

On her own, Sarah had written an autobiography about her life with severe morning sleep inertia (SI) before treatment, and then after treatment with its lasting positive impact on her subsequent life. An abridged version of this autobiography was contained in a book,* which will be presented below with further editing. (The publisher reverted its rights to the book to Carlos H. Schenck [CHS] as author, allowing further use by CHS without restriction).

Sarah and her mother also agreed to share their story in person when they were interviewed by CHS at the session “Treatment of Sleep Drunkenness” during the 8th Annual Upper Midwest Sleep Society Meeting, Bloomington, Minnesota, October 2, 1998.

Finally, after reading Sarah’s Story, consider how for more than 20 years of follow-up appointments leading to our recent 28 year follow-up appointment, there was hardly any talk about Sarah’s morning SI, just a brief discussion about the prescription renewals for its ongoing control (i.e. bedtime bupropion-xl for the work week, and bedtime bupropion-sr for weekends). It was a given between us that treatment continued to be fully effective. At our yearly appointments, we discussed any pertinent medical and mental health updates, along with her work as a dog groomer, and her family and personal life.

* Schenck CH. Chapter 7: Confusional Arousals and the Crush of Severe Morning Sleep Inertia [“Sarah’s Story”, pages 86-93]. In: Schenck CH. Sleep: The Mysteries, The Problems, And the Solutions. Avery/Penguin Press: New York, New York, 2007 (March). (ISBN 978-1-58333-270-2). [[Hardcover](#)]

* Schenck CH. Chapter 7: Confusional Arousals and the Crush of Severe Morning Sleep Inertia [“Sarah’s Story”, pages 86-93]. In: Schenck, C.H. Sleep: A Groundbreaking Guide To The Mysteries, The Problems And The Solutions (Learn How To Overcome Insomnia, Restless Legs Syndrome, Sleep Apnea, Sleepwalking, Night Terrors, Sleep-Related Eating Disorder, Sexsomnia, And More). Avery/Penguin Press: New York, New York, 2008 (March). (ISBN 978-1-58333-301-3). [[Paperback](#)]

Sarah's Story (autobiography)

Highlights

"I never would have guessed in my wildest dreams that my life would change just by opening the Yellow Pages and looking up the word *sleep*."

"Today I live a normal life."

"I am able to wake up for my kids if they have a bad dream."

"I am able to get to work on time."

"I am a normal person at last."

Extreme urge to stay asleep

As a young child, my parents couldn't get me fully awake, no matter what they tried. I would sleep really late on weekends, and in the summers. The only reason I didn't during the school year is because of my amazing parents. My dad worked a lot, so my mother is the one who had to deal with most of it. If I could change anything in my life, it would be to change what I put my poor parents through.

If I would have had any other set of parents, I would have for sure been an abused child. I really can't believe that they stuck it out for all of those years and never gave up. There is only so much a person can take before giving up, even if it is giving up on your own child.

On school days they could not give up, they HAD to get me to school. Even in elementary school, it was a fight every single day between my mom and the monster she would have to face every morning while trying to wake me up. But my high school

years were much worse. She would start waking me up long before she should have had to. She would start by coming downstairs to my room, sit on the edge of my bed and say my name over and over: "Sarah, Sarah, it's time to get up, Sarah, Sarah, Sarah." On and on. I bet she would say my name a good 30 times before I would even realize she was there and be able to give her any type of response at all. I might have groaned or moved, but I was still out cold. This would go on for a while and she would get louder and louder. Sometimes I could hear her doing this, but it was as if I were in a coma, not being able to open my eyes or talk, no matter how hard I would try.

It was exhausting to me to try so hard to respond to her that by the time I would be able to say anything, I would yell "I AM UP!!!" Now if any normal person would yell like that, I don't think there is any way they would be able to go back to sleep, but 5 seconds later, I was out like a light. Right back into that deep, deep sleep, and she would have to start all over again. "Sarah, Sarah, Sarah....." I don't think anyone has had their name said to them as many times as I have had mine said to me.

My bed was like a drug

When she would finally get me out of bed, the whole house--and I'm sure the whole neighborhood--knew it. I'd fly out of bed, yell at her that I was awake, storm around the room, throw things or whatever. I hated her, I hated mornings, I hated my life, I wanted to die. I would have her convinced that I was awake and going to stay up, so she would leave. But the second she was gone, I was back in bed and back to sleep. My mom talks about how she would sit at the top of the stairs crying because of what she had to

go through. She would then start all over again. The more she did it, the more mean I would get. When I would come to again, I would feel my blood boil, and go on rampage after rampage. I thank God that I never hurt her during one of these mornings of pure Hell that I put her through. She would calmly walk out of my room, knowing full well that she would most likely have to come back and wake me up again.

