



Sleep Demons: An Insomniac's Memoir

By Bill Hayes

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Bill Hayes grew up in a family in which the question "How'd you sleep?" was as much a staple at the breakfast table as orange juice or coffee, a question that encouraged genuine reflection and a legacy of life-shaping implications. *If there's such a thing as an insomnia gene*, he tells us at the outset of this beautifully written memoir, *my father passed it on to me, along with his green eyes and Irish melancholy*.

Hayes' narrative affords an intimate look at one man's singular journey through contemporary life -- from his over-caffeinated, sleep-disturbed childhood as the son of a Coca-Cola bottler to the height of his insomnia, when his partner struggles with AIDS and Hayes must face an increasingly troubling and debilitating sleep disorder.

Armed with an infectious curiosity and an obsession with the mysteries of his personal demons, he leads readers on a fascinating exploration of sleep disorders and contends with all manner of theories and experimentation, from the conceptions of sleep in ancient mythology to today's state-of-the-art sleeping aids and clinics.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

For as far back as he can remember, Hayes has had trouble sleeping. He'd wander his parents' house at night, "existing on nothing but the fumes of consciousness," jealously wondering how everyone else slipped into dreamland so easily. From these nocturnal ramblings grew an unblinking, lifelong fascination with sleep (or the absence of it), which Hayes has transmuted into a skilled and graceful debut that variously reads like a journey of scientific discovery, a personal memoir and a literary episode of Ripley's *Believe It or Not*. Hayes, a freelance writer from San Francisco, chronicles all his attempts to secure a good night's rest, from folk remedies to psychotherapy to sleeping pills (which failed to provide relief: "The difference between drugged and natural sleep eventually reveals itself," Hayes writes, "like the difference between an affair and true romance"). In charting the struggle of scientists and philosophers throughout history to understand insomnia, Hayes produces a bonanza of oddball trivia. We learn the longest verified period without sleep was 180 hours, achieved in 1957 by an amphetamine-driven researcher, and that the presence of an internal biological clock was proved in 1955 by flying a hive of bees from Paris to New York on a newfangled jet. Intertwined with all these anecdotes are Hayes's recollections of growing up Catholic and coming to terms with his homosexuality. Though these memories have little to do with his reflections on insomnia, Hayes is such a fluid, poetic and entertaining writer that it doesn't matter. The explanation of how a researcher discovered REM (rapid eye movement) sleep by studying his own son, for example, is just as gripping as Hayes's descriptions of how he helped his partner manage his AIDS symptoms. An intelligent, beautifully written book, Hayes's curious hybrid will delight readers who snore past dawn as well as those who pace away while the midnight oil burns. Agent, Wendy Weil.

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Review

Publishers Weekly (starred review) A skilled and graceful debut that variously reads like a journey of scientific discovery, a personal memoir, and a literary episode of *Ripley's Believe It or Not*....An intelligent, beautifully written book, Hayes' curious hybrid will delight readers who snore past dawn as well as those who pace away while the midnight oil burns. -- *Review*

About the Author

Bill Hayes studied writing at Santa Clara University and has worked for the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Library Foundation, and the San Francisco AIDS Foundation. His work has been published in *The New York Times Magazine*, *Details*, and *Salon*, among other publications. He lives in San Francisco with his partner, Steve.

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