

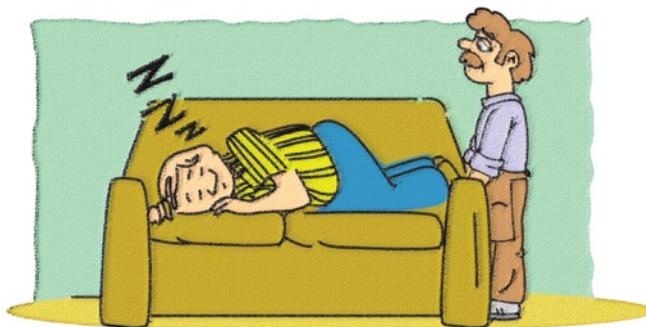
By John D. Matonich, LS

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Sounding Like Dad

I was discussing my teenage kids' sleep habits with some friends the other day. I wasn't really complaining, but I was expressing how odd I thought these habits were. It seems being up late at night and sleeping as long as possible the next day is quite a common practice. My son and I had just returned from a trip to our place in Michigan's "God's Country" and I think he spent more time on his back than on his feet. Now, we didn't have many chores to do and it was the time of the year when there isn't enough snow to go snowmobiling and too much snow to go four-wheeling, so we did do a lot of nothing. I didn't mind that as I wanted a chance to just spend some bonding time. I could have bonded more if I would have sat over his bed (or the couch) and spoke to him over his snoring. I guess he was recharging his batteries and sleep was a major part of that process. As I was relating this story to friends, I stopped in mid-comment and realized I was starting to sound just like my Dad did when I was that age. That was a little scary.

As I sat there, my mind raced back to those days living at home. I smiled as I remembered my life at that age. My father was a very early riser. I mean extremely early. He usually had downed a pot of coffee and caught the news on the local AM radio station before the sun even thought about rising. That was fine with me, but what caused the problems was he thought everyone else should be up at that time as well to share in the glory of the morning. I was never too enthused about joining him that early because I knew as soon as the sun rose there would be a list of things to do. No matter what time I got home (the older I got, the later it was) he would show up at the door to my bedroom and pace back and forth for at least five minutes. If



the sound of his footsteps did wake me up, he would start coughing and clearing his throat. That usually did the trick, but of course, I ignored him in hopes he would go searching for a new pot of coffee or some latest local high school sports score. Rarely did ignoring him work and I could just feel the heat from the slow burn he was doing in the hallway. Pretty soon he couldn't help himself and he would poke his head in the door and say loudly, "Are you going to sleep the whole GD day away? We have work to do!"

Of course we really didn't have anything that *had* to be done at that time of the morning, but he wanted to make sure rocks got picked out of the garden or snow got shoveled off the roof or the post-age-stamp sized yard we had got mowed. Starting the mower at the crack of dawn may have got the job done, but didn't do anything for my relationship with the neighbors. Even though they knew my father was an early riser, they continued to blame me for not finding a way to seize up the mower motor so it wouldn't be heard until a more civilized time of day. I knew stalling Dad was a lost cause, so I would get up, choke down a cup of two-hour old coffee, rehash the local news with him, and try not to fall asleep at the table.

After I could see some light outside, I would take my list of to-dos, walk outside

and try to find one that caused the least amount of disruption to the rest of town and get at it. After completing the items on the list, I would head back in the house fully awake, knowing I was now up for the duration. It never failed that as soon as I walked in the house I could hear snoring coming from the family room where Dad was peacefully napping on his favorite couch. Of course I wanted to pour Drano in his half-drunk tenth cup of coffee, but never did. I would simply go about my business for the rest of the day. You see I failed to mention this was Dad's modus operandi. He usually went to bed about 8:00 P.M., got up about 4:00 A.M., took a nap at 8:00 A.M., left the house until about noon, and after a bowl of soup would hit the couch again at about 1:30 P.M.. I know it doesn't sound very exciting, but he was happy, so other than wanting to drag me into his world, who was I to complain?

After remembering those times, I told myself I would go a little easier on my son from now on. I guess if he wants to sleep until noon every day of a school break, I won't stand in his way. Besides I don't want him eyeballing my half-drunk cup of coffee while I am snoozing on the couch at eight o'clock in the morning.

And that's the situation as I survey it...