

No More Sick Days...

by Chris Ladd
EDITORIAL EDITOR

Oh, God, am I sick. I wake myself up coughing at night, so I don't get enough sleep, and I can't think straight. I feel like a hoarse Bob Dylan, and I sound like there's muck packed into my sinuses with a shovel.



WHERE THE
HELL IS
WAYNE, ME?

There's this pile of tissues scattered near the wastebin, and I haven't got the energy to pick them up. They sit there because I didn't have the energy to move the wastebin closer to my bed, and they're scattered because I didn't have the energy to aim. I haven't got much energy left, barely enough to finish this column.

I went to the drug store and bought an arsenal of over the counter medicines from Echinacea to Robitussin, and nothing works. I think I'm being punished for something. I think that my past abuses of sickness have woken some ancient magic, magic that has transformed me from a normal, quasi-productive student into a drugged-up phlegm factory. It's not until you are truly sick that you grasp how many fluids and colors the human body can secrete at once. It's blown my mind these past few days.

Adult illness is such a drag.

As a kid, when you stop, the world stops with you. You're responsible for so little, and even that can be deferred indefinitely until you recover from whatever ails you. I know I used to pray for illness, for some rare strain of the plague to blow across town, drift through my window, and plow straight down my throat. I begged viral infections to strike at the core of my immune system.

"Do your worst," I screamed in the high-pitched wail of childhood.

When the sick train hits me now, as an adult, it doesn't just toss

me aside and let me recover beside the tracks like it used to. No. It catches on my clothing, drags me alongside and underneath it, bouncing and scraping over deadlines, appointments, and exams, racing past meetings and rehearsals, and crashing through assignments and class projects. Debris from the collision-tissues, cough drop wrappers, and empty juice bottles-scatter in my wake.

I hate being sick.



My parents, progressives that they were, let me decide if I were able to go to school. Raised in that environment, spared the rod and never spanked, I was spoiled beyond repair, and those Sesame-Street-watching-NPR-listening compassionate crazies molded me into a squeaky-voiced eight-year-old Pinocchio. I just couldn't fake it."

There was a time when I saw this kind of illness as a blessing, germs sent from on high to deliver me from the mundane. My parents, progressives that they were, let me decide if I were able to go to school. Raised in that environment, spared the rod and never spanked, I was spoiled beyond repair, and those Sesame-Street-watching-NPR-listening compassionate crazies molded me into a squeaky-voiced eight-year-old Pinocchio. I just couldn't fake it.

"I think I can make it to school," I'd croak after a little drama. An 'atta boy' or 'good for you' later, I was waddling my snowpanted self to the bus stop. Great. Just great.

The problem with these trusting parents is the emotional weight that comes with disobedience. If I wanted a day of Ramen noodles and daytime television, I would need a cough, a fever, chills, vomit, or a burst appendix. I got a week off and a Sega Genesis once for tonsillitis.

Once, in the third grade, I spent the entire period between snack and

lunch recess, 10:00 to 11:30, dragging my opened bottom lip over the top of my desk, letting the outside flop down against my chin and sliding my whole head forward, over and over again, until the inside of my lip felt dry against the laminate wood grain. I'd heard that there were germs everywhere, and that these germs were what made a person sick. I spent an hour and a half laying out the welcome mat for these school-room bacteria, and it worked.

The next morning, I looked straight into my parents' eyes and told them, in a voice that seemed too exhausted to form words at all, that I didn't know if I would make it to school that day. What was wrong? My stomach hurt. My nose was stuffy. I felt... sick. Did I need to go to the doctor? I don't know, maybe... no. No, I decided. I just needed to rest. I would just stay here in bed. Should one of my parents stay home? Ohhhhh... no, I thought I'd be alright. Was there anything I wanted, anything at all that I needed to help me feel better? Nnnnn.... No. No, I felt fine. Sick, but fine. Go on, leave me here.

At this point, a cool washcloth was brought to lay upon the angel's forehead.

Sometimes, in my sicker moments, I actually curled up in bed for a few hours, but usually once the front door clicked shut and the whine of my mother's reversing minivan faded, I was out of the covers and down the stairs, free to

explore the house in my pajamas for hours. I could watch television or cook anything I wanted. Usually, there were sandwiches left out, or soup in the microwave ready to heat.

More than anything, it was the solitude I enjoyed. When you're a kid, they watch you all the time. Your parents, the bus driver, your teachers... Every action needs an explanation, each sentence a rationale. Alone, in my own house, I could run laps around my kitchen, go on archaeological digs of my basement, or eat goldfish dipped in mayonnaise for no reason at all. In times of sickness, the price was always right, and Bob Barker let me do whatever I wanted.

Today it's a different story. Most of us have already had enough solitude; that's why people get married. I could've eaten mayonnaise-covered anything before this snofest struck, and now all I'd like is a strong soup. I haven't got a television, and I've missed too many of my classes being healthy to miss any more now. I'm sick, but the world won't stop. I've just got to trudge along with it.

It's something I never realized before, but being sick, being incapacitated isn't any fun at all. From the carefree infections of my youth, I'd never have guessed, but adult illness sucks, and being sick is damned inconvenient.