

A Walk in the 'Twilight Zone' Park

Written by Alex Baer

Wednesday, 24 October 2012 17:24

The original *Twilight Zone* series had a timely episode involving a kind of a stopwatch: Click the stem, and all time stops. Except *you*. Maybe you're already hearing the tell-tale series music and its four-note loop.

40-year-old Patrick McNulty realized the stopwatch offered many intriguing possibilities, if its secrets could be unwound. In the teleplay by series creator Rod Serling, the [spoiler alert] watch is dropped and broken -- forever stranding McNulty in time.

Except for that being-stranded-in-time part, I could have long used a stopwatch like that. (You too?) It sure would have shrunk down those 75-hour weeks to size.

Talk about mandatory over-employment meted out onto a small, salaried plate! Trying to eat faster was the only solution to keep up with the kitchen -- aside from tossing up one's hands and walking out. Then, a magical idea -- like Alice in Wonderland, but in stopwatch clicks, not pills: *One click makes your work seem to go faster, and another click finds you relaxing at home.*

Not quite as perfect as having a "duplicate you" to send off to work in your place each day, but still pretty good. To quote from another fine *Zone* episode, there would finally be "time enough at last."

It's a nice pipe dream, especially as we all try to play *Beat The Clock*, or at least, try to not get the decompression bends or too many cramps from immersion into the time stream and commuting in the daily depths, trying to squeeze in more life for the time that we have. *And for the time we have left.*

Teasing such thoughts around has an aspect to it of strolling in a green oasis in the city, or sitting on one of the park benches on a mild, bright summer day, content to consider and mull, dappled by sunlight beneath a leafy canopy. Feel free to join in, if you like. There's plenty of room on the bench.

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I have noticed that the questions most worth asking never have easy or apparent answers. Here's one of them now: When did life become reduced to little more than a front-to-back, side-to-side, top-to-bottom exercise in accounting and keeping score?

Money used to be our servant, not the other way around. Exchanging goods and services for currency made life more convenient, and certainly easier than dealing in numbers of goats or burlap sacks of barley. Somewhere in there it became corrupted, and became a system too easy to manipulate, casting unfair advantage to the manipulators.

It probably happened as one of the unplanned side-effects to the construct, a sad reality that not all people have fair, similar, or equal access to money. We certainly don't all start out at the figurative gate at Hialeah, pockets empty, waiting for the pistol shot and the doors to spring open, flinging ourselves down the track to earn the daily bread.

Right from the beginning, or even before that, there's the fact some of us can afford to take a slow, easy shamle around the track, or just go roaming back up in the stands, for a 'dog and a beer. Others of us have to go round and round, hard as we can.

Or do we? How is it that money became the Central Oracle that must always be first consulted before life may go forward again?

Of course, two groups will never seek an audience with the Oracle: the poor, for they are fully aware no money resides in their accounts, and the assorted stair-steps of the rich, super-rich, and mega-rich, for they know there is no *need* to check -- *there's piles of the stuff around*.

"Clickety-clack," said the Wall Street keyboard, "we're all millionaires now." Not much of a bed-time story. Nor is checking under the sofa cushions for spare change.

We're all on the continuum and it's compulsory we play: It's the Mandatory Participation Monetary System, trademarked the world over. If you are lucky enough to have a home, you collide with the MPMS the instant your foot leaves the doorstep or stoop. The MPMS is as binding and obligatory as the handshake we make with death to experience life -- call it a loan

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from the Grim Reaper, granting us a new, but fleeting, lease on life.

I can almost hear that stopwatch ticking from here -- almost as loud, perhaps, as Poe's telltale heart. Maybe you can, too. All that seems certain to do about it is to realize our time here is finite -- woefully short at best. Then, we need to realize that what we do with this time is ultimately important. Life is a gift, and a second-to-second loan that we knit together and call our unbroken line of life.

Life wisdom gets compressed into handy adages. Here's one: Approaching the end of their lives, few people would say they really wished they had worked more overtime. This is a good thought for *now*. Beats waiting until the end, when it's too late.