I ended up quitting school and going to an alternative school where I only had to go once a week and pick up my work so I could work independently at home. I got pregnant at the age of 17, when I was still working part time as a waitress and going to school. I had the baby and decided to keep him. I promised my parents that I would move out and raise him on my own. I'm sure this made my parents worry, wondering how I would wake up with the baby. Even at first when I was still living at home, I would have to sleep with my mother with the baby in her room, so she could wake me up to feed and change him, because I wouldn't hear him. It must have killed her to watch us move out, knowing that I wouldn't wake up with my baby.

Life of shame

I would go to bed at 9:00 PM, and wake up feeling crabby at about 9:00 AM, with my baby. I would go back to bed as soon as I could get him back to sleep. I always bragged about what a good baby he was, and how he slept through the night at such a young age. But in reality, I'm sure he woke up and cried for long periods at a time and I just slept through it. I do remember hearing him many times and not being able to get to him. I would think about this when I would finally get up with him the next day and

see the happiest baby in the world. Hungry and soaked to the bone, but happy nevertheless. I know the reason he was always so happy was because he was just so thankful that his mom finally got up for him. When I met Shane, who would become my husband, he would do everything in his power to wake me up before he would go to work every day. We had a friend living with us who worked with Shane. While one was in the shower the other one would say my name over and over and over. I was so ashamed of myself. My mother finally made me give her a key to my apartment after she had time and time again pounded on my door, hearing my baby crying and my never waking up for any of it, even though at one time I had 6 alarm clocks in my room.

I got my GED and went to pet grooming school. This was a real tough time for me. I would wake up at noon or later and call the school giving them some lame excuse as to why I wasn't there. I ended up going part-time in the evenings, so it took me twice as long to finish school. I got pregnant again, so now I had another baby who was going to be neglected when Shane wasn't there to take care of him.

Shane said I was a good person and mother when I was awake, but would turn into Satan when I was waking up. We separated shortly after we were married for a year. The boys were 1 and 3 years old at the time. I think this was the toughest time of all dealing with my sleep problem, or as everyone else put it, "my laziness."

I made two very special friends during this time period and if it weren't for them and my mother I know my kids would have been taken away from me by social services. They

would do whatever they needed to do to make sure my boys would have someone there as much as they could. But I would get lectured about how I needed to take care of my boys and grow up and become a mother to them. I was so ashamed of myself.

Addicted to sleep

My bed was like a drug. I would do anything to get back to it if I was forced to leave it. I wouldn't care who got in my way, who got hurt in the process, or who I had become during those episodes. When I was about 12, my parents tried to get help for me, but the doctor couldn't figure it out, so nothing was ever done about it. When I was about 21, another doctor told me to drink 8 glasses of water before I went to bed, that way I would have to get up to use the bathroom. It didn't work--and I wet the bed at the age of 21.

I don't ever remember waking up in a good mood, but I remember waking up to happy kids, and looking at them like they were horrible for interrupting my sleep. One of my friends said that I needed to get help. She didn't sugarcoat anything. I was going to lose everything if something didn't change.

Well, I would have never guessed in my wildest dreams that my life would change just by opening the Yellow Pages and looking up the word *sleep*.

Evaluation at the sleep center and response to treatment

It was the beginning of my new life. None of us had ever dreamed that there was a doctor who would have been able to help me, much less tough it out and figure out my problem and find a treatment. I went through a lot of testing ordered by Dr Schenck. He really did care and stuck it out until I was able to live a normal life.

I will never forget the first night on medication (long-acting methylphenidate). I was so excited to go to bed to see if it actually worked, but in the back of my mind I had a lot of doubt. The first night was the happiest night of my whole entire life. During that night I woke up 4 or 5 times for no reason. Nothing woke me, I just woke up. That next morning was a lot different. I felt confused, alone, scared, bored, happy, and maybe a little shocked. I had most likely NEVER been awake before my boys. I didn't know how they would react to me being there as soon as they woke up. I woke up to a clean house. I was happy and calm, not mad and hysterical. I realized that I had never sat in the morning sun in my house before. It was quiet. I didn't know what to do with myself, I really felt alone. It was too early to call my mom and tell her the good news. I actually thought that I wasn't going to like this. How did people wake up at that time and stay sane? What did they do to keep themselves busy? How boring, I thought it was.

The boys got up and I did something that I hadn't done in a long time. I made them breakfast. Time passed and it didn't take long for the bad feelings to go away. Now, I like to wake up early because there isn't enough time in a day.

Today I live a normal life, I am able to wake up at the first buzz of the alarm clock and I have the volume turned way down low. I am able to wake up for my kids if they have a bad dream, I am able to get to work on time, I am a normal person at last.

I am now a morning person and go to bed usually no later than 10 or 11. I wake up about 7:00 AM, put my shoes on right away and can't sit still till I go to bed at night.

I want to thank GOD for giving me all of these people. My Mom, for being the strongest woman on Earth, Shane, my Dad, and my brother, for never giving up on me. Tina for being such a good Mom to my boys and to me, and Dr. Schenck for giving me a new life and for always showing me that he really cared. My Mom thanks you too! But most of all, my boys, for their unconditional love.