



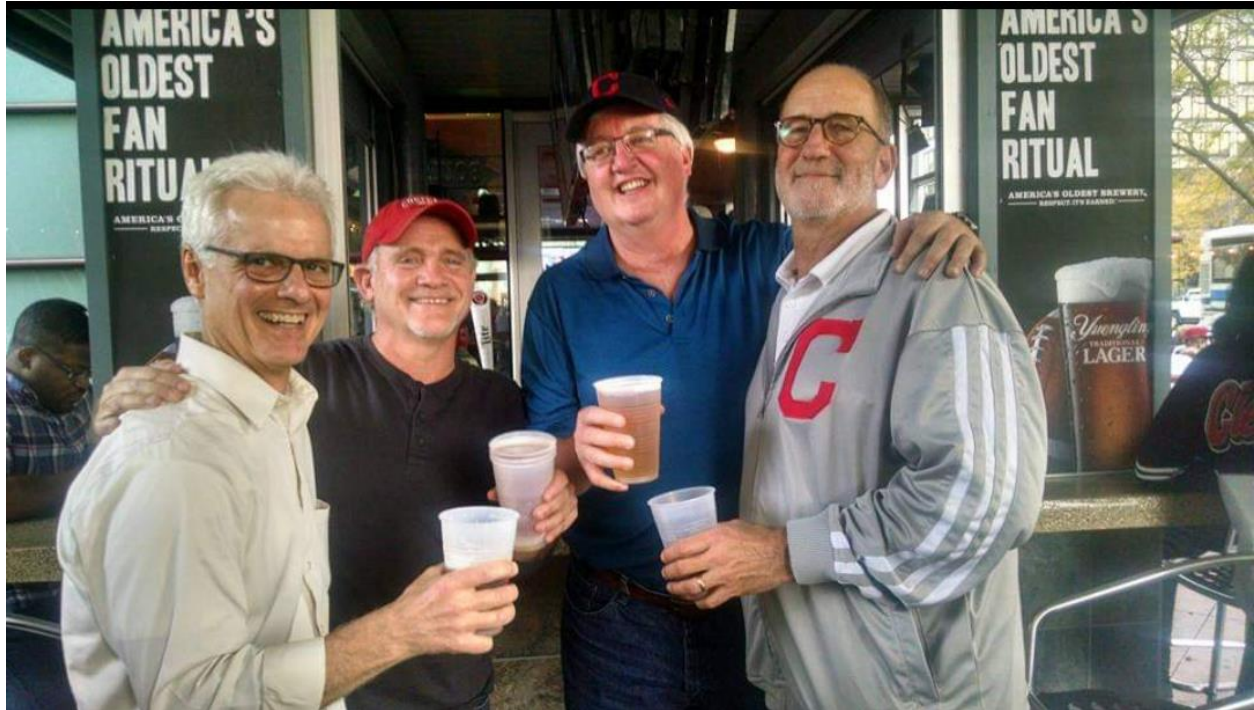
Reflections of a River Rat:

Whether narcoleptic man or cranky old man,
I could use a good night's sleep

I had heard all the jokes ages ago from my old newsroom buddies.

I had agreed to work overnight to process the sports pages. Why wait until 6 a.m. to battle a 9 a.m. deadline when most sports events were over by 1 a.m. If I worked midnight to 8 a.m., I would improve page flow and beat deadline with ease. So I became a night owl.

The trouble was I routinely stayed at the newspaper until 10, 11 or noon, then couldn't sleep when I got home. Or I couldn't sleep long enough before the boys arrived home from the newsroom and dreamed up another adventure.



The Sperry Dairy reunion occurred before Game Six of the 2016 World Series between Cleveland and the Chicago Cubs. Tom Breckenridge, Leo Roth, Jim Holleran and Mark Gillispie had taunted each other as housemates and co-workers at The News-Herald in Lake County, Ohio, in the early 1980s.

Four single guys in their 20s in one farmhouse. "C'mon," they implored. "You can sleep later." It was a cross between "Animal House" and "Night Stalker."

Soon, my work suffered, and I developed this habit of falling asleep in bars on Friday nights.

Breck fired the first salvo: "You are the narcoleptic man. You can fall asleep anywhere." Soon Leo and Dizz chimed in with "Trout Lips" and "The Largemouth Bass."

