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The most meaningful moment of my day

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Writers share about the most meaningful moments in their day
- Some treasure the morning quiet outside in their yards
- "I feel most myself between the having done and having to do again"
- One writer enjoys the time she spends counting her blessings at end of day

(REAL SIMPLE) -- From early morning to the last hours of the evening: 12 writers share the times they treasure most.

4 a.m.

Edwidge Danticat

Author, "Breath, Eyes, Memory" and "Brother, I'm Dying"

When I was a girl growing up in Haiti, I would occasionally go to ambulant prayer meetings, called kowòts, with my aunts. We would head out before dawn, wearing white dresses with our heads tightly wrapped in matching handkerchiefs.

Often we would carry flashlights to light our way while singing loudly to alert others to join us. In the usually lively and rambunctious neighborhood where we lived, just being able to hear our voices echo in the silence was divine.

As we walked along, our numbers would grow until there were about 20 or 25 of us, all sentinels for God. Occasionally people would curse us or throw buckets of water at us because we were disturbing their sleep, but even that seemed worthwhile as we watched the sun rise and the air lighten from dark to gray to crystal light.

[Real Simple: How I transformed my mornings](#)

I am no longer an early riser. Rather, I am a late sleeper. I have two small daughters, and I often begin my work -- writing -- when they are safely tucked in bed, joining them for a few hours of sleep, right around 4 a.m. This remains my favorite moment of the day.

Every morning, before I climb in to snuggle a bit with my husband or daughters or sometimes everyone together, I say a simple kowòt prayer: God grant me many more mornings, so that I might grow old with the ones I love.

6:30 a.m.

Rick Moody

Author, "The Diviners," "Garden State" and "The Ice Storm"

Home delivery of the newspaper may be considered one of civilized society's great innovations, but I don't see it that way. I started going out for the paper every day in my 20s because I came from news-obsessed people and because I was too broke for home delivery.

After a while, I was hooked. Turns out that being up at 6:30 and venturing onto the unpopulated streets for the paper (and to get my wife a muffin for breakfast) is now one of my happiest responsibilities. My mind is clear; I am full of feeling; I get a lot of ideas for things I want to write.

Even if it's raining, there's something sublime about slowing the day down to chat up the guy at the newsstand. Do I worry about the fate of newspapers in the Internet era? You bet. It's not the same if you can just punch it up on a screen.

[Real Simple: 10 ways to be happier](#)

After sunrise

Roxana Robinson**Author, "Cost" and "This Is My Daughter"**

I like to take my coffee and go outside, first thing, to see what has happened during the night. I step onto the back porch. The air is fresh and cool. Now, in the fall, it smells of dampness: The woods are turning dark and quiet. Autumn is arriving; there is a movement toward silence. The leaves in the woods are underfoot now, slippery, rotting. They've become nourishment.

I stand looking. There is mist at the end of the meadow, and a fine, tiny curl of steam rising from my coffee. This is the moment I want to be in. I stand holding my mug, looking out over the meadow. Sometimes there's a wild turkey stalking across it -- awkward, arrogant. Sometimes there is just the wind, shifting the dry stalks of the grasses, moving the last leaves in the woods. I breathe in the cool, damp air. Everything is poised. The day is about to begin.

[Real Simple: How to worry less](#)

After school drop-off**Rebecca Barry****Author, "Later, at the Bar"**

It may be that a truly disciplined person gets up and goes directly to work, but I've accepted that I'm not that kind of person. So after the kids go to school, I give myself an hour each morning to head down to the coffee shop and gossip.

I have always loved this part of the day. When I was single and child-free, I went to a bar every day at 5 p.m. to hear what was going on: how so-and-so set his own house on fire; that roommate X and Y got into a fistfight because X left town for the weekend and hid the TV remote to spite Y; and so on.

Now it's morning at the coffee shop, where I gather the details worth knowing about the fight that happened in the building across the street (a futon was thrown down the stairs; a television landed in the sink). It's where I run into my neighbors. It's where I hear about people's spouses (current and former), jobs, and children. It's where I talk about my family and get leads on work.

