

*No Partner in Insomnia*

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The strangest thing about being an insomniac is the overwhelming and staggering feeling of being utterly alone. The truth is however, that you're not. Millions of people are equally afflicted, caught in that vicious cycle of late-night talk-shows, all-night diners, spending hours surfing the internet and hammering back untold pots of black coffee at four in the morning. It's enough to piss anybody off. If you let it.

Driving around the city streets though, down abandoned and quiet avenues in the middle of the soft reset that occurs after the bars close, always begs the question, where the hell is everyone at? Where are the rest of my kin and kind? Bulletin boards fail to organize other insomniacs into groups, joining the rest of the wounded animals to come together, console each other, make sense of it and move on. Most people, inclusive of Doctors, advertising and family will happily tell you that staying awake all night and drifting through daylight hours like some strange kind of zen monk, just isn't natural. Unless of course you're a vampire, and clearly, I am not, and if I could unhappily report to the rest of the Goth, black-clad children of the night that they aren't either, just another version of someone like me, tragically hip in all the wrong ways for fetishes that are probably due to being up all night and feeling like an outcast rather than the other way around – feeling like a vampire and being up all night. Whatever that means. When the consumerism that is pummeling your senses begins to wear off, you'll see what I mean.

They'll also tell you that it's hell on your body and wrecks your soul. I've always had a problem with both of those sentiments. First of all, if anyone's retained their youth at all, in the small and very pathetic circle of friends that I do have, I'd have to say that it's me. Being the eldest of the group, I still

have my hair, which has yet to turn gray – but it is. I have clear skin and bright eyes, all of which I attribute to the correct brand of dog-food.

I do try to get sleep, when I can sleep, which is a conundrum, because either I can or I can't. Most of my friends refer to me as 'Sleeping Beauty', but they just don't know how spot on they are. I could have a career advertising Oil of Olay with my perfect skin and make millions of dollars, but I'll leave those jobs for high-fashion models, actresses and day-time talk-show stars that are new mums. That's just a fantasy though, isn't it? Some of my friends who are only in their late twenties already look as though they're past forty. In my mind, that's what an everyday life will get you. Premature aging, dark spots and black circles, gray hair, stress, loads of children and in-laws. Let me back that up a minute, because I believe I got off track. Children and In-laws. That denotes a family, which denotes a relationship, and most insomniacs will tell you that, for the most part, a healthy relationship just isn't possible.

Even with all the possible optimism that you may possess, managing a relationship under such circumstances, literally in the dark, can leave you not just numb but a basket case. Numb, due to the fact that again you'll have to come home to a note about how she's unable to deal with you, how she never sees you and how it's just not working out and 'who in their right mind keeps those kinds of hours, besides Night Watchman?' (Which I am not).

You could also wind up finding her naked self entangled in the sheets and clutches of your best friend, who just conveniently happens to be normal, at least compared to you. I often call these people 'day walkers' as a joke, regardless of how cliché it may sound. It usually makes me laugh, and all these things can very much leave you once again, feeling numb. The questioning, and endless cycles of assailing your doubt and hate, all directed inward, is what slowly makes you into said basket case.

And then you'll have to function in the real world from time to time, as well and having to cope in those very few and select moments every few days with your 'superiors.' It just becomes a stressful exercise in trying to hide as many of your personal idiosyncrasies as possible, lest you end up getting

hauled off to a place where they smile and suggest you sign the consent form to be admitted because ‘it would be good for you’. Usually meltdowns rise up when you least expect it and you’re hoping to have a good day as you did the day before; but when that doesn’t happen, the over-reaction that seems to boil-up three fold over every sixty-seconds, like a loaf of bread baking, causes you to *absolutely lose it*, and you make an ass out of yourself. All of the sudden, what you were dreading becomes easy.

‘How in the hell did that just happen?’, you begin to think as you’re lying in seclusion on a seventy-two hour suicide watch all because the dry cleaners over-charged you again and you felt like arguing over the five dollars instead of just letting it go. But that’s another story, of course, or rather a down-the-road consequence to years of isolatory behavior.

And that’s the beginning of my life as an Insomniac. Although through the years I know I’ve been called far-worse things, mostly by ex-girlfriends as they’re shoving junk into a trash bag and hastening towards the grand exeunt, while flipping through a dizzying litany of such choice beauties as Narcissist, Egomaniac, Sociopath, bi-polar, manic-depressive, Fascist, Damien Thorn, Satan and several other masterpieces collected from the diagnostic service manual, version four and the archives of classic head-chewing zombie horror flicks.

Trust me when I say that I’ve been spared no expense at insults and also that most of them were catalogued into my personal file-cabinets for later consideration and deep reflection.

So, over the last fifteen years, I have done quite well at getting used to my affliction, if you could call it that. I’ve also had the unique opportunity to spend a lot of time studying Insomnia in every detail and have come up with some quite fascinating observations.

First thing is, that a lot of people who believe they suffer from insomnia, actually don’t. Not to be harsh, or elitist, about who’s really an insomniac, because trust me there’s no prize for it, although their probably should be but most of these so-called insomniacs are suffering from an intense over-dose of television. Thus having glutted themselves, and having fallen into a pattern of long hours of late night viewing which has now actually supplanted itself firmly and successfully in lieu of sleep. Usually

the absence of television, which is the clear and indecisive culprit, typically heals the patient and allows them safe return back to the everyday doldrums of ‘day-walking’. But the odds are actually stacked against themselves because according to statistics, the average American has four point five televisions sets on their non-perishable list of dry goods at home. While it might sound easy to get rid of one, or maybe even two, it’s always the point-five of a set that proves problematic, lending to relapse and straight back to addiction.

