

Time, priceless time

BY WAYNE MULLER

IN COMMERCE, we trade time for money. Our time is converted into labor, productivity, output and profit. Whenever we can, we find new, innovative methods for leveraging time into cash.

But in the tender country of illness and divorce, we are suddenly desperate to trade money for time. We pay lawyers colossal fees to guarantee an extra day or two of custodial time with our children. We eagerly employ teams of physicians to increase the possibility of six additional months of life.

"Time is money," we learned early in our professions. But the equation is flawed. I see it in my counseling sessions, and we all see it with our family and friends. I would like to share two stories (with names and some minor details altered).

John and Mary are getting divorced. Successful in their respective careers, their love for one another has withered for reasons only they can know. They are now trying to divide custody of the children.

Sasha, who was diagnosed with leukemia, took a sabbatical from her job in advertising. She and her husband, a filmmaker, moved to a cottage to walk, to rest, to listen to the quieter voices that teach them what is most necessary.

Time is not money. Time and money are two enzymes that serve very specific functions in our life, and confusing the two can bring us great suffering.

Money traded in the marketplace purchases basic goods and services we cannot provide for ourselves. But how much time should we trade for this money? How do we know when we do not have enough money, and when we do not have enough time? The question is rarely asked, and when it is, it is often too late.

People who have a lot of money and no time we call "rich." People who have a great deal of time but no money we call "poor." Yet the most precious gifts of a human life—love, friendship, time with children and loved ones—grow only in the sweet soil of "unproductive" time.

Adolescents who spend leisure time with their families become less prone to heavy drinking. The less time parents

hang out with their kids, the more likely teenagers will develop alcohol problems.

The problem is not simply that we work too much, but that we are paid in the wrong currency. We must be wise enough to render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's. What if genuine wealth is a fruitful marriage of both time and money, combining material security with those priceless things that grow only in time—time to walk in the park, to read a book, to dance, to put our hands in the garden, to cook meals with friends, to paint, to sing, to meditate, to keep a journal?

Elaine is a professional woman in private practice. She works hard and well, is diligent and honorable in her work.



But Elaine lost two husbands—the first in Vietnam, the second to cancer. Now, alone and courageous, she treasures the gifts that only time can bestow. Several days a week she turns off the phone, lights a candle on a small altar and sits quietly. She prays, she gathers pictures. She may go for a walk, and when she walks, she says, she often sings. ■

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This menacing phantom is more entertaining than *The Phantom Menace*.

RE-VIEWING Phantom phantoms

GEORGE LUCAS' überhyped *Star Wars: Episode I—The Phantom Menace* set box office records last month but generally underwhelmed critics and fans. If you've held out this long, why not consider skipping it altogether? Better yet, you might want to revisit a few classic "phantom" flicks from the past (a plus: none of their characters will ever be caught shilling for toothpaste companies).

Haunting and alluring, the original *Phantom of the Opera* (1925) is the best film adaptation of Gaston Leroux's tale of Christine Daaé, the sweet soprano of the Paris Opera, and the malformed no-goodnik who covets her. Lavish sets and costumes sent the production tab just shy of \$1 million—a huge budget back then—but the real attraction is silent film star Lon Chaney. Born to deaf-mute parents, Chaney was a master of pantomime who also did his own makeup for the movie. Chaney considered his phantom face so shocking he embarrassed any advance photos so audiences would share Daaé's shock when she swipes the monster's mask.

Luis Buñuel's *The Phantom of Liberty* (1974) is a phantom of a dif-