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Learning Something New

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Edward T. Nista

Average price per bag: 60 dollars.

Average lifespan of a bag: 2 days.

Average number of extractions per day: 2.

Average of guaranteed mind-numbing affects per day: Multiple.

Foreseen feeling of desperation and earth-spinning mindlessness:

Priceless.

Sometimes I wonder what motivated me to smoke pot.

Freshman year I lived next to a guy who knew me only as 'leee-nissta,' because he used to send me emails with his essays for me to print out for him.

"Yo, what's up, leee-nissta," he used to say to me. I can't remember if his name was Nick or Steve; I can't remember those days too well anymore. Freshman year was an amalgamation of joy and frustration. That year, I think I lived next to the two biggest pot smokers on campus. There were dudes in their room smoking up every morning at eight or nine o'clock, every afternoon at four twenty and every evening between nine and midnight. The hallways smelt putrid, my own room smelt putrid. My windows and theirs were right next to each other; whatever they blew out their windows came happily floating into mine. First semester freshman year I was sitting in my room getting high on someone else's supply and it wasn't my choice.

I lived in Robins Hall room A127, the jack-off room as my prior owners had dubbed it. A guy named Paul came by my room my third night at UR. "Dude, I probably jacked off in your room a thousand times freshman year." I looked at them with a combination of shock and disgust, wondering if I too was destined for such a pathetic beginning to my college days.

"No, really, he did, man, I lived with him for two years." *And so why do you still live with him, I wondered to myself silently.* "I'd wake up in the middle of the night and Paul would be down there beating off to one of his Jenna Jameson videos." Forrest laughed happily with Paul and they continued out the exit just past my doorway. I sadly realized I was going to be seeing a lot of this fine welcoming committee.

Robins Hall was rowdy. If I wasn't playing Golden-Eye, I was playing Mario Kart. If I wasn't playing WWF Smack-Down, I was playing Golden-Eye. It was a vicious cycle and homework was not on anybody's minds. Down the hall there was a Playstation and an original N.E.S. consisting of Tony Hawk rail-slides and Super Mario sky-dives. Video games dominated my life for the first semester. And once, my first December in Richmond, I took a puff on the

magic dragon. I wasn't asked to, I wasn't told to, I did it of my own free will; and it didn't do a damn thing, though it never does the first time.

In high school my friends had smoked up as often as a chip of hash could be purchased. My best friend's parents had found out he smoked because I had mentioned it to my mother. He eventually spent a summer at Bible camp, his parents' choice of rehab, though it is well-known today that this had no effect on him. Why had I chosen to take that initial hit? I had avoided it for so long. I remember a seminar I had senior year with John Glenn and his flight team. "Take risks!" they had said. But what did I know; I took their advice and smoked some weed. Weed isn't bad, it's not bad for everyone, but it was definitely no good for me. I remember sophomore year and weed. Or maybe I don't remember sophomore year, but I do remember weed.

I was so doped up every weekend of my sophomore year, that all of the things I remember are trapped within the hundreds of pictures I took. Of course I remember some things, but when I think of sophomore year of college, it just seems like a blur—a blazing, red-eyed black-eye. One night I lay in bed, my world spinning around me, with a feeling that I couldn't stop dreaming, even when I thought I lay awake and sat straight up in bed, I was still

dreaming. The phrase "I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry" ricocheted off every edge of my mind. I could feel the echoes coming out of my mouth, in my breath, and resonating back against my ears. Soon I was speaking those exact words, over and over again. I threw my head back down against the pillow, promising myself never to smoke again, but still a perpetual dream rocked my mind.

Am I breathing fast? Am I breathing at all? Am I really sitting up in bed? Am I lying down? Where's my soul? Where's my body? Where's my body? Light flickers on and off in the room. My roommate's crappy monitor flickers through different shades of blue. Pink Floyd plays calmly across the stereo emitting its own neon green and blue light patterns against the walls of the room. "Tongue-tied and twisted just an earth-bound misfit, I" wonder who I am and what is wrong with me, why I'm doing this to myself. I jump off the bed and run to my bathroom, thrusting my head under freezing shower water.. My head spins worse than ever before. What did I do that night? What did I drink? What did I eat? Did I eat or drink anything? My head feels like a bowling pin after being hit by the mighty bowling ball, spinning around and around.

I stumble loudly back into the bedroom. Arms flailing, I climb back up to the top bunk, not an ordinary jump for a bunk bed on cinder blocks. I lie in bed. If my heart wasn't racing before, it is now. I lie in bed, "Standing alone my senses reeled," slowly pick up the sound of running water. I soon realize my head is wet and wonder how it got this way. I wonder why my roommate left the shower on, or why he is showering at this hour of the night. How long have I slept? How long have I been lying here? I climb out of bed and stumble lazily to my bathroom and turn off the shower. I sit on the nice cool floor and reach up an arm to the towel rack and pull a white one down. I wrap it around my head and lay my head down on the cold hard floor, and sleep.

I awoke from that dream in August of 2002. I promised some people I really cared about I wouldn't do it again. I smoked up in my house at ten o'clock at night, in the bathroom, blowing smoke rings at my cat, Tucker. I'd like to think that for the most part I've kept that promise. I've moved on to other things, other addictions; though I've never really admitted I was addicted to weed, I'm fairly sure I've been addicted to beer since high school days in Japan. Life is a series of lessons. We screw up and we learn, and we screw up some more and we learn—or some of us learn, others of us are just dumb and don't learn. We must continue to learn, though, learn to cope with the insanity.