

When I have time

By Ruth Ostrow

IT happened again last weekend - another batch of articles torn out for the Must Read pile. The Must Read pile in the corner of my office is now as high as me, threatening to topple over at any moment.

Meanwhile, back on "planet desk" is the dreaded To Do list, which includes the Must Read pile – which I will get to when I have time.

"When I have time" has become the ultimate catchcry of our era. "When I have time" means so many things in this cash-rich, time-poor culture. But the best translation I can come up with is one simple word: "Never!"

When I have time, I will: 1) read the Must Read pile; 2) get the car serviced; 3) go to the dentist to replace my amalgam fillings; 4) spring-clean the wardrobes; 5) have that coffee with you.

Given this sad truth, I've learnt to arrange my To Do list according to urgency. There's the Must Do A-list, which includes chores that have to be done lest the tax or police department bang on my door; there's the Must Do B-list: "Let's pretend that one day I'm going to ..." Last and most certainly least there's the Must Do C-list, which may as well be filed in the rubbish bin.

As I optimistically cut out another Must Read article it occurs to me that, like most people, I need four of me.

One would be constantly attending to the To Do list; one would be maintaining hearth, home, friendships and career; one would be having sex (and going on endless holidays); and the final me would be back at university studying medicine or something grand.

Instead, I'm mono-bodied, busy, and have a To Do list that makes me feel constantly guilty unless I have those exhilarating moments when a To Do goes into the Done column. (I remember when only orgasms could make me feel that good).

But mostly I'm haunted on sunny weekends by the people I will never call, articles and books I'll never read, recipes I'll never cook, and things I'll never become in this lifetime.

There is one solution to the "When I have time" blues. Think of Steve Irwin, who still had so much "to do". Maybe if we don't take it all too seriously we can find a moment's peace from the To Do monster, and make saner choices concerning our most endangered resource of all – time.

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