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Simply Living

Oh, to end years of nap-envy

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I'm jealous. I have been for years.

It's all because of my husband and our bed -- but wait, it's not what you think.

There's no Other Woman involved. My nemesis is that elusive seductress Sleep.

My husband has the uncanny ability to take naps whenever he's tired. It's a "gift" he has nurtured for as long as I've known him. And, for all those years -- 37 come December -- I have been envious.

How does he do it? More to the point, why can't I?

We lie down in the afternoon together -- the same bed, the same time. We're both tired. We both close our eyes. He falls asleep. I get up.

In our many years together, I can count on both hands the times I've successfully taken a daytime nap. When it has happened, I've either been overwhelmingly exhausted or on the edge of illness. You could persuasively argue that those times didn't really count, and I'd agree.

Suffice it to say, daytime sleep doesn't come easily to me as it does to my dear husband.

How I wish it did.

Ralph wakes up from his midday siestas totally rejuvenated, bursting with energy.

"I feel like I have two days in one," he often proclaims. "I wish you could take a nap, too."

So do I, Ralph. So do I.

When I lie down during daylight hours, my head barely touches the pillow before waves of data ripple through my mind.



Advertisement graphic with a blue background. The text reads: "CAN A CAMERA HELP YOU RECOVER FROM A HURRICANE?" Below this is a yellow button with the text "FIND OUT". At the bottom right is the Allstate logo, which consists of a globe icon and the word "Allstate" in white text.

I try to rest. I really do. I close my eyes and nestle into the pillow. But my mind wanders, curling around thought after thought after thought. I'm more likely to mentally sketch out the first chapter of a book during naptime than surrender myself solely to sleep. Thinking about napping, assuming a prone position and closing my eyes is about as far as I ever allow myself to go.

Not Ralph. He gives himself over completely to the goddess of dreams.

Lie on bed. Put head to pillow. Close eyes. Sleep. It's his no-fail formula.

It must be genetic. Of our four children, two have inherited their father's uncanny ability to catch forty winks at the proverbial drop of a hat.

The other two are more like me. They find it nearly impossible to enter dreamland when the sun is shining. Let it be noted that we're not a family of insomniacs. None of us has trouble falling asleep at night. It's just pre-dusk slumber that some of us find elusive.

That doesn't mean we get enough rest.

According to the National Sleep Foundation, 50 million to 70 million Americans suffer from inadequate sleep, and I'm probably in that category.

Experts say adults need to consistently get seven to nine hours of sleep at night in order to function at optimal level. Unfortunately, the norm is 6.7 hours of nighttime rest. Because so many of us don't get enough sleep, we are often tired in the daytime. Without a nap to refresh us, that weariness takes a toll.

A study done in 2005 by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration attributed 100,000 car accidents to sleep-impaired drivers.

The NHTSA reports at least 1,550 deaths and 71,000 injuries caused by driver fatigue -- probably more because it is difficult to document.

I can't help but wonder how many tragedies could have been prevented if more of us had prioritized sleep or allowed ourselves to take regular naps.

Recently, much research has touted the benefits of nap-taking.

In 2002, Sara Mednick and her colleagues in Harvard University's psychology department discovered that people such as my husband, who take 60- to 90-minute naps, gain the same degree of learning and performance improvement as someone who has had an eight-hour night's sleep.

Four years later, Mednick published a book on the subject: *Take a Nap! Change Your Life* (Workman Publishing Co.; 2006).

In it she explains how napping "increases alertness, boosts creativity, reduces stress, improves perception, stamina, motor skills and accuracy, enhances your sex life, helps you make better decisions, keeps you looking younger, aids in weight loss, reduces the risk of heart attack, elevates your mood and strengthens memory."

That's a long list of benefits. Even if only a few of the 14 perks Mednick attributes to napping occurred, some

daytime shut-eye would be a worthwhile use of time.

Not for me, though. Not yet anyway.

If I'm a dedicated student and practice the 16-step relaxation techniques Mednick explains in her book, and if I take to heart the encouragement my husband offers, perhaps one day my "in-nap-ability" will be a thing of the past.

Maybe then I'll finally experience the exuberant sense of renewal Ralph feels after his midday siestas.

When that day comes -- if it ever does -- I'll be joining the ranks of illustrious individuals such as John F. Kennedy, Albert Einstein, Thomas Edison, Winston Churchill, Bill Clinton and Lance Armstrong who credit much of their boundless energy and ability to cope with responsibilities to regularly scheduled daytime snoozes.

When I learn to nap, I'll no longer need to feel jealous of my husband. Thirty-seven years is a long time to harbor sleep-envy. The time is ripe to put that bad baby to bed.

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