Now, 40 years later, I'm still sparring with my pillow and ducking and weaving in the sheets. There are nights I just can't sleep. However, I can still doze off just about anywhere.

About half of men 60 and over suffer from insomnia. Research shows as men age, they need more time to fall asleep, as much as 30-45 minutes.

There are plenty of reasons to stay up late:



I am hoping to pass on the gift of napping anywhere to my grandson Wes Edwards.

Work history – When you worked for years on the copy desk, deadlines reached a crescendo about 11 p.m. and lasted until 1 a.m. I often explained that nobody came home from work at 5 p.m. and went to bed at 6. When you come home after 1 all jacked up from deadline, you are up until 3 or 4 a.m.

Save your marriage – This plays out in bedrooms across the USA. You go to bed, your partner starts snoring, and she won't respond to a few shoves or nudges. Or conversely, you give your spouse a headstart of an hour, two hours if there is something worth watching on TV, so she will fall asleep ahead of your freight train imitation.

Bottoms up – You crave that Diet Coke or cup of coffee, or perhaps your basketball buddies go for beers after a pickup game. The caffeine or alcohol mess with your sleep, and you wake at 2 a.m. to stare at your watch, wondering if you will ever fall back to sleep. Maybe you hit the couch downstairs or jump on the computer. Either way, you're going to need an hour or two to feel tired again.

The Superman complex – I’ve had problems with this since I was in college. You think you can function on 2 hours of sleep, that you have more endurance than the average person. That’s why I slept through E.T. with the Considine nieces and nephew at a theatre. That’s why, when I was going to grad school by day and laying out the sports section by night, that I essentially sleepwalked into the women’s bathroom at Brockport State. When you’re already 20 years older than most of the students, it looks creepy.

The older I get, the more my doctor insists that I find heart-healthy exercise. My sainted wife Mary labels this “feeding your ego” against younger athletes. There are plenty of reasons to rise early:

The 5:30 a.m. golf game – Who wants to endure a 4- or 5-hour round of golf with the high-handicappers, serial practice-swingers or players you could time with a sundial. I tee off ahead of these guys at 5:30, walk 18, carry my clubs, and finish in 2 hours, 40 minutes. Sleep is overrated. You can nap later in the day.

The 6 a.m. basketball game – My guys have a simple rule: The last man to arrive at the gym is the first guy to sit for 5 minutes. If you sit first, you feel you are out of synch. So I set the alarm for 5:15 and arrive by 5:40. At 64, you need to stretch so you can compete with the 40-year-olds and their rubber spines, and you must warm up your shot or they won’t pass you the ball.

Tiny bladders – Any man over 50 will lament the path they have worn in the bedroom carpet that leads directly to the bathroom. It’s a condition of age and worn-out human plumbing. The risk of rising two and three times in a night is that you may not fall back asleep. You can bet that Rip Van Winkle never faced this.



Jim with cousin Mike LaPorte at Golf Club of Newport, overlooking the Mohawk Valley.

All these factors came into play last week when I started my Tour de North Country. After 3 hours of sleep and 3 frustrating hours of cursing out sheep, I started my day at 5 a.m., then drove 2½ hours to Newport for the annual golf match with cousin Fluff

LaPorte, so named because I caught him lifting his ball in the rough. It didn't affect the match because my swing broke down on the back nine. No sleep, no rhythm.

On the way to Morristown, I caught myself dozing off near Lowville, so I pulled over. After 20 minutes, it was apparent that I could not sleep. Back on the road to finish the 2-hour, 40-minute drive.

After two beers with an old friend, you'd think the alcohol would depress my system, maybe lead to a nap. No way. But I still woke up the next morning at 5 as a matter of habit.

I talked with several men who agreed -- the older we get, the less we sleep. I am starting to understand the stereotype of the cranky, old man.

Now as I write this, I am pushing midnight and I need to rise at 6 for another golf match. What wears me out faster -- the lack of sleep or my whining?

Jim Holleran, a Morristown native, is a retired teacher and registrar for the Rochester City School District, and former sports editor of the Democrat and Chronicle. Reach him at jimholleran29@gmail.com or view past columns under "Reflections of River Rat" at <https://hollerangetsitwrite.com/blog/>