotton pants, a huge sombrero to shade his head, and a brown linen shirt with various small tears. His cupped hands held the end of a fishing line, but he rested as if deep in meditation.

The businessman looked down from his big deck, less than a hundred meters away, and thought, "Why is that poor devil fishing there all alone in the middle of this bay?" His steely, furtive eyes jumped back and forth between the fisherman and the bay, as if he were scanning the site for potential development. He had his crew lower the dinghy, jumped aboard, and rode out towards the fisherman.

The businessman came closer and closer but the fisherman did not budge, seemingly still absorbed in the sea, the sun and his own mysterious thoughts. The businessman stopped his dinghy, and broke the silence.

"Hello Mister, how are you?" he said in a rushed voice.

The fisherman rose gently from his reclined position, and with a calm motion tilted his sombrero up. He looked up towards the businessman, his black-brown eyes filled with a depth that seemed stolen from the sea itself. The businessman looked down.

"Hello Señor. I am well. Thank you. And what about yourself?" His lips rose, and formed a soft, humble smile.

"Very well, very well. Thank you." The words gushed out, and immediately he shifted gears and got down to business. "Tell me Mister what are you doing here?"

The fisherman smiled, slightly perplexed. "Well ... well, I am fishing, Señor." And the thought crossed his mind, "strange question."

"And tell me what do you do with your fish once you catch it?"

The fisherman smiled again. "Well Señor, I eat it."

"And tell me is that all you do with your fish?"

"Well, let me see ... I eat it, and of course, so does my wife, and my kids."

"Is that all?"

The fisherman's eyes lit up. "Ah, I see Señor. Well, I do sell some when I have extra."

"And where do you sell them?"

"I sell them right here in the village."

“And how long does it take you to catch your fish, and how much do you get for it?”

The fisherman looked away, and in the direction of his fishing line. “Well, it takes me a few hours, and I usually get a few pesos per fish, or sometimes I just exchange it for some fruit or vegetables.”

“But my friend, that is almost nothing!” His voice boomed with confidence. “You could make so much more!”

The fisherman remained quiet, and the businessman immediately launched into a Socratic dialogue aimed at teaching the poor devil the rudiments of commerce.

“Let me help you here my friend. I know a few things or two about business,” he gestured towards his big motorboat, “and I think a young fellow like you, in a undeveloped place like this,” he paused and looked out towards the pristine bay, “well, well you could make a killing!” his eyes opened wide with excitement.

“Yes, perhaps, Señor.”

“Oh, no. Not perhaps. Definitely, my friend. Definitely. First off, tell me, do you work just two hours a day?”

“Well, I fish a few hours, and then I look after my house and garden for a few hours.”

“Is that it? What else do you do?”

“Well Señor ... I see my friends, I spend time on the beach with my wife, I play with my kids ...”

The businessman stared intently at the fisherman. “You see, that’s just it. That’s the problem right there. Do you see?”

“No Señor.”

“Well you have all this free time, and you barely work at all!”

The fisherman looked back at him with perplexed eyes.

“Look my friend, this is how you do it. Instead of going out to fish for two hours, you go out for eight. That way you catch four times more fish.”

“And then what Señor?”

“Well then, you have four times more fish, right? One quarter of the catch you keep for yourself, just like before, but the remaining three quarters you sell for a profit.” He gesticulated with great energy, as he explained to the fisherman how to start his business.

“With that profit, after a year, you buy a bigger boat, and bigger nets. That way in eight hours, you now double your previous catch. So at that point, you catch eight times more fish than now.”

The fisherman followed the businessman’s arguments carefully. “So now I have one part for me, and seven parts for sale?”

“That’s right! Very good! So, after a few years, with the profit from that you get a second boat, and you hire another fisherman to help you.”

“And then what Señor?”

“You don’t get it?” The businessman launched off again, and gesticulated even more furiously. “Well then you double your catch again! After a few more years, with that profit, you get more boats, and more assistants. And then you double your catch again!” His eyes lit up.

“And so Señor, then ...?”

“Well then the best part comes. Then you set up a cannery right here in the village. And so all the fish you get, you can, and sell everywhere in the country.” And he paused gravely, as if to deliver a very important piece of information. The fisherman grasped his fishing line and stared at him.

“And then, my friend, you are a real businessman, and you are constantly multiplying your profits. You now have a fleet of boats, workers everywhere, several canneries. You have made it, my friend!”

The fisherman released the grip on his fishing line. He removed his sombrero and scratched his head, and with a timid voice he said “And so ... so then what Señor?”

The businessman slapped his hand on his forehead, and looked at him in disbelief. “Don’t you see!? Then you are rich and successful! You have made it!”

The fisherman remained still for a little while, and mumbled the words “made it” a few times. He hesitated before speaking, but the same words wanted to come out: “And then what Señor?”

“What?!” This has got to be the slowest fellow around, the businessman thought. “Then you have made it, my friend! You’re rich and successful, and then ...” The businessman paused, took in the scenic beauty of the bay, and made a grand gesture. “Then you can retire to a place like this ... do a little fishing, spend time on the beach, play with your kids ...”

The fisherman considered the businessman’s words for a few moments, and he laughed gently. “But Señor, that it is exactly what I am doing right now! Why go through all that trouble?”

- W.S. Crow

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