Social

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A TRUE STORY

PART ONE

The muscles in my fingers were tired from scrolling. I was lying beneath thick covers in the comfort of my bed, holding my phone a few inches from my face in an otherwise-dark room. Blue light is known to cause some insomnia, but I never have trouble sleeping. So I kept scrolling. As I recollect on this moment, I cannot remember a single image or video I saw. None of it was memorable or frankly, worth my time. But I kept scrolling.

I've never been one of those teens who obsessively checks their likes and followers. Never. But the notion of viewing new content every half-second with a simple flick of the finger was far too irresistible. And admittedly, a comment or like did provide a dopamine hit that made me feel like Instagram was giving me some valid form of connectedness. But I knew it really wasn't.

Why am I still scrolling? The content was hardly visible through my eyes, which were watery from pure exhaustion. *It's gonna be really hard getting out of bed tomorrow. Is it worth losing an hour or so of sleep for this?*

This night was one of the first times I became conscious of my behavior. Yet it did not stop me. I continued scrolling. Some posts would show me a bit of interesting news, that I likely could have found out elsewhere. Some would show a comedic sketch, or a funny video, and I would respond with a slight exhalation from the nose before scrolling on and forgetting about it. Some would show a friend or relative, and I would leave a 'like' to indicate that I enjoyed whatever image they had shared. But, as I said, not a single image resonated with me. I was scrolling and liking with no purpose. I received nothing from it, other than a groggy morning of regret.

I was not happy with myself.

PART TWO

After the hundredth… or maybe *two hundredth* night of my life that I chose to spend scrolling aimlessly, I awoke to an alarm. I was angered by the sound, and angry that I had to get up at all. As I stood in the shower, I grumbled internally about the day ahead.

I have a fairly easy life, and there was certainly nothing approaching that day worth a grumble. But for whatever reason, I was tired physically and mentally. Why would that be? Oh yeah, my scrolling marathon from the previous night.

I was fed up with this vicious cycle. I emerged from the bathroom, my hair still dripping with water, and I grabbed my phone from my bedside table. I unlocked it, and went to my "Social Media" app folder.

Then I deleted Instagram.

Then I deleted Twitter.

Then I deleted the others.

Then I spent the remainder of the morning pulling out my phone and tapping my thumb in the area where the Instagram app icon once lived. That was confirmation of what I had previously denied. I never used Instagram purposefully. I opened it and scrolled out of force of habit.

In that seeming casually, but honestly triumphant moment, I cleansed my daily routine of an addictive substance that had been stealing my most valuable asset from me. *Time.*

PART THREE

I received an abundance of heartfelt comments on my post.

I had put together a collection of images of me and my dog from his last few days before passing away. Dealing with his sickness and spending time with him created a week that was both mentally draining and also full of sweetness and furry cuddles. At the end of it all, I was rather hesitant to share anything about Snowball's death on social media. I didn't want to do him a disservice by trying to get online attention or anything of the sort from his passing. But I ultimately decided that was not my true intention. I wanted to share with my friends, family members, and schoolmates about the wonderful dog who had been my friend for ten years. It was as simple as that.

I teared up while writing the caption. I needed a hug from my parents after posting it. But I was happy with my decision, because people showed so much support. Not just empty sympathy or meaningless comments. They felt genuine. I believe if social media can accomplish one goal, it is to create a place where memories can be shared and expressed in a way that cannot be done in real life.

Months earlier, I had made the "power move" of deleting social media from my phone. But I kept it on my iPad. I maintain a way of using these intricate tools for necessary reasons, but I have eliminated the habit of pulling out my phone and checking Instagram habitually.

Ultimately, mental health controls all. Including one's physical health. Social media, like any drug, can alter your mind and memories if used improperly or in excess. But when used for its true purpose, social media can create bonds and be used for self-expression in powerful ways.