Once I spoke with an anthropologist who told me that while gossiping often has a negative connotation, most of us use it simply to connect with one another. I always loved this idea, and so I cherish that hour, when I enjoy the small things that make the world a nice place to live -- good coffee, a cozy place to sit, and listening to other people's business.

10:30 a.m.**Monique Truong****Author, "The Book of Salt"**

I am a late riser. I have my first cup of coffee around 10:30 in the morning. Then I do what my husband and I jokingly refer to as "walking the grounds." In our small backyard in Brooklyn, we have squeezed a fig tree, several citrus trees, a variety of herbs, and a couple of pots of geraniums and ivy. I inspect every little thing that has sprouted, bloomed, and wilted, especially now that autumn is in full tilt.

My husband does the same thing before he goes off to work, long before I am awake. We call each other during the day to compare notes. We talk about the one lime that has survived the hourly squirrel attacks. (Brooklyn squirrels are no joke.) Or how the figs have ripened overnight, turning yellow and almost obscenely bloated.

Of course, our modest backyard is not worthy of the term "the grounds" (I think of a country estate or a villa), but somehow that phrase reminds me of the joy of being a caretaker, a constant companion to these plants. Though, perhaps, the joy is also in the sharing of this small piece of the earth with my own constant companion.

Noon**Lily Tuck****Author, "The News From Paraguay" and "Woman of Rome"**

All my writing life, I have said that I don't go out for lunch -- or at least not unless I am having lunch with my editor, my agent, a long-lost friend who is in town from, say, Australia for only that day, etc., etc.

My day goes something like this: I get up, have coffee, read the paper, go to my yoga class, return home -- on the way, I pick up a sandwich, this is important! -- go to my desk, and start to work.

Well, perhaps, I don't really start to work: I read e-mails, send e-mails, go to my favorite blogs, check eBay, make a few phone calls. All of a sudden, I look at my watch and it is noon and lunchtime! I go get the aforementioned sandwich and put it on a plate on a tray with a glass of soda water and bring it back to my desk.

I eat my lunch. The reason the sandwich is so important and such a meaningful part of my day is that it, in fact, marks and divides the day. After lunch, it is time for me to stop procrastinating and actually go to work and write. And most days, I do.

3 p.m.**Amy Bloom****Author, "Away" and the forthcoming "Where the God of Love Hangs Out"**

Three o'clock is naptime. It has been naptime for 50 years. Back in elementary school, by the time the bell rang, I could hardly keep my eyes open. Often I shuffled home until I came to a big and bushy hedge. I crawled in and woke up 20 minutes later, with the edge of a book poking me in the cheek and otherwise completely refreshed.

I love three o'clock's inexorable pull. I have refused to succumb from time to time. When I was a pregnant psychotherapist, I would dig my nails into my neck, trying to stay awake long enough to stretch out on the couch for 10 minutes between 3:50 and 4. I have managed to postpone my nap during job interviews and marriage proposals; nothing else interferes.

My nap is a forceful, accomplished lover, for whom I have bought, over the years, a few appreciative tokens (a mammoth couch, an indestructible blanket). I submit; I wallow; I revel in what's coming. When this hour rolls around, I put down my work and open my arms to Hypnos and his handsome sons, Morpheus and Phantasus not ones to say no to a nap.

6 p.m.

Geraldine Brooks

Author, "March" and "People of the Book"

I love the moment when we all pull up our chairs and sit down to dinner. Most nights, if it's just the five of us, we eat around the kitchen table, so there are a few minutes of transition between the flurry at the stove and the clatter of tableware and the passage of dishes across the room. Then we all take a deep breath.

Last year, we brought our son, then age 5, home from Ethiopia. He had been raised to chant a lovely Amharic blessing before meals, expressing thanks for the food, for the hands that made the food, and the hope that those who do not have food will somehow be nourished. Though he gradually stopped wanting to say that blessing, we have kept the essence of the tradition and always take a moment to settle, quieten, and be grateful.

