



Slowing Down

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by Kathie Hightower

I remember Charms Lollipops. Growing up in Berlin, Germany, we could buy Charms pops at the movie theater for a nickel. You could make one lollipop last the entire two hours of a movie. Toward the end we liked to look through the lollipop to see the screen in a different color — usually red or orange for me.

Not once do I remember thinking: "Boy, I wish I could get rid of this lollipop faster — I wish it were over with!"

So who came up with this new invention I first found in our little town of Bammental, Germany, and now see in stores all over the U.S.? The Pop Machine — or Turbo-Lutscher (Turbo-Sucker). You put a lollipop (the size of a Tootsie Pop) in the top, push the ON button and the battery-operated machine turns your lollipop for you. Faster pleasures, I guess. Saves you having to lick — just stick out your tongue.

The Pop Machine is a symbol for me — a symbol of the last straw as our world gets faster and faster. Fax me right away. Call me on my cell phone. Your photos developed in one hour. Drive through dry cleaning and cappuccino service. Remote controls for everything. Bread machines. Cake icing in a can. Pudding in a tub.

I remember one evening in Berlin when I was nine. We had some older German friends over one night for dinner. As they watched my younger brother make Jello Instant Pudding they were amazed that you didn't have to cook it. "Cook pudding?" we asked. Why would you do that? Just add milk and stir and stick it in the fridge. Now you don't even need those few steps. Just open.

So where does it all end? I sometimes feel like screaming, "Stop the world — I want to get off." Or better yet, maybe I should be singing "Slow down — you move too fast — you've got to make the morning last."

Obviously, I'm not the only one that feels this way. I've been reading books and articles about a trend to get back to the basics, to get back to a simpler, slower life. Books like *Simple Living*, *Voluntary Simplicity*, *Plain and Simple*, *Downshifting*, and *Simple Abundance* speak to this movement.

People want to slow down. To savor the long, slow process of baking bread or cookies. To enjoy the time and daydreaming of washing the dishes by hand and drying each slowly while you look out the window or talk with your family. To sit on the front porch and watch the neighborhood. To grow your own vegetables. To hang your laundry out on the line.

I read a book that sums this all up in its title: *Slowing Down in a Speeded Up World*. The author, Adair Lara, a San Francisco columnist, feeling overwhelmed herself, asked her readers: "What do you do? What's your version of hanging out the wash?" Within days she had hundreds of people writing in to share the ways of slowing down that they had discovered.

As she says, "The way to slow down in a hectic world is not to find even more ways of saving time, but to look for ways to spend it." The ways her readers shared included things like writing letters in longhand even if they owned computers, washing dishes though they have dishwashers, refusing to use the car on Saturdays, arriving early to doctors appointments, stepping out in the yard just to look up at the sky and breathe.

I use tricks to help me. I have a magnet from my favorite artist, SARK, staring at me at work: "STOP DOING — just for this moment." It reminds me to be rather than do. I use every red light as a reminder to stop and breathe and stretch. Each time my phone rings I pause and breath for a few moments reminding myself to be in the moment — to pay attention.

I walk around my neighborhood just for the pleasure of looking at all the beautiful flowers — and, yes, I do stop to smell them. I stop whatever I'm doing just to pet my cat and pay attention to his purring when he jumps in my lap. I sit with a cup of tea and just look out at my garden and listen to the birds. I stop to admire the sunset — and breathe. I slow down and enjoy sweeping the floor rather than rushing to check that chore off my list. I admit that I'm not ready to get rid of my dishwasher or clothes dryer. But I might just choose not to use them every now and then.

And for now I think I might just go buy a Charms Lollipop and spend a long afternoon at the movies.

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