



REARVIEW

By Shelley Wood

Too much busyness

When Shelley sets out to do less with her time, she realized the complications of delaying life in a busy, busy world

Forget your many pots on the burner, lines in the water, irons in the fire: I am going to tell you something that will stop you in your tracks.

I'm not busy.

I'm so not busy I couldn't even get through the million and one things I didn't need to get done today in order to compose this plea for an end to busyness, or at least a rethink of the way we slavishly fetish it. I'm fed up by the extent to which modern life has become so laden with commitments, duties and scheduling that busyness has become the only thing we have left to talk about. Ask anyone: How are you? The answer is never: I'm happy, sad, nostalgic, confused. The answer, inevitably, is: busy.

Not long ago I quit my job, giving me plenty of idle moments to fret about how I'm not filling them. But one thing I'm actively doing with my time between jobs is trying to do less with it. It's not so easy, delaying a life. In this day and age, success is measured by how much we accomplish, so not having work and responsibilities makes me feel rudderless and ineffectual. When people ask me, perplexed, how I'm passing the hours, I'm evasive or self-deprecating. I feel the need to trumpet a project or activity that explains my seemingly empty days.

Last year, let me hasten to tell you, I was extremely busy and important. I was juggling work and family and friends and chores and finances and regular exercise and healthy eating and hobbies — the list goes on and on, and is deadly dull. Needless to say, I was so busy I


never climbed properly out of one activity before plunging earnestly into the next. Everyone I know was in the same boat, all of us breathlessly bemoaning our busy lives. This means most conversations consisted of busyness one-upmanship rather than any actual listening and discussion. Surely your busyness is nowhere near as grueling and unsustainable as my busyness. Listen to this!

Here's the thing: everyone is busy. Being busy today is like having functioning kidneys and a heart that is still shunting blood from one chamber to the other. And as conversational topics go, it's as boring as a pulse.

Clearly I'm alive, so I lied when I said I wasn't busy, because of course I'm cramming my days with ...

No. I'm not going to tell you about it, because surely you've had enough of this too, cataloging and hearing about all this busyness. We've let it invade even our rare scraps of leisure time, the scant moments of drifting conversation with

the people we love, time we could be using to talk about something other than busyness.

At any moment in any busy day, an idea, a memory or an emotion might flutter through your mind when you are too run off your feet to snatch at it. You might glimpse something astonishing or amusing in an instant with no space for reflection. In the 10 minutes you have for a phone call, or the 5 minutes you have for an email, or the 30 seconds you have to tap out a text, tell me about that moment. Crack it wide open and give it its due. I promise, I'll drop everything I'm doing and give you my full attention. 

I'm fed up with the way modern life has become so laden with commitments, duties and scheduling that busyness is all we have left to talk about.