6:30 p.m.

Ann Hood

Author, "The Knitting Circle" and "Comfort"

The day begins, too early and too fast: my 5-year-old awake before the alarm; Steve from "Blue's Clues" on the living-room TV singing louder than even "Morning Jo"e on the kitchen one; coffee slurped; a newspaper I will not get to read before I have to drag my 16-year-old out of bed, make lunches, find clean socks, sign permission slips, drive kids to school in opposite directions, get back home to e-mails, deadlines, phones -- home and cell -- already ringing, a repairman (cable, refrigerator, roof) waiting, and me struggling to find time to complete my actual work before I need to pick up kids and drive them to lessons, the e-mails dinging even while I buy groceries, retrieve kids, cook, endure Steve from "Blue's Clues" singing all over again.

Until, finally, it is 6:30. Above all that din, I hear the sound of my husband's key in the lock. The hurrying, the driving, the fixing, all of it worthwhile for this moment: a kiss hello, a drink, the sharing of what has happened in our hours apart.

8:30 p.m.

Jonathan Safran Foer

Author, "Everything Is Illuminated," "Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close", and the forthcoming "Eating Animals"

Every day there comes an in-between moment, after things have ended and before they've begun again. For two hours, I count the minutes backward until my children fall asleep. And then, in this in-between moment -- while reading a book or paying a bill -- I inevitably find myself wanting them to wake up. (Sometimes, after having spent a century easing them into unconsciousness, I'll even go back in and check on them, with the secret hope of "accidentally" waking them.)

This is my most deeply felt in-between moment, but not the only one I experience in the course of the day. I spend hours staring at my blank screen wanting only to turn it off (or worse). And then -- while cooking dinner or changing a lightbulb -- I become anxious to get back to the work I was so recently anxious to escape.

Come 8:30 p.m. I'm exhausted: tired of walking up stairs, speaking into telephones, debating inconsequential things with myself. The relief of being done with it all washes over me but is mixed with the anticipation of tomorrow's stairs, phones, and thoughts. And walking the dog I had just bemoaned having to take on her evening walk. And pruning the plant I just considered digging up. I feel most myself between the having done and having to do again.

The Kids' Bedtime

Ayelet Waldman

Author, "Bad Mother" and "Love and Other Impossible Pursuits"

Of my four children, 8-year-old Rosie loves books and stories the most. She remembers whether "Percy the Polar Bear's" pal is named Aurora or Andrea; she remembers every twist and turn in the complicated Norse myths. She is the one who can recount with a near compulsive exactitude the plots of every one of the nonsense stories I have made up for her.

All she has ever wanted to do is read. And, of course, because fate can be cruel, she is dyslexic. Mildly, true -- but, still, reading for Rosie has come very slowly. It has involved tutors and intensive programs, and boxes of sight words and all sorts of things designed to sap all

pleasure from books and the written word.

At night, when I curl up next to Rosie and we read from a book, alternating paragraphs, her generally confident trill turned halting and tentative, I ache with both sadness and admiration for this small girl, who will never give up until she can read her own (and perhaps write her own) stories and books. Those 20 minutes of pain and joy are the highlight of my day.

Late at Night
Monica Bhide
Author, "Modern Spice"

Most nights I make a list of things I'm grateful for in my head. I don't mean a list of abstractions like: thanks for the moon and the stars. I mean a list of real gifts like: thanks for making sure my husband got to the doctor's appointment on time; thanks for giving me the chance to appreciate a good piece of music; thank you for allowing me the opportunity to be able to cook a delicious dish today; thanks for the fact that I had ointment available to aid my kiddo when he scraped his knee again.


I started this ritual on the advice of a friend, who recommended it as an antidote for restless nights. Honestly, I had my doubts that this practice would work. Aren't effective solutions supposed to be complicated?

It did work. This reflective, almost meditative, nightly ritual soothes my spirit, centers my mind, makes me feel so light -- and so much happier about my life, my work, the world. It now often reminds me of an old prayer: Count your blessings, name them one by one. And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.

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