

## Insomnia Epiphany

Bob Sack, July 2023

It was 1:30 a.m. and still Erik couldn't fall asleep. His wife Kitty didn't snore, but she made regular puffy breathing sounds that were distracting. The day had been hot and, of course, the air conditioning was on the blink. In an attempt to cool the bedroom, Erik had opened the window, but that made the sounds of the occasional car driving by loud and clear. He lay on top of the covers with the overhead fan generating puny waves of air that barely dried his moistened skin. As was his routine, he had locked the doors before turning out the lights, but now he couldn't stop thinking about the burglary of his neighbor's house two weeks ago.



Erik had a decent paying job, writing copy for a local advertising agency. At least he could make his mortgage payments. However, a younger rival at the firm named Justin had started using Chat GPT that could generate twice as much copy as Erik in the same amount of time. It was not good writing but it was sufficient for the down-scale market that the agency served. Erik stopped worrying about the burglary and started worrying that he might be laid off.

Before going to bed, he had watched the Blazers play basketball and drank a couple of beers. After the home team fell behind, and the game got boring, he dozed off for a few minutes. Now the alcohol had worn off giving rise to a rebound alerting effect. Erik had a number of reasons for his sleeplessness, but underneath the obvious causes, perhaps there was more to the story.

He decided to get up for a while. He walked by his eighteen-year-old son's bedroom and saw that it was empty. It was Friday night and Timmy had said that he would be getting home late. There had been a short argument before he left. Erik gave in and thought to himself, "What the heck, in a few months he will be going off to college and we will have no say in his bedtime."

He made his way down the hall and quietly slid the patio door open and went outside. The clean crisp night air was a welcome contrast to the vague odor of garlic in the house retained from last night's pizza dinner. His cotton bathrobe felt cozy. He could smell the wood chips he had spread last week on the path leading down the hill. He stretched out on the chaise lounge and gazed through the darkness to the valley below where a scattering of lights dotted the countryside. Off to side he saw an almost full moon behind the upper branches of the fir trees and its light cast a peaceful glow over the acreage below his house.

The view from the hillside brought a definite wave of cheer that swept away the worries. He felt lucky to buy this house in the countryside with a view. It prompted Erik to think once again about making a change in his life.

When Erik and Kitty bought this place, he joked with her that the two acres below the house would be a good place to grow lingonberries. She didn't realize that this was not exactly a joke. Erik was born and raised on a farm in Minnesota among relatives of a Nordic heritage. They all loved their Sunday pancakes topped with lingonberries and sour cream. But all that lingonberry sauce was imported in glass jars from Norway; lingonberries did not grow in Minnesota.

When Erik moved to Oregon to go to college, he loved to hike on Mt. Hood, especially in the early summer when he could pick huckleberries. The little purple berries looked like a close relative to lingonberries although they were not as tart. His research at the college library revealed that lingonberries could likely grow in the Pacific Northwest and might even thrive. So, for many years, while Erik was forging his career and starting a family, he would imagine owning a small farm growing lingonberries and making preserves to sell to the Nordic diaspora around the US.

Now, he calculated that a trust fund inheritance would cover the college education costs for his son, his mortgage was about paid off, and his wife just got a raise as a nursing supervisor. If the need for money were problem, he could always work part time at the local hardware store. So maybe, just maybe, he didn't have to spend the rest of his life in front of a computer screen. Instead, he could spend his time cultivating little bushes, harvesting the berries, and cooking them in a small version of an industrial scale kitchen in the old barn on the property. He would make and sell "Erik's Lingonberry Preserves."

His imagination turned to the pleasure of figuring out the details of his future lingonberry plot... whether the rows should run north and south or east and west, how he would keep the birds from poaching, where he could find some big restaurant-scale pots to cook his crop. His eyelids felt heavy and he fell asleep at last.

Erik was awakened by the dawning sun as it arose behind the profile of Mt. Hood. The heavens were a glorious mixture of oranges and blues. Jet trails marked the sky like strokes of paint made with a gigantic brush.

He immediately decided to call in "sick." No, he wouldn't even call in; he would just not show up. He smiled as he wondered if they would fire him. An almost sleepless night had the effect of someone grabbing him by the collar and shaking him. "Erik, face it, you are bored with your job, your kid is about to leave home, you are getting older, it is time to stop wasting your time drinking beer and watching the Blazers. And get off your duff and give those lousy air-conditioning repairmen a call. It's been weeks."

Scanning the profile of the mountain reminded him of those hikes. Today he would start building a lingonberry farm. He needed to make a change, and he could. It was a new day.