Conversations usually only go this far between a doctor and their patient:

Doctor: *Did you remove the set from your bedroom dresser?*

Patient: *Yes, Doctor. I did.*

Doctor: *Very well, then.*

The real problem is that most insomniacs sleep on the couch, for yet another litany of reasons either known or not known. None of which really cries out as true insomnia, but is closer to the attention getting ‘dysfunctional relationship’ problem.

So, now you’re probably asking yourself, ‘am I really a Narcissist? How long have I been sleeping on said couch? And was I actually put on a seventy-two hour hold? Other obvious niceities about insomnia are a real study in numbers. For example, living in Los Angeles with a population of ten million people and apparently as the ivory-tower of psychiatry purports that three-point-five percent of the population suffer from said affliction, which puts a very sizable three-hundred-and-fifty-thousand people at any one time awake after the hours of ten pm, who should be out enjoying their late night insomniac adventures through the so-called ‘city of lights’.

But it gets even worse, figure this. Usually around four to four-thirty in the morning, when all the twenty-four hour restaurants that have been open all night serving patrons their ‘Colorado Omelets’ and ‘Patty Melts with a side of Au jous’, suddenly and for no explainable reason ... go silent. And it’s not just the fact that I find myself in the very few places throughout the city, having my main meal of

the day at this time, which is approximately my dinner-time, but there is a complete absence of other insomniacs doing the exact same thing. You would believe that I would begin to see other people, the same people doing exactly the same thing as myself. But I don't, and I've looked hard. They're non-existent and I'm usually eating my dinner alone. One in three hundred-and-fifty-thousand. But the odds are actually much lower, because of the fifteen total all-night diners in and around the city, a bottleneck is created and the odds drop dramatically, so being alone – as usual- is a real son-of-a-bitch. Due to this I wonder if I'm in a class of people that probably should be grouped together with leprechauns, fairies and other such creatures that probably don't exist. Maybe all the other insomniacs could get together on odd nights and have eat-ins and watch classic black-and-white movies together with a discussion after, but I'm just not bright enough to properly network and find my own clique of sleep deprived night-hawks.

But then that's too complicated, isn't it? Like salmon trying to hurry home in large groups to spawn at the exact spot up river where they first breathed first life and continue the circle. My life though, couldn't be so complicated. I wouldn't allow it, thus leading credence to earlier claim that I was quite possibly a fascist.

But I know that I'm not *that* controlling. I've never held anyone against their will, deprived someone of their rights or impugned anyone unjustly, so I guess the jury is still out on that one, however, I can openly and honestly tell you that I definitely have made other people miserable. When my wife packed half-the-house, my savings and all three televisions, leaving me with the point-five set, those were the words she used to justify ending our relationship. That was over a year ago now, but I had seen it coming and wasn't that upset about it at the time, now, I was completely aware what it was to be utterly alone and at times I regretted being so flippant about her feelings and our relationship. Now, everyday was starting to look like the last, some days I slept, some days I didn't, but time itself had now lost meaning for me and passed in a fog. If I wasn't careful, I'd wake up and be much older than I am now and I'll still be doing the same old shit, eating dinner and drinking coffee at Bob's Big

Boy, trying to find something on the menu that I hadn't eaten several times already, but that was still a long way off, making it still a safe practice to not think about it.

I was operating on what some people referred to as 'Hacker Standard Time', but I wasn't a Hacker, apart from the hours I spent building useless websites, playing video games, reading plot scenarios on Wikipedia for my favorite television shows and answering email. But I would probably continue to do so for several more weeks, or until the current cycle ran its course. The circadian clock programmed within each of us, has a its own captain steering the vessel and adjusts only to light and temperature. Two things I regulated, well, like a fascist.

Several other things should also be classified, the first is the definition of the word 'insomniac'. Pretty straight forward stuff really, most of the jargon relevant to it contains the terms 'at night' and 'loss of sleep' and 'intermittent'. I had problems quieting my mind and finding enough peace to fall into a restful slumber. I would make every attempt possible, several times during the past week I had made several efforts to try to return my life to the 'day walkers', hoping to turn my back on the 'nighthawks' for good.

The toughest thing to deal with is the people that I care the most about. When my phone rings off the hook with friends complaining about my hours, that they can't reach me and that it's inconvenient that I sleep the entire day away, I have to brace myself. I usually smile, take the phone messages in stride and keep moving. Once in a while though it gets to me. It crawls under my skin and agitates every inch of me. Listening to a few people will blow their cool, come unhinged and start a tirade about what a complete fucking wanker I am and that I'm sleeping again. These are the hardest pills to take. I've lost several friendships behind this and I can see it coming as the person's anger escalates. I usually write their name and number on my bathroom mirror with a sharpie and the numbers 3:57 just below it. That's the time I'm going to call them at home and play back their message to them as they pull themselves from the deep reverie of sleep to wonder just what the hell is going on. It's the only recourse I have for the insensitive. Otherwise I wouldn't have any outlet and no way to

provide perspective. The many conversations trying to explain to them, that to me it's natural, I've been this way since I was a lad, I thrive, etc., whatever. None of that ever seems to work. When I find myself slipping into a cacophony of excuses and realize that I'm now repeating myself and groveling like Ugarte on Casablanca 'Rick, hide me, Rick, you must do something ...', I know that it's time for something more drastic.