

GUEST ESSAY by Marci Diehl
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The news that there is an international best seller on the subject of slowing life down reconfirms my status as a psychic, unheralded trend spotter.

Four years ago, while author Carl Honore was having the epiphany that spurred him to write his book, I wrote a piece for a publication in which I declared: “The only goal I have for 2001 is not to have one.” This decision was borne out of an epiphany of my own – a spontaneous migraine/crying spell in my car one night, and the realization that I listed a whopping 39 goals for myself for the year 2000. I accomplished ninety percent of those goals, but at a cost to my peace and creative energy. I was hyperventilating on the fast track.

According to Honore, the “Slow” movement is “a loose collection of individuals and groups who share the same belief: that we can live better if we live a little more slowly.” The movement is already afoot in Europe and Japan, he says.

The question is – Will it ever take hold in the USA?

It’s an issue that’s been haunting me for weeks, since I spent ten exhilaratingly slow days on the Aegean island of Santorini, Greece. I went there to attend a wedding, and do some research for a novel I’m writing. As a teenager, I spent two weeks in Athens, and always wished for a trip back to Greek island life.

Thanks to my friends, Dick and Joanne, parents of the bride, my wish came true. I spent months preparing for the trip, checking websites for security and health alerts, tips

on navigating airports, how to pack for these perilous times, and how to avoid looking like an American tourist-target.

While everyone was thrilled for me to go, my dad and son worried about my safety leaving the country. And I had to admit, I was anxious enough to keep my passport cover hidden. I'd even read a tip not to smile or laugh too much. It's a dead giveaway. We Americans are far too sunny, apparently.

We arrived on the little island of Santorini, where it's always Greek Time. Greek Time is slow, and it takes some getting used to, when you are as stressed-out, pressured, driven and ruled by the clock as we Americans. On our first day, Dick growled to himself at the half-hour or more it took to get a sandwich at the pool bar, while around us the sun shone in a sky so intensely blue it was almost neon. The bougainvillea draped in pink splendor over white walls. Women sunbathed topless while children chased each other around the pool. People smoked, and drank from wine glasses at their lounges.

There were no rules, no regulations, and no hurry. The sandwich came eventually, and we asked ourselves – where did we have to be, anyway? What in-born, stateside time clock were we punching?

For the first time in my life, I awoke at dawn to roosters crowing in the town. I didn't touch a phone, cell phone, email, laptop, television or newspaper. Each day contained some adventure, a story, or a conversation with someone from another part of the world. We partied and danced with the groom's Greek family. We lay in the broiling sun, contemplating the mountain looming over the beach at Kamari. If we ate dinner at nine-thirty in the evening, we were the Early Bird special. The tavernas don't get cranking

until about ten-thirty; the stores open in mid-morning, take an afternoon break, and close around midnight. The clubs close at four a.m.

Midway through our stay, we relaxed about waiting to get the check for dinner. At home, we're used to being hustled through a meal while the check arrives before you've swallowed your last bite. But on slow Greek Time, dinner is about enjoying some wine, lots of food, and most of all, the gift of each other's company on an exquisite night by the sea. It's about living in the moment, through all your senses.

While we ticked down the number of days we had left of heaven, the Europeans kicked back for their three-week holidays. We had the least vacation time, and business insanity waiting our return.

Immersion into Santorini's spectacular environment -- as the brother of the bride put it -- makes you want to change your life for the better.

"For the better," he meant, is opening your spirit to the realization that the world is full of stunning beauty and good-hearted, warm, interesting people; that once you break out of the media-and-government-induced paranoia, you realize no one cares particularly where you come from, as long as you act like a decent human being; that a smile and laughter go a long way in any language. And finally, that something happens to your spirit when you let go of -- as Honore put it -- "the addiction to hurry" we slave to here in the States. Something that feels truly free, and wonderful.

I keep a post card of one of Santorini's magic views on my refrigerator. It's not going to be easy to stay away from feeling ruled by the calendar and clock. It helps to know I'm at the forefront of a movement. It may have all the speed of a glacier in taking hold, but our time will come. I hope.

