

How to slow down  
in a world that is continually gathering speed



# **HOW TO SLOW DOWN**

**in a world that is continually gathering speed**

**Yvonne Mol**

Translated by Maria-Bonita Kapitany



[www.how2slowdown.com](http://www.how2slowdown.com)

Copyright © 2022 Yvonne Mol  
All rights reserved

Published by Foliant, The Netherlands

Originally published as:  
*Wacht maar niet op mij, ik haal jullie later wel in*  
by Foliant, The Netherlands  
Copyright © 2019 Yvonne Mol

English Translation by Maria-Bonita Kapitany  
[www.bonitakapitany.com](http://www.bonitakapitany.com)

Illustrations: Inge Verrips

ISBN/EAN: 9789083020624

Theme: VSA

*Do less,  
change the way you think  
and accomplish more*

*That's how you slow down*



## Table of Contents

<b>A Heap of Anguish</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Slowing Down</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>What to Expect from this Book</b>	<b>20</b>

### **PART 1 Do Less and Accomplish More** Fout! Bladwijzer niet gedefinieerd.

STEP 1 Stop Doing Things **Fout! Bladwijzer niet gedefinieerd.**

STEP 2 Do One Thing at a Time **Fout! Bladwijzer niet gedefinieerd.**

STEP 3 Choose a Life Without Rushing **Fout! Bladwijzer niet gedefinieerd.**

STEP 4 Make Time for Relaxation **Fout! Bladwijzer niet gedefinieerd.**

### **PART 2 Change the Way You Think and Accomplish More** Fout! Bladwijzer niet gedefinieerd.

STEP 5 Discover Who You Are **Fout! Bladwijzer niet gedefinieerd.**

STEP 6 Live Passionately and Choose Happy Thoughts **Fout! Bladwijzer niet gedefinieerd.**

STEP 7 Let Things Go **Fout! Bladwijzer niet gedefinieerd.**

STEP 8 Liberate Yourself **Fout! Bladwijzer niet gedefinieerd.**

### **PART 3 Accomplish Even More** Fout! Bladwijzer niet gedefinieerd.

STEP 9 Give as Much as You Can **Fout! Bladwijzer niet gedefinieerd.**

STEP 10 Keep Growing **Fout! Bladwijzer niet gedefinieerd.**

**Afterword** Fout! Bladwijzer niet gedefinieerd.

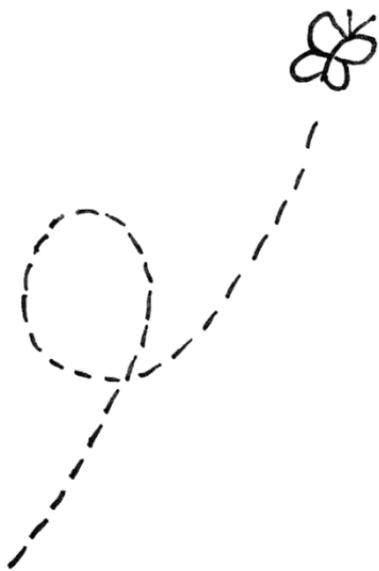
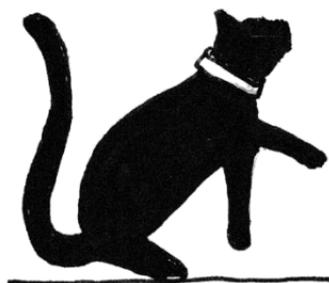
**Acknowledgements**

Fout! Bladwijzer niet gedefinieerd.

**Thanks for reading!**

Fout! Bladwijzer niet gedefinieerd.





## A Heap of Anguish

This book is built on top of a heap of anguish. The seed for my search for a slower way of life sprouted from the most difficult decision I have ever had to make. Slowing down was my response to a period of hardship and pain in my life. The insight that stress and overload are not a given arose from a time when I was an emotional wreck and my days were spent repeating the thought: *“I don’t understand; I just don’t get it anymore.”*

That is why I must start this book with the story of that anguish. Because without that grief I would probably still be rushing around.

