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"A different Light"

A Different Light 6 April 2019 – Sleep is hard to find on these balmy, balmy nights

The past month is likely to be one of the warmest March months on record in New Zealand according to Niwa. When March came along I was looking for some cooling respite from the hot evenings we've been having this Summer. But no, they were as hot and humid as ever. I find it hard to sleep in the heat. To be honest, I find sleep hard at the best of times. It's not the act of going to sleep that's problematic. Apparently I do that fairly swiftly according to my wife, "You fall asleep instantly snore instantly and loudly!" It's staying asleep that I find hard. I tend to wake up every hour to toss and turn and worry about totally irrelevant things that don't seem to matter in the light of day. I seem to have a dream that I slip in and out of throughout the night.

I think I developed the habit last year during a stay in hospital, when I had my neck surgery. Sleep in hospital is always interrupted with lights and nurses checking on you every hour, taking observations. It was during this hospital stint that they identified that I have sleep apnoea; a condition in which you stop breathing for a few seconds and then suddenly, and raucously, inhale. Apparently, mere snoring pales in comparison. The Hospital Sleep Team kindly supplied me with a breathing mask. It's a mask you wear at night that pumps air into the nose and mouth, alleviating the sleep apnoea, not to mention snoring. My wife is very keen on it. I find it very intrusive. It's like having an octopus attached to your face. I feel as though I'm an extra in 'Alien', waiting for Sigourney Weaver to despatch the offending appendage from my face. To add to the delight, sometimes during the night, a leak in the mask can occur, resulting in a loud raspberry sound, as air vibrates the rubber against your face.

And then there are mosquitoes. They don't seem to bother my wife who insists on having the windows open. They sure zero in on me, and seem to make a beeline for my ear, at which I slap in a futile attempt to squash the assailant. And there are other disturbances. I've been trying meditation at bedtime to set myself up on the path of a sound sleep all night long. This seems to work instantly, until I wake up to hear the guided meditation still emanating from my phone. It no longer sounds relaxing, just downright creepy!

This week, the temperature's forecast to drop. Southerlies are on the way. While I love summer, I'm looking forward to cooler nights and a hunkering down to a sound sleep.

Jonny Wilkinson is the CEO of Tiaho Trust - Disability A Matter of Perception. A Whangarei based disability advocacy organisation.