

Talking in my sleep (Best of)



I'm growing very tired of a little game that rural people play on the telephone in the wee hours of the morning. I call the game "How Early Do You Get Up?" The rules of the contest are very simple: a person keeps calling me earlier and earlier until they get me to admit that I was actually in bed and asleep when they called.

It's a guy thing, like checking a man's paws when you shake hands, testing for calluses, short fingernails and grease stains to see how manly they are. It's the same with sleep deprivation. A person who needs eight hours of sleep a night is considered a wimp. Bags under one's eyes are considered a badge of honor amongst rural folks.

The world champion of this little game is Rascal, a sort-of-friend of mine who's got a heart so hard if you kicked it you'd break your toe. Rascal is a retired farmer who has nothing better in the world to do than to irritate me. Because of his constant tormenting, I have no doubt that when Rascal says "good night" for the final time in this life, he's going to bed down in a place where he won't need any covers.

As a former farmer, Rascal is a believer in the old adage that if the sun is up you should be too. The game starts when I answer the phone about 6 in the morning and hear a grating voice on the other end that would drive a wolf to commit suicide. "Morning, Lee. I didn't wake you, did I?" asks Rascal, hoping to have caught me asleep.

The key to winning this game of "mind over mattress" is to sound real cheery when you answer the phone, even if you were sleeping as sound as a dead calf. I find it helps to clear my throat before answering. If you do manage to convince the caller that you've been up for hours, their next call will come an hour earlier. And so on.

"Morning, Lee," says Rascal hopefully at 5 a.m. "You sound like you were asleep."

It's the Pitts

Written by Lee Pitts

"Nope," I lied like a rug. "I had to get up to wake up the rooster. What exactly is it that you are calling about, Rascal?"

"Oh, I hadn't talked to you for a good while and just wanted to see how you are doing."

Actually, the purpose of the call was to inform me that I was going to miss the next hour of sleep.

Being an artistic liar, I've developed some ready answers that really irritate Rascal. Once he called at 4 a.m., when it was so dark the bats couldn't even see, to ask if he'd caught me sleeping. "Nope. Actually I've been out working for several hours. I've been up so long I'm thinking of going down for my nap," I replied.

"Well, you sure sound like you were asleep to me," replied Rascal dejectedly.

Although this is a game played mostly by men, it does not mean our wives don't suffer. This contest drives my wife crazy. "Why don't you just tell them we are sleeping?" she asks.

"I can't. Then he would win," I explain patiently.

"Well, why don't you call him when he's trying to sleep at 9 at night?"

"That would be cheating. Besides, it's rude to call someone that late."

My wife is simply unable to grasp the competitive nature of the game. But I must admit that even I am tiring of it. I can't even sleep when Rascal DOESN'T call because I'm laying awake

listening for the phone to ring, clearing my voice for a ready response.

I really hesitated to bring this little game to the attention of readers, realizing that others may want to play and may start calling me in the early morning hours. Please be advised that I have started screening my calls, so all calls before 5 will go unanswered in the future and a constant ringing of my phone DOES NOT necessarily mean that I am still in bed.

Also, you can't reach me on a cell phone because I don't own one. I wouldn't want my phone going off while I'm driving or engaged in conversation with my wonderful wife — those being the only two opportunities I have these days to get some sleep.

Holyoke Enterprise January 31, 2013