This story starts in 2007. Our youngest son was about to turn one when the urge to have a child hit me again. We had two sweet, happy boys and yet to me, our family didn’t feel complete. Because my husband was not excited about the prospect of more diapers and sleepless nights, it took me a few years to convince him I was “right”. In 2010 he finally capitulated and I got pregnant with our third child. Everything was wonderful; the boys were going to have a little brother or sister and we would soon be a family of five.

The first ultrasound, however, showed that there was something wrong with our baby. That same afternoon we were sent to the hospital where the doctor told us that we had to prepare ourselves for the possibility of a miscarriage. Just to be sure, they did a CVS (chorionic villus sampling), but the prognosis was discouraging and for the next few weeks there was nothing we could do except wait.

Nothing happened. The result of the test even provided new hope: no chromosomal abnormalities. On the ultrasound we saw some improvement and the doctor told us there was a little girl in my womb, who was alive and well. Miscarriage was no longer mentioned.

At nineteen weeks, we had a comprehensive ultrasound at the Erasmus University Medical Center in Rotterdam. The baby was examined from top to bottom and we saw a very lively little girl on the monitor. "This all looks very good; this is great," the radiologist said during the exam. For a moment, it seemed that all our worries had been unfounded, but that hope vanished when the baby's heart was examined and everyone in the room fell silent. The conclusion: hypoplastic left heart syndrome. The left side of the heart (the most important side) was barely functional. A serious defect. It would require many surgeries and even then, her quality of life would be far less than that of our healthy boys.

With this diagnosis, the physicians put the fate of this unborn little human into our hands. We discussed the consequences of the two choices facing us: a life filled with pain and restrictions, or prematurely ending the pregnancy to protect her from this misery. We realized we scarcely had any real choice and understood that we had to start preparing ourselves for saying goodbye. When we got home, we gave our little girl a name and told the boys that their sister was very ill and was therefore not going to make it. In our minds, we prepared ourselves for death.

Four days later, we received an unexpected call from the doctor in Rotterdam. The medical team had been discussing the results of the ultrasound and some doubt

had arisen about the diagnosis. Again, we were stuck in limbo between hope and fear for weeks. When I was 22 weeks pregnant, we went back to the hospital and were told definitively that our baby had a serious heart defect, plus an unknown syndrome with as yet unclear consequences. It was unavoidable: the only thing we could do was to make the immensely sad decision after all. After months of uncertainty, during which we oscillated between hope and disappointment, and during which both our love and our worries grew, we told the gynecologist our decision. That same evening, at home, sitting on the couch, I took the first pill that would prepare my body for the very premature delivery. On Thursday the twentieth of January 2011, after a very emotional delivery, Emely was born at 8:10 p.m.

*Time is fleeting. But as I am giving birth to our little girl, every second sticks like a syrupy drip on a faucet. It is all surreal and I cannot absorb it, but I tell myself: pay attention, remember this moment. This is all you will have of her.*

*The moment of farewell approaches; it makes me feel sick. This is the longest and most intense birth of the three. Then she is there, and it seems so sudden, that I'm not even aware of it at first.*

*"Oh, that's better!" I call out as the pressure in my womb subsides. The obstetrician can't help but laugh.*

*"Yes, I'm sure," I hear her saying. She picks up a clamp and a pair of scissors. I lift my head, but all I can see is a tangle of arms.*

*"Is she here?" I try to ask, but my throat feels restricted and no sound comes out. I look at Igor. He nods.*

*"Is she dead?" I hear my voice asking from somewhere far away. Yes, she is dead.*

*"Maybe it's better this way," I whisper.*

## A Heap of Anguish

*Igor cuts the umbilical cord and looks at his daughter, crushed. They lay her down on my belly, as we had planned. For the first few seconds she feels warm and cozy, but her temperature rapidly drops until she is cold, cool and sticky. Her thin, delicate skin adheres to my fingers. Very carefully, I put my hands around her, unmoving, in one spot and absorb what my baby looks like. She is so beautiful! She is completely formed, a real little girl, with narrow little shoulders and finely formed little legs; she even has tiny fingernails already. Her eyes are closed, the eyelids relaxed in eternal sleep. Her mouth is open; I can see her palate and the gums, holding a future we will not experience. There will be no first tooth, only this moment.*

