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The Joy of Missing Out: Finding Balance in a Wired World

by Christina Crook

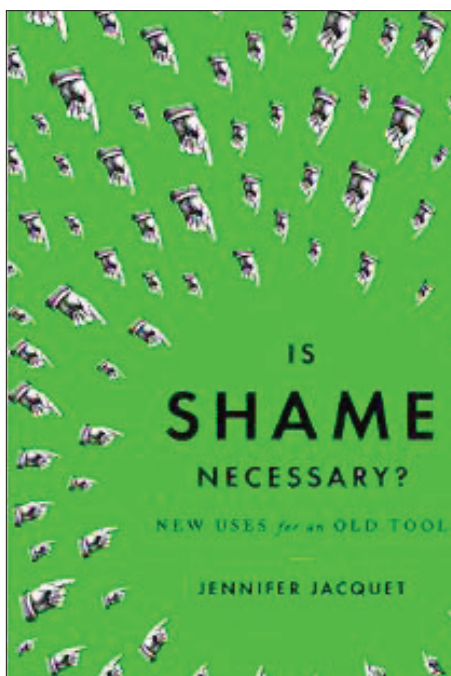
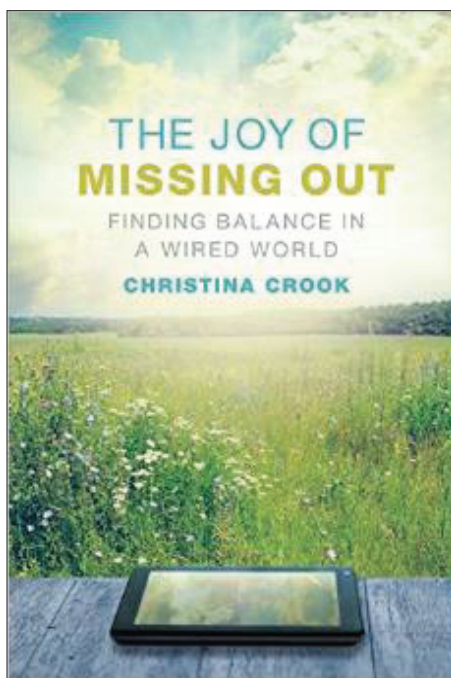
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What happens when technology moves beyond lifting genuine burdens and starts freeing us from burdens that we should not want to be rid of?

Christina Crook sets about trying to answer philosopher Albert Borgmann's question with many examples of "good burdens" which anchor people to reality. Once we get beyond the initial inertia posed by effort, "the burden disappears." Without handing over our daily chores to gadgets, appliances and computer screens, satisfaction and even joy can be found in the ordinary tasks required by life. Teachers could easily adapt situations Ms. Crook describes to classroom scenarios to encourage discussions among students. Try this one: "...making things easier doesn't lead to a deep sense of satisfaction. Patience, discipline and hard work do."

Partly a personal account of the author's coming-to-terms with technology, including her 31-day "fast" from IT, and partly an overview of problems caused by digital technology, *The Joy of Missing Out* draws on many studies and surveys showing that the promised benefits of a plugged-in world have had detrimental effects on reality: College students are now 40% less empathetic than they were 30 years ago, according to a 2010 University of Michigan study. Children born in lower-income homes hear 30 million fewer words spoken by their parents. Web and TV voices cannot replace the human interaction.



Composed of 14 short chapters, the book deals with topics such as *Dusting Off the Dictionary: Why Definitions Matter*; *Why Fast from the Internet?*; *Finding What Sustains*; *Gaining the Time: Implementing Constraints*; and *Quitting the Comparison Game: Reclaiming Delight*.

Online, we are drawn mostly to social media and news sites where editors encourage "clickable content." This is because the more we click, the more pages we view, and the more we are exposed to ads encouraging us to spend money. Attention gets diverted from real-life and our real-life links are diminished.

Nomophobia (no-mo[bile]-phone phobia – check out Tim Elmore's post in the Sept. 18, 2014, issue of *Psychology Today*: "Nomophobia: A Rising Trend in Students"), a neologism, has crept into the language to describe teens who panic if their cell phone is not working or lost. This might not be written up any time soon as a new disorder in the American Psychological Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Psychological Disorders*, but it is estimated that more than half a million children in Japan, aged 12 to 18, suffer from an Internet addiction, causing attention deficits, obesity, sleep disorders, or depression. "In fact, a research study has shown that for every additional hour kids spend online, their happiness decreases eight percent (Happify website, 2014)." The problem is so serious that the Japanese Ministry of Education has sought government subsidies to run "fasting" or detox camps where children and