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Editorial

Danger!



Norman Rockwell's *Lazybones* featured on *The Saturday Evening Post* cover, September 6, 1919 edition. Credit for the journal cover image and the image above: *The Saturday Evening Post* cover licensed by Curtis Licensing Indianapolis, IN.

The Saturday Evening Post was first published in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, as a weekly newspaper on August 4, 1821 using the same presses that Benjamin Franklin used to publish *The Pennsylvania Gazette*. It evolved into a weekly magazine becoming the most widely read publication in the United States. Its readers anxiously awaited each issue's cover and stories. By the 1950s with the advent of television and changes in readers' interests, the *Post* started a steady decline in readership.

Beginning with the late 1890s issue, the *Post's* cover always featured an illustration. These were black and white etchings created by illustrators. The January 27, 1900 edition had a color illustration on the cover, and by 1901 all the covers had color illustrations. Practical color photographic film was not introduced until the 1930s. The May 20, 1916 edition had a cover by an unknown 22-year-old illustrator,

Norman Rockwell. He went on to create 323 covers for the *Post* and he became the best-known illustrator in the world.

The September 6, 1919 edition had on its cover a painting called *Lazybones*. The painting that was used as the cover had a fascinating history. In 1954, a gentleman by the name of Robert Grant was playing pool at a friend's home which had several paintings by Norman Rockwell. While playing pool, he accidentally poked *Lazybones* with his pool cue. To make up for the damaged painting, he bought it for \$50. It remained in his home in Fox Hollow, New Jersey until it was stolen in 1976 and then recovered by the Federal Bureau of Investigations 40 years later.

Lazybones shows a sweaty obese boy with a very ruddy complexion, sleeping, mouth open, snoring with his dog's sleeping head on his lap. He has fallen asleep while working.¹ This illustration conveyed the stereotype that falling asleep at the wrong time is a sign of sloth. Of course, at the time it was unknown that the boy may have had the same disease as Joe, the Fat Boy, described by writer Charles Dickens.²

In *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*, Dickens introduces the reader to Joe: "...and on the box sat a fat and red-faced boy, in a state of somnolency." Dickens tell us that Joe was sleepy and difficult to arouse from sleep: "The fat boy rose, opened his eyes, swallowed a huge piece of pie he had been in the act of masticating when he last fell asleep." and in response to the firing of enormous guns at a military exercise "everybody was excited except the fat boy who slept as soundly as if the roaring of cannon were his ordinary lullaby."

The medical profession did not recognize the potentially fatal problem until 1956.³ A nonmedical person first seeing the painting might think of the scene as representing rest, peace, or even sloth. A medical person today, examining this work, would think about the danger posed by the repetitive episodes of oxygen desaturation, and changes in cardiovascular function caused by sleep disordered breathing.⁴ They would recognize that the subject of *Lazybones* is in danger.

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