

# WAITING IS WASTING



**H**enry David Thoreau (1817 – 1862) left us with these words, “If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away”. Jonathan\* is such a man. Trained as a lawyer Jonathan has a keen eye for what is called “cognitive dissonance”. This notion refers to the discomfort experienced when battling conflicting beliefs, values, attitudes or emotional reactions. From the Biblical story of the Good Samaritan, this inner conflict must have been keenly experienced by the priest and Levite who ignored the man who lay beaten-up on the road. Evidence of our social cognitive dissonance plays off daily when we, calling ourselves good, don’t see the needs or hear the appeals of our neighbour in need. Jonathan knows he will die a spiritual and intellectual death if he acts blind and hides behind justified materialism. For this reason his favourite lines from Fight Club are: *I see all this potential, and I see it squandered. God damn it, an entire generation pumping gas, waiting tables - slaves with white collars. Advertising has us chasing cars and clothes, working jobs we*

*hate so we can buy shit we don’t need. We’re the middle children of history, man. No purpose or place. We have no Great War. No Great Depression. Our great war is a spiritual war... Our great depression is our lives. We’ve all been raised on television to believe that one day we’d all be millionaires, and movie gods, and rock stars, but we won’t. We’re slowly learning that fact. And we’re very, very p#! off.* Jonathan recalls being bullied at school. “Come stand here then that bugga won’t hurt you,” said George. Jonathan was grateful as George was older and taller than his pursuer. When he reached the fort of George, George merely burst out laughing and the bully recognised the licence to continue. In this moment Jonathan’s faith in humanity received a cut to the heart. It was years later, reading Edmund Burke’s words, “All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing” that Jonathan realised all George needed to do to stop the bully was to raise his voice. Jonathan would begin to see many more of these scenarios play out. By extending a little help one can both maintain another’s faith in humanity and contain many kinds of evil. And yet, how many of us are not Georges with our respon-

sibility-shifting and self-excusing attitude which perpetuates the indifference in our society? This “innocent” indifference keeps doors that can be opened closed and allows doors that should be closed to open wider. For Jonathan, “we are all endowed with an innate justice, preceded by a state of innocence”. Looking at life he sees that when people are deprived of this innocence they become dysfunctional adults. Imagine at an event like the annual Windhoek show a lost five year old girl approaches a stranger, “Uncle, please help me find my mother”. In this moment she displays an innate sense of justice, acting in a way that says, “I believe you will do the right thing and help me find my mother.” Jonathan is acutely aware of silent appeals for help. This is evident everywhere if we only choose to see it – as in the picture of a lost child at the show or seeing the bare feet of the learner in a washed-out school uniform receiving the Best Achiever award. Outsiders may look at parents who poorly manage their finances, abuse drugs or end up incarcerated and argue that these people should grow up and take responsibility for their own instead of



expecting upright citizens to take care of their children. Excuses, excuses, excuses. Not helping someone or a group of people because another, such as a parent or government, is rightfully responsible for them, is a lame excuse. Jonathan sees immediate needs and therefore has no time for long term planning as would be required in first founding an organization, dealing with red tape, setting up a fundraising committee and inviting more volunteers. In his view this thoroughness often leads to indefinite inaction. There is a place for this, but he is not pursuing Vision 2030

Jonathan's focus is on community and the environment for these are the challenges of our time. Employed as a legal advisor he is able to direct his own company and other members of the legal fraternity in their social corporate responsibility endeavours. But above and beyond this professional giving and serving Jonathan's private time and personal finances are wholeheartedly committed to helping those in need. He sees how he could very easily have been the one in need and on the periphery of society. What would then become of any smug materialistic and self-centred world-view? There are also those family members, colleagues (in their

personal capacities), a few church members, and a friend or two who come beside him from time to time to donate money, food, clothing, skills and time. Jonathan and those corporate and private people he can mobilise pay school fees of deserving, yet needy pupils, and help schools with clothes, food, and trees. Isolated schools have been helped with miscellaneous needs ranging from fixing windows to providing them with a photocopy machine. Baumgart's Bruhn Primary School received benches, stationery and a ceiling had been replaced. Jonathan assists with painting as well as providing murals for the maternity ward of the Katutura State Hospital can testify. He gives 10 packets of meat to 10 families every month. For the greatest part of 2013 he has woken up at 5am to drive children from Katutura to school in Cimbebasia who have lost their house. These children are bright and their potential is evident. So the least he can do is to keep their faith in humanity alive and show them despite all the bad there is reason to keep on giving their best. Jonathan's bedless bedroom (he drove the bed to a needy family in South Africa), old car, last season clothes, empty fridge and zero bank account speak of a non-materialistic man for he would rather pay a

brother's bills or fill a stranger's stomach. And yet he does try to balance things. He enjoys the occasional trip to South Africa for a rugby game; he is a Spoken Word fan and theatre goer though his Friday and Saturday evenings are often spent packing food parcels to hand out at Okahandja Park, Kalkrand, Stampriet and other remote areas.

While some of us do allow our Edgars accounts and flat screens to stand in the way of reaching out a helping hand, we are all unique and many people do reach out in varying ways. Anthony builds low cost houses and rents them out cheaply, Tina pays the school fees of 5 cousins, Judy has been taking care of her bedridden aunt for the last 6 years. Jonathan's life exemplifies a consuming consciousness of being his brother's keeper; it may frustrate, offend, condemn or inspire people. The choice is yours.

Any children's books can be donated to Sister Namibia for Jonathan to distribute to primary schools to promote a culture of reading.

\* Jonathan is a pseudonym  
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