

Early Riser

I often try to imagine what it would be like to sleep in and awaken to the smell of fresh morning coffee, the singing birds, a cool fragrant breeze blowing across my pillow, and delicate golden sunlight filtering through the shutters onto my face. But, when one is a paperboy, one cannot enjoy such pleasures.

In reality, I must arise at 5:30 in the morning, fumble in dark to switch off my blaring alarm clock and stumble half asleep across a cold black room to put on my clothes. My shirt is usually on backward, my hair is sticking straight up, my shoelaces are untied, and I trip down the stairs often stepping on the family dog. Thereafter, the dog lets out a painful howl that sends the neighborhood dogs into a barking frenzy and scares me half to death.

Actually, I like being a paperboy. There is something romantic about delivering heavy newspapers on an old rusty bicycle on chilly mornings. The feeling of being the first to see the morning newspaper, to actually deliver news that may have a profound effect on people's lives, is second to none.

When I first started my route more than three years ago, I was very uncoordinated. The papers would fly through the air and land on the wet grass, in a bush or flower bed, smack the side of a car, slam against a door or window, or skid into a pile of mud. I received many complaints. Over time, my arm muscles grew stronger and my aim became sharper. Now, each paper lands with a solid thunk on a porch or walkway, and complaints have become rare.

After years of riding the streets before sunrise, I have become familiar with some of the early risers in the neighborhood. There is the birdwatcher who paces the sidewalk with binoculars in hand, the Asian man who performs Tai-Chi in his driveway, the young woman who often becomes entangled by the leashes of her six Pekinese dogs, the old woman who walks hunched over with her arms clasped behind her back, and the overweight lady with tow pigtails who sings to herself while jogging. Then there are the other types of early risers such as the raccoon I see scurrying along an ivy-covered fence and the family of possums I see crossing the street.

Yes, being a paperboy has its ups and downs, but I would never trade my alarm clock, ratty old coat, thick woolen gloves, or newspapers for an extra hour of shut-eye. Never!