*I want to completely absorb her into me; every detail, no part of this fragile fragment should be lost. I see her frail little feet and oh, that little cheek, so soft and flawless. I gently kiss her. She feels cold, but so familiar. This is my child. I quickly give her another kiss, a little firmer this time. "Remember this," I whisper to myself, "don't ever forget this feeling of your baby's soft, tender skin on your lips."*

*She is perfect; so, so sweet. Here is my child, lying in my arms like she is meant to be, but not quite. We recognize her; she is unmistakably our boys' little sister. Her mouth is like one of them and the little cheeks are just like the other one's; a mixture of us all. I feel proud. We have a daughter. We, Igor and I, have a beautiful little girl.*

Having to make this choice, having to decide on the life of our child, that was the most difficult part of the entire experience for me. We were told at the hospital what her life would have been like. We really didn't have a choice, but it was excruciating, it was staggering. The loss, missing her, yes, that hurt, but making the decision was absolutely heart-wrenching.

A Heap of Anguish

Saturday, February 5, 2011

*So much has happened, I can't even wrap my mind around it. You have left me completely bewildered. "Why?" That is the only question. We scattered your ashes, yet you are still so near to us. I try to imagine what it would have been like if we had decided differently.*

*I got to kiss you twice, but you were already dead. Did you feel it anyway? I want to hold you, to feel you in my arms. You belong with us. You should be with us.*

*Today we went to the beach during a big, wild wind storm, it was awesome. We had lunch in a restaurant out on the pier. The only thing that was missing was you; our family was not complete. Even while I felt happy, inside I could only cry. Happiness is limited without you.*

Sunday, February 6, 2011

*Today I thought of something I want to hang on to: could it be that my desire for a third child was so strong because you were meant to come to us? Because we were strong enough to make that impossible choice? Did you choose us so that we could protect you from a life full of pain and misery?*

Wednesday, February 9, 2011

*I wish you could let me know how you are. Where are you now? Are you being cared for? Are you no longer sick? I really hope you are doing well. You must be; that is why we went through all of this, isn't it? Can you hear us talking about you? Your brothers think about you too, each in their own way. So brave, so sweet.*

Monday, February 14, 2011

*The fog in my head is starting to clear. My thoughts are still with Emely and I don't expect that to change anytime soon. Maybe it never will, but it feels good to be able to breathe again. I'm*

*looking forward to the future again, just a little bit, knowing there is so much we do have. I'm becoming more interested in the world around me again, thankfully.*

I wrote that last entry 25 days after the delivery. It sounds reasonably hopeful, but in reality it took me about three years to start to make sense of my life again. Although I began to feel some air around me on that day in February, I remained in a zombie-like state for a long time. Sometime during that entire process, part of me died as well. I participated, I picked up my work again, enjoyed the boys and our life together, but I was no longer able to make sense of it all.

As soon as I was alone, I would whisper to myself: *"I don't understand; I just don't get it anymore."* When I was climbing the stairs up to the attic to do the laundry, or getting the boys' bikes out of the garage, or getting into the car: the minute it was quiet around me, confusion would envelop me.

I increasingly started to ask myself why we do what we do. What moves us to waste our days on superficialities and busyness? Who decided that we have to struggle and soldier on? Despite this confusion, I was rushing through my life, just like I always had. I was a mom, a wife, an entrepreneur, a municipal councilor, a homemaker, a friend, a helping parent at school, and a volunteer for several foundations. I planned out all my days, my weeks, my entire life, and vigorously checked things off my lists: one more item from my action list completed. And to be honest, for that split second that I literally checked off the item in question I felt a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment. But it lasted no longer than that split

second, because even while I was writing that check mark, my thoughts were already on the next item on the list.

Around ten o'clock at night, I would invariably drop down on the couch, feeling bone-tired and far from fulfilled. I constantly felt like I was just trying to catch up to myself and never quite getting there. I was very busy, I seemed to be always in a hurry, and all that rushing around was exhausting me and totally stressing me out.

