

An Antidote to Hurry
By
Daniel E. White August 14, 2023

On my first visit to Disneyland, I stood by a sign at the Autopia ride. Actually under. A child needed to be as tall as the bottom of the sign in order to be allowed to drive one of the cars.

“I can’t wait until I’m tall enough,” I whined.

In how many Decembers did we kids say with impatience, “I can’t wait to open my presents?” Or in the middle of a school year, “I can’t wait until summer?”

Be old enough to drive, to buy a beer, to be out on one’s own; how typical it seems that we wished little bits of time away, anticipating some future age or station in life?

Even today, years later, in the middle of triple digit temperatures and searing summer sun, I am sure I have said, “I can’t wait for the monsoons to come.

I wonder, if the circumstances of my passing from this world involve a prolonged period during which my body slowly shuts down, if I will recall such wishes for time to pass more quickly and ask, what was all the hurry about?

Recently, Judy shared the following story:

“ In Washington DC, at a Metro Station, on a cold January morning in 2007, a man with a violin played six Bach pieces for about 45 minutes. During that time, approximately 2000 people went through the station, most of them on their way to work.

After about four minutes, a middle-aged man noticed that there was a musician playing. He slowed his pace and stopped for a few seconds, and then he hurried on to meet his schedule.

About four minutes later, the violinist received his first dollar. A woman threw money in the hat and, without stopping, continued to walk.

At six minutes, a young man leaned against the wall to listen to him, then looked at his watch and started to walk again.

At ten minutes, a three-year old boy stopped, but his mother tugged him along hurriedly. The kid stopped to look at the violinist again, but the mother pushed hard, and the child continued to walk, turning his head the whole time. This action was repeated by several other children, but every parent - without exception - forced their children to move on quickly.

After forty-five minutes, only six people had stopped and listened for a short while. About twenty gave money but continued to walk at their normal pace. The man collected a total of \$32.

After an hour, he finished playing and silence took over. No one noticed and no one applauded. There was no recognition at all. No one knew this, but the violinist was Joshua Bell, one of the greatest musicians in the world. He played one of the most intricate pieces ever written, with a

violin worth \$3.5 million dollars. Two days before, Joshua Bell sold out a theater in Boston where the seats averaged \$100 each to sit and listen to him play the same music.

This is a true story. Joshua Bell, playing incognito in the D.C. Metro Station, was organized by the Washington Post as part of a social experiment about perception, taste and people's priorities.

This experiment raised several questions in my mind:

In a common-place environment, at an inappropriate hour, do we perceive beauty? If so, do we stop to appreciate it?

Do we recognize talent in an unexpected context?

One possible conclusion reached from this experiment could be this:

If we do not have a moment to stop and listen to one of the best musicians in the world, playing some of the finest music ever written, with one of the most beautiful instruments ever made... how many other things are we missing as we rush through life?"

Judy and I talked about the context of the story. When in a subway station on the way to work, isn't one likely to be focused on the time the train leaves, the distance to the right platform, and such? If one has encountered buskers before, have we formed an assumption about the social status or economic circumstances of the musician or actor, dismissing the music or the act? Is one in the habit of dropping cash into the collection box of every busker?

People of a Certain Age, we have been conditioned to "do" rather than just "be," and we are good at doing. We don't lack reminders about "stopping to smell the roses" or "living in the moment" or the limited time each of us will walk this earth. Still, how difficult is it for us to find the time to be, to stop and listen, to absorb the beauty even for a moment, to be content with "now" and not wishing for "then?"

We will each respond in our own ways. I'd like to think I would have stopped for Bell playing Bach. But that might have depended on where I was headed and how soon I need to be there.

I wonder what would happen if I made a point each day to find a moment of beauty and make a note of it? And then have that collection of notes handy, as I answered that question at the end of my life, as a reminder that I didn't hurry needlessly all the time?

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