

Take time to enjoy your life



**BRIGITTE
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ON THE RAT RACE

"We only have one life
and we shouldn't
waste it trying
to make it."

Perdre sa vie à la gagner is an awful thing to do. Because as Malcolm Forbes said, "By the time we've made it, we've had it." Especially when most of us don't actually make it all that spectacularly. Yet it seems these days as though there's nothing more important than getting rid of all that makes life, er, lively, in order to focus on the challenges of our exhausting jobs. How depressing.

Take the debate about what to do with the \$5-a-day day care. There have been so many individuals and groups expressing strongly held opinions on the matter that I'm starting to worry the media are soon going to run out of people to interview. Yet in the nonstop discussions over what form a renewed program might take and how much it is all going to cost, I haven't heard

anybody ask, "Say, why do we need day care in the first place?"

I know what you'll say: Parents who work outside the house need to have a dependable, and possibly educational, place to dump their kids every morning. School qualifies as roughly dependable and occasionally educational. And day care is the "school" for kids under the age of 5. But my question is this: Does it make sense to work so hard to afford day care that you don't have time for yourself or your family?

Your whole family, if we count "granny care," that is, the very latest in work-improvement ideas. Brainchild of a British think tank, this proposal would see companies setting up day-care centres for their employees' elderly relatives, where they would be entertained and cared for by nurses and, presumably, other professionals such as dance teachers and manicurists. Imagine the routine: Get up, shower, have coffee, dress for work, drive toddler to day care, dump grandpa in elderly care, proceed to work, work all day, pick up differently coiffed grandpa, pick up toddler and her new drawings, drive home, fix a quick dinner, help with homework, ferry kids to piano

lessons, perform various chores, collapse in bed. Repeat until you die from exhaustion.

You pay for day care, granny care, maybe even a dog-sitter or domestic help, plus all the other things like clothes and transportation you have to buy before you can start earning a salary, and you can't for the life of you find the time to cook a real meal, see a movie or do the laundry. You haven't had a private, adult conversation with your spouse in weeks. Your "reward" for all this endless scrambling around is a few thousand dollars extra in your bank account, a really short fuse and huge bags under your eyes. Is the job really worth all the stress and aggravation, especially if it isn't that rewarding professionally? It seems like a good question to ask — provided, of course, you have any time left to ponder the issue.

Some Canadian researchers have started doing just that. Last February, the Canadian Policy Research Network released the results of a wide-ranging study into the quality of work, which among other things found one-third of university-educated women complained of a "job-quality deficit" in their attempt at balancing work and life. And just this week, the same think tank warned middle-aged workers are dangerously squeezed between work and caring for both their parents and kids.

The solution, according to Canadian Policy Research Net-

works president Judith Maxwell, is for governments to find a "new logic" that fits policy to the patterns of how people live today. Chiefly, governments must find the political will to implement high-quality day care and elder care.

More of the same. But if we're going to use "old logic" instead, maybe we should use some "really old logic" like that family matters more than money and that home can be a refuge rather than a prison.

I understand the importance of reaching one's full professional potential through a fulfilling career, but there's got to be a point at which we stop to smell the roses, feed the dog, hug the kids and dump the "job-quality deficit" instead of parking pets and relatives in some kind of day care in order to run around like headless chickens trying to earn a living in a job we don't even like all that much. There's no joie de vivre in that.

We've only have one life, and we shouldn't waste it trying to make it. Especially not at the expense of the people and things that make our lives worth living.

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