Perhaps the MPMS, patented and in use in all the world's countries, is simply a part of Nature, expressed as part of our own natures. The case has certainly been well made by many that the making of money is a substitute for much -- including the primal hunt, and war.

In Africa, muscle mass, cunning, and speed are power; it is much better to be a lion, leopard, or cheetah than to be an antelope, gazelle, or springbok. It is an easy process of conversion, conversationally, transferring those winning, predatory qualities into money, connections, and power -- Economic Darwinism in its simplest terms.

Thing is: As a human time is so incredibly short, why do we put our focus and emphasis on the things as we do? That is, we want to avoid approaching death wishing we'd worked more overtime hours, why do any of us spend our very limited and precious time in that way?

If money is just a marker in life, used as tokens in a vast, often rigged game of accounting and keeping score, why do we forfeit so much of our lives pursuing these markers and tokens, these scraps of colored paper? What is of value? What really lasts? What is worth trading our time -- and our lives -- for, in the end?

As I say, such questions have no easy or apparent answers. I can only tell you that asking them now and again is important for getting your bearings and in navigating life's transit, using

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the course you yourself most want to set.

Thanks for listening, sharing the bench, and thanks for a walk in the park -- even though such questions never are.

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Sign in an elevator at an ad agency: *Speed, Quality, Price -- Pick Any Two.*

My personal corollary? *Time, Money, Energy -- Pick Any Two.*

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We face another FrightFest called an election, complete with candidates wearing their best game faces and campaign masks -- along with another Halloween, complete with caped and costumed characters, commerce, and candy. With one group, there is a traditional "Trick or Treat" involved, and, with another, "Trick or Treacle," or something close. "Trick or Trickle," maybe, in this season of tricks and truculence, and queasy uncertainty.

Not even Superman has job security. In fact, he has quit -- well, Clark Kent has. Cashed in his job at the Daily Planet, where he's worked since the 1940s. Some of it was a bitter battle over shabby and shameful marching orders from a conglomerate's takeover. The rest of the story? Clark's had it with soft news -- major-league ticked that hard news has taken a distant back seat to entertainment stories. Blogging may be in Kent's future.

A leaked panel from the comic has Clark complaining, "Why am I the one sounding like a grizzled, ink-stained wretch who thinks news should be about, I don't know, **news**?" Here's where I shout, "

You

go

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Clark -- get 'em buddy."

(Ever clocked a local or national newscast, just to see how much is news and how much is less-than-imperative fluff that could be run anytime in the next couple of weeks? You'd be surprised. Especially if you get the *right* kind of stopwatch.)

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Finally, now: pumpkins, and a special bonus, way down here at the end. Yes: It's ghoulish, zombie pumpkin-heads at the New York Botannical Garden, helping celebrate the season -- a nice salute for both ghoulish candidates and zombie pumpkin-head voters.

The Detroit Zoo, meanwhile, has passed out pumpkins, with mixed results, a bit early to its residents. Call it *life enrichment* -- which is a nice way to say, "We hope this helps perk up your somewhat boring and routine days in captivity."

Did I already mention that zoos are on the list of questions with no easy answers? They are for me -- love to see the animals, but hate to see their captivity. Thinking about zoos as viable pools of genetic material for their wild re-population down the road, helps a little.

And now, three minutes and 18 seconds of *oooh*, *ohhhh*, and *aaaahhhh*: Stunning, time-lapse photography of nature, starfields, and the northern lights -- various vistas and views, set to relaxing and pensive music. Link's down below. Maybe it'll help with those unanswerable questions. Even the election.

Twilight Zone stopwatch: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Kind_of_a_Stopwatch

Twilight Zone time: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Time_Enough_at_Last

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Kent calls it quits: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-20050483>

and: <http://www.newsarama.com/comics/superman-13-clark-quits-daily-planet.html>

Zombie pumpkins: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-20070973>

Zoo pumpkins: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-11617911>

3:18 of *aaahhhh*:

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/22/within-two-worlds-time-lapse-aurora-borealis-video_n_2000984.html?ref=topbar