

Dreams of the sordid past

Posted on May 24, Posted by [Lois Lowry](#) Category [Uncategorized](#)

Just about everyone of my age is a former smoker. Well, maybe not everyone; but a large number, certainly. Back in the 50s's, when people of my generation went to college, they actually gave out cigarettes in the college dorms...little 5-in-a-package Winstons; and when your little pack was gone, you could get another, free of charge. The cheery TV commercials said, "Winston tastes good, like a cigarette should!" in a jaunty voice. College classroom chairs, the ones with the little table growing out of the arm, all had a small silver square of an ashtray on them, and we puffed away while listening to the professors. It is so hard to picture all of this now.

So we all became addicted, with the help of the tobacco companies, and then we all had to suffer through quitting, sometimes years later.

I only mention all of this because last night I dreamed I was smoking, something I haven't done for many years. And I was loving it. But there was another element, more contemporary, because I was in someone's New York apartment in the dream - some friend - who was being very pleasant and accepting while at the same time asking me nicely to be more careful, please, and pointing out that I had dropped burning ashes on her very nice couch. So clearly smoking was BAD in the dream, something to be scolded for and to apologize about....yet I was still doing it and enjoying it thoroughly.

It raises the question for me, once again...the question I have wrestled with in at least one book...of the origin of dreams. Clearly it's the bits and pieces of the past re-surfacing, along with other stuff (In the dream I was sitting on that nice couch leafing through a book of drawings, and one drawing was by Lucien Freud. Now Lucien Freud happens to be an artist I admire greatly, and coincidentally he was an answer on "Jeopardy" the other night (and I knew the answer, but none of the contestants did, since I am a longtime fan of Lucien Freud)...but why on earth did he pop up in my dream)?

There was one other thing, as well. I asked the apartment owner, the same one whose couch I was ruining, how large the apartment was, how many square feet. She replied "150." I looked

around and told her she had to be mistaken, she had to mean "1500."

So there were three elements, three things I remember clearly. The cigarettes. Freud (not Sigmund, but his grandson). And a number: either 150, or 1500.

I can't seem to connect those dots in any meaningful way.

But I have certainly wasted half of an early-morning hour thinking about it.

And it occurs to me that in the writing of books, we traffic in the connection of disparate elements also: presenting things that seem unrelated (think of "Holes," a good example of this) and then cleverly (one hopes, at least, that it is cleverly done) bringing them together, making the connections seem inevitable and important.

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