

MEMORY WOBBLE

I know it was a long time ago, but I do NOT snore. So I was NOT snoring the night I arrived here!” exclaimed Northwick. The bear had thumped his paws on the duvet when he said NOT. That made NOT sound big and bold, but the duvet was too soft for him to actually underline the word as well.

Northwick sat up in bed and tried to stare across the room at Frank. But without his glasses it was too far to do a really good, hard stare. So the bear fumbled for his specs on the bedside table and tried to remember just how many years he had been sharing a bedroom with Frank.

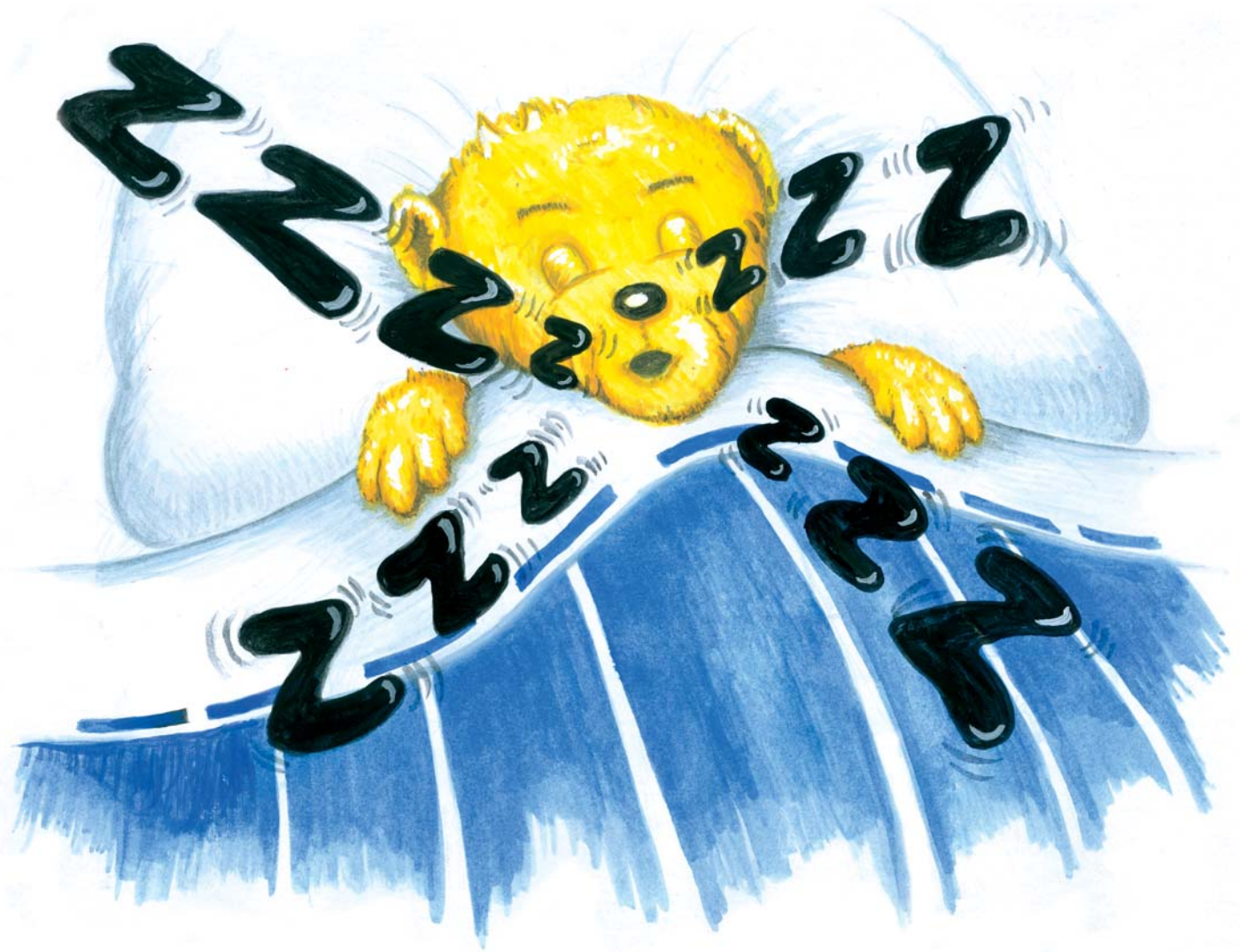
“Whatever, I heard you. And snoring was only part of it,” said Frank, who was also sitting up in bed, making the most of a Saturday morning sit-in. “The song says that if you go down to the woods today you’re sure of a big surprise. But I hadn’t even got out of bed that morning. And there you were! A bear in MY bedroom! Snoring or NOT – that was a BIG surprise!”

“Well, it’s not as if I had any choice, is it?” replied Northwick with just the hint of an ice cube in his voice. “It was late and I was fast asleep when your mother brought me in from the car. And I’d had a very tiring and, and ... a very hungry and disturbing day. Imagine if someone you didn’t know won you at a raffle and then took you home,” he added.



Frank had no idea what it was like to be raffled. But he remembered his astonishment all those years ago when he woke up and saw Northwick for the first time. Even with his glasses he couldn’t believe his eyes. And not just because a bear was fast asleep – or in Northwick’s case probably slow asleep – in the other bed. But a bear with eyes like his. “Do you remember telling me to do that thing with my eyes? At first I had no idea what you were on about,” he said to Northwick.

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“Oh, yes, you’re right!” replied the bear smiling now. “That was the first time either of us had ever seen anyone else with wobbly eyes. It’s weird to think that until then neither of us had any idea our eyes moved all the time.”

Frank put his hands behind his head and lay back on the pillow. “Well, I must have seen Uncle Chris, but I’d never noticed his eyes. I didn’t believe it when you said my eyes moved all the time. Do you remember you got me to look in the mirror? But I couldn’t see my eyes moving even then.”

“That’s right,” said Northwick, swinging his legs out of bed and rumbling his tummy at the same time. “I’d almost forgotten. And I thought you were just being silly and spiteful when you said my eyes were never still. It was a while before we realised our eyes — all four of them — do exactly the same thing.”

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“Yes,” said Frank. “But we didn’t really believe each other until my mum came in after she heard us arguing. It was only when she told us we both had nystagmus. Or what did you call it then – Nice Agnes, wasn’t it?” said the boy with a giggle.

“You didn’t know what it was called either,” said Northwick, a little huffily. But he went on quickly: “And then we didn’t stop asking her questions for days or was it weeks on end. Why us? Will it get better? Will it get worse? What causes it? Is it catching?”

Then Frank chipped in: “You had the best question of all, though: Will I have to eat more because of all the energy my eyes use up moving around? I don’t think mum has ever answered that one, has she? And when you asked that doctor, it was so funny. He didn’t know what to say, did he?”

“No,” said Northwick. “You’re right. Makes you realise that doctors don’t know everything. But you’re still wrong about one thing – I do NOT snore.” And with that, the bear jumped out of bed, hurled a pillow at Frank and ran downstairs for breakfast, shouting as he went: “But I’m still always hungry!”

This story first appeared in the spring 2008 issue (82) of the Nystagmus Network’s Focus newsletter. It was also adapted and performed by the UCAN Productions theatre group at the Cardiff Millennium Centre, July 2009.