

THE GREATEST UNANSWERED QUESTION

by Fred Hobbs

On average, you experience them three to five times each night, sometimes up to seven. No one knows why, not even the experts, but theories abound. Sometimes they make you feel euphoric, sometimes frightened, often puzzled.

The episodes range in durations as short as three or four seconds or as long as twenty minutes. Dreams.

The publication *Psychology Today* admits that the whole study of dreams and what causes them remains one of the behavioral scientist's greatest unanswered questions. Could they be a form of memory consolidation, emotional regulation, threat stimulation...or are those and other theories just pipe dreams, vain hopes said to have originated from the practice of smoking opium pipes?

The ancient Greeks and Romans had a much too simple explanation for dreams. They were thought to be messages coming directly from the gods or the dead.

Since no one knows for certain the cause of dreams, anecdotes remain the most interesting way to discuss them. First, do you dream? My late wife declared that she never dreamed. However, not a night goes by that I don't experience a dream, though I don't seem to conjure up three, five and certainly not seven per night. My dreams seem to be singular, fairly long and generally vivid.

Dreams tend to fall in four categories: magical, melancholic, adventurous and sensual. Not much magic is evident in my sleep-induced reveries. Occasionally, an adventure unfolds and yes, some are sensual. Most often my dreams fall into two categories of my own definition, bittersweet (often wishing my late wife was still with me but recounting our happy moments together) and the other, nonsensical.

My nonsense dream is a variation of the "plot" about having to take a test for which you have not studied or read the book. I dream I have been hired for a prestigious new job paying lots of money in my field of broadcasting. I'm supposed to host a top-rated disc jockey show, but it's located in a large city that I have never visited. I can't find the building, or the studio and the record library contains weird and unknown musical selections. I know the audience will hate them and, of course, I'll be fired. Besides, the other staff members are making fun of me.

Sigmund Freud, in his analysis about dreams, referred to "the deepest desires and anxieties often repressed in childhood memories." Among my happiest career moments were those spent as a young disc jockey and radio announcer. So, I wasn't reverting to childhood in my dream. I wasn't repressed or anxious about that part of my life, either. Most often, I can't remember details of any dream more than a few minutes after I wake up, but still the curiosity is there as to why certain dreams, crazy dreams, recur, such as that one.

Since dreams, whether good or bad, can't really be explained with certainty, perhaps it's best to follow the advice that author J.K. Rowling offers in the Harry Potter books. "It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live."