More and more, I began to feel an aversion to this daily endurance battle. The loss of our daughter put everything into a different perspective. The confusion I felt after her death gradually became more palpable and made way for a new question. That question was: *Do I need to go along with this?* This question was the beginning of my search for a slower way of life.



## Slowing Down

The despair that had haunted me in the years after we lost Emely gradually evaporated and in its place a phrase began to form in my mind, written in bold caps:

### **I WANT MY LIFE TO SLOW DOWN!**

Yes, I want to live a slower life, so I can see where I am and notice how I'm feeling. I want a life with less rushing, and I want to take time for what really matters to me; those things that deserve my undivided attention. Because it's not about collecting as many experiences as possible or accomplishing as many achievements as possible, it's about the courage to create meaningful moments and to stretch those out as long as possible. I want to light the fireplace together and just relax and watch the flames, feeling enveloped by the comfort of the cozy heat and seeing how the fire playfully casts a glow on our cheeks. No laptop on our laps, no phone in our hands. No, I want to create space for genuine attention.

I want to slow down so I don't have to constantly think about six things at the same time. So that I won't wake up in a cold sweat to a day in which every minute is booked and I have no idea how I'm going to accomplish it all. I want a more relaxed life, in which I take time to work and I also take time *not* to work, so my body and my mind will have a chance to recharge and process all the information they have absorbed, before I go back to work again.

A great concept, but unfortunately, it only went as far as these thoughts for quite a while. I knew things could be

different, but I could not figure out how to shift my life down a gear. I knew where things were going wrong in my arduous existence, but I didn't know how to fix it. My life continued to be hectic and I continued to feel like I was not in control of it.

Until one morning I woke up and for once I didn't grab my phone right away to check my calendar. Instead, I closed my eyes and listened to the silence of our sleeping household. The stillness of that moment gave me an insight that changed everything. My sleepy head suddenly understood what the missing link was: I could keep longing for peacefulness and relaxation all I wanted, and even gain a better understanding of what was causing all the busyness, but that was not going to change anything. This was not the way I was ever going to create a relaxed and happy life. Because, I suddenly realized, it's not about what you know, but about what you *do* with that knowledge.

And so, I got started that very same day. Step by step, I transformed my life into a healthier and more enjoyable one. And, as it turned out, that didn't require drastic changes. I gradually learned to slow down, in amongst all the hustle and bustle of everyday life. Little by little, I changed my lifestyle from "too busy and superficial" to "relaxed and meaningful".

The steps described in this book are the steps that I have tried out and embraced over the last few years. This new way of being and thinking has changed my life completely. I am still an entrepreneur, a mother, a wife, a volunteer and a friend, but now I'm doing and being all these things wholeheartedly, and in a way that is relaxed and in line with who I am and with what makes me happy. I

discovered that all of it was possible without the hectic pace and busyness. And without having to make huge adjustments. A peaceful and meaningful existence was possible almost completely within the life I already had. It may not even look like much has changed, but nothing could be further from the truth! My life could not have taken a better turn than it did. I am doing less but accomplishing more. I feel relaxed and content virtually every day. I'm working on projects that are important to me and they are more successful than before, when I was always struggling to keep up. I have learned to change the way I think, which allows me to have the courage to walk my own path with confidence. I feel like I'm exactly where I'm supposed to be, and I feel happier, more cheerful and freer than ever before. I'm not sitting still, but I'm doing everything without rushing, without that anxious feeling and sense of dissatisfaction. Slowing down has improved the quality of my life in surprising ways.

Of course, I still occasionally fall into the odd trap and my mind threatens to start racing like it used to, but that's happening less and less often and never for long. I know what is needed to slow down my life. The journey towards that took me years, but I did manage to find the path. I increasingly understood how I could make my days more enjoyable and more meaningful. By now, I know the recipe for slowing down and I have written that recipe out for you so that you can use it to create your own "meal" with it. You might not like every ingredient, but that's okay; you can adjust the recipe according to your own taste. But I am sure that you will also be able to make your days more

enjoyable by taking the steps that lead to a slower pace in your life.

