

## Green couch

I have long had a couch in my office, so long that some of my former fellows think it should be donated to the Smithsonian Museum. Old and somewhat worn, it has, however, appreciated in value since a recent Tribune article described how midday naps have become quite the thing with business executives, highly acceptable, and no longer frowned upon as sleeping on the job. Physiologists now view naps as "a health benefit and not a sign of being lazy"; "a basic physiologic need"; "a way of recharging one's batteries"--especially for people who work late hours into the night and are chronically sleep deprived. Siestas indeed are very much part of the culture of many nations. Winston Churchill took naps, so did Ronald Reagan, and also Thomas Edison.

Many teenagers also tend to take brief naps or "microsleeps," especially during morning classes. These youngsters are chronically sleep deprived, allegedly because reset biological clocks or melatonin secretion cause them to want to stay up late at night and not get up early in the morning for classes. They accordingly perform best at night and poorly in the mornings, to the distress of their educators, who often feel they "are teaching walking zombies."

For those aiming at more than a micro-sleep, however, snoring remains an intractable problem--this despite a \$200 million antismoring growth industry--especially when the noise produced waxes to a motorcycle-like intensity of 93 decibels. Remedies include herbal tablets; vibrator wrist watches; contour pillows; nasal adhesive strips, dilators, or flexible coils; and devices that hold the tongue or thrust the jaw forwards--and are somewhat reminiscent of the Spanish Inquisition.

But for those desiring eternal sleep and release from this mortal coil, the news is that yet another jury, the third one, has acquitted the notorious Dr Kevorkian, who by now has assisted terminal patients in 28 suicides. It has also come to light, according to an article in the New England Journal of Medicine, that some critical care nurses admit to having occasionally giving terminal patients a high dose of opiate. In this highly emotionally charged controversy Dr Kevorkian has been vilified as a phony, an infamous paranoid, a murderer. Yet polls have shown that the majority of Americans "want their physicians to make assisted suicide available" and that some kind of regulation, guidelines, procedure ought to be implemented accordingly. Against this stands the view that doctors are healers and should not take part in assisted suicide or for that matter in executions. Some time ago Professor Grumpus, of Grim-brick University, even suggested that society might be ready for the services of a different kind of a profession, a death care professional with a higher degree in pharmacology, who could carry out these functions, and who on slow days might be allowed to moonlight for the Mafia. The professor's credibility, however, was undermined by his extreme cynicism and sour perspective on life. This has been largely attributed to his not having a green couch in his office.--