I needed ten steps to get the hectic tempo out of my life and the busyness out of my head. I will share those steps with you here, so that you can also say goodbye to stress, frustration and all that superficial rushing around. An additional benefit of slowing down is that peacefulness and relaxation are the ideal basis for giving your life more meaning. The space that is created in a slower life affords you new opportunities for personal growth and for increasing your happiness and the substance of your life.

Come and take a walk with me. I will show you how easy it is to slow down the stampede. The ten steps in this book will enable you to find your own way of saying goodbye to that inner tension, which is so much a part of this fast-paced world. You too can opt for a happy, relaxed, and meaningful life.



## What to Expect from this Book

Things really can be different. By slowing down, you create space in your day and in your head. The practical tips in this book will immediately bring you some relief, more relaxation, and more peace. You can apply the steps while you go about your regular activities, so you don't need to free up time to practice. This book provides you with the means to regain control of your own time. You will learn how you can do less and change your thinking, which will allow you to accomplish more.

Just realizing that your days are too full and too hectic is not what is going to make the difference. Getting used to a different lifestyle requires some dedication, just like any change does; slowing down is something you need to learn to do. But you don't have to do it all in a week. If you change your lifestyle one step at a time, you will experience every bit of progress very consciously and that will be wonderful! That is why I have divided the process into ten steps. Each of them will help you to consciously tackle one aspect. This way it will be fun, and you won't have to disrupt your whole life in order to slow it down.

Here is what you can expect from this book:

- Less stress, more peace, and more meaning
- Practical solutions that will immediately create more space
- Simple, compact steps that can be applied to your day-to-day life immediately
- A permanently decelerating effect

You too can get rid of unnecessary busyness, stress and exhaustion; I'm sure of it. The ten steps will help you get there. Whatever you do, don't rush through the steps; after all, the goal is to slow down your lifestyle, so take your time implementing them. If you try to take all the steps as quickly as possible, you will not make your days slower; you'll be making them more stressful instead. Go through the various parts calmly and at your own pace. Once you have gotten used to the first step and you're feeling the calmness it brings you, then it's a good time to begin the next step. Or you might want to skip a step and come back to it later, starting with something that really appeals to you, because slowing down the pace of your life is not an exact science.

The order of the steps is not completely arbitrary, however. I have divided them into three categories:

- Do less and accomplish more
- Change the way you think and accomplish more
- Accomplish even more

### **Part 1 – Do Less and Accomplish More**

The first part provides practical tips. You will adjust something in your routine and you will immediately experience more ease in your life. These first few tips in particular are geared towards *doing less*, because eliminating the rush and the hectic pace from your days will give you a head start on slowing down. Choose to do less, so that your priorities can get to the top of the pile. Then you will be able to use your time optimally; not by doing as much as possible, but by clearing a lot off your

plate. By avoiding distraction, you will be able to get back to the core of your being and focus on what is truly important to you.

### **Part 2 – Change the Way You Think and Accomplish More**

In Part 2, you will discover how to change your thinking; to take the chaos not only out of your days but also out of your head. As soon as you learn to change your thinking, you will free up space in your life for enough relaxation and calmness to allow you to play an entire game of Monopoly in one sitting, for instance. You will also be creating space for creativity, because the best ideas flow into an empty mind.

By changing your thinking, you will gradually lift your life up to a higher level. The steps in Part 2 will help you to not revert back to your old habits. Although the practical steps from the first part definitely give you the first incentive for slowing down, the insights from the “change the way you think” category are the ones that will ensure that you will get the space and serenity you are craving.

### **Part 3 – Accomplish Even More**

*Doing less* enables you to accomplish more. Focusing your attention on your priorities will ensure more growth than the tension, struggling and rushing that you have become used to. *Changing the way you think* creates opportunities you didn't see before. That makes slowing down extra attractive: it makes you healthier and happier *and* it also creates opportunities to accomplish more.

In Part 3, the emphasis is on your own personal growth. While you are going through the steps from Part 1 and Part 2, more space is created. Part 3 shows how you can use this space for personal growth.

## Slowing Down

“I certainly like the idea of slowing down,” I can hear you think, “but how will I go about doing it?” Well, I’m going to help you with that, one step at a time. Start by doing less, but don’t stop there. Allow yourself to change the way you think. Take the first step towards slowing down today!