

## Surrendering the Bennies

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About seven years ago, my then beau and I stayed at a B & B in upstate New York. We decided one morning to conquer our fear of strangers and small talk, and sit at the same breakfast table as another couple, who I'll refer to as Burt and Bobbie. Burt and Bobbie were friendly and talkative, and within minutes we knew all about their lives as flight attendants. Apparently, it was grueling. If they got home after work, it was usually at different hours from one another and they suffered from lack of sleep and time together. They were sick a lot. They didn't have any hobbies but they were both creative and wanted them. They were on a four day vacation which they were loathed to end, only to return to two months of hardly seeing each other at all.

Finally, the seemingly endless list of their complaints about their lifestyle baited my partner to ask, "Have you ever thought of doing something else?" To which Bobbie replied, "We would, if it weren't for *the bennies*."

My partner and I looked quizzically at each other. Bobbie explained that "the bennies," or benefits, of the job were the cream of the crop -- the best health insurance (even dental!), low-to-no cost flights anywhere in the world and great overtime pay. Burt and Bobbie were working for bennies that they hardly had the time to enjoy. I never forgot the heavy feeling that descended when I left the table and realized how their predicament was a perfect reflection of how our false and fear-based notions of security run our lives and steal our freedom and self-esteem.

Last year, I encountered love-at-first sight with a sculptor on the other coast. When he pursued me, I was conflicted as to whether or not I should resist the complication of it all, or to "drop my fear" and follow my heart. I followed my heart and flew with it to a romantic getaway in the middle of the country to get to know him better. He was attractive, sensitive, playful and funny. Our bodies melted into one another. We felt we had found each other.

After months of an ecstatic but tortured long-distance "vacation relation," our lives finally came together and he moved in with me. Like most people when they first live with someone, I got a different view of the person. Although we prepared for that, I didn't expect the difference would be so drastic. Rather than regale you with the details, suffice it to say, I began having insomnia. And in my insomniac daydreams, I fantasized about my future with this man, and saw images of me as an exhausted mother of two: one, a crying infant, and the other, him, as a teenage boy, eating in front of the TV.

I wasn't panicking every moment. There was still love, play and closeness, but there wasn't much clear communication. Discussing my concerns, fears and feelings with him was usually disastrous, and only confirmed that this self-proclaimed Peter Pan (yes, those were his words) had no intention of growing up. Now I know we all have young parts and are psychologically stuck at certain ages, and I am not an evolved angel or the easiest person to live with either, so I hung in there with it. In fact, I did more than just hang in. I vowed to become Tolerance herself. Instead of trying to wear down his stubborn resistance to our getting help, I was going to help myself. I adopted the "spiritually correct" philosophy that my reactions to his behavior were my issues and my work and I was going to heal. I was living constantly at my edge, exhausted, but determined to hold on -- after all, I was growing and stretching, and for the warm, adoring body in my house, it was worth it!

But my increasing insomnia was a clue that deep down, I knew that it didn't have to be THIS much work. It became clear that for all my "surrendering" to what was going on, my complaints were not going away, and they probably never would. No matter how hard I tried to stuff them,

grow beyond them, etc., they were leaking into those insomniac daydreams of a life of compromise, disappointment and resentment. In fact, if a stranger sat down next to me at a table and asked me how my relationship was going, I would have morphed into Burt and Bobbie on the spot.

And then, in one of my wee-hours-of-the-morning contemplations, I realized *I* was living for the *bennies*: The biggest package of bennies to come along in a while. I had a warm hug and kiss to come home to. I had a Friday night date, great sex, a movie partner, lots of laughs, devotion, and adoration. And our kids would be gorgeous. In that moment I also knew that I would rather live life alone, than be shrouded in compromise, burdens and resentments, all for the sake of physical closeness, giggles and a false sense of relationship security. So, even though I am in my mid-thirties with raging, baby-making hormones, I surrendered the bennies, and said farewell to my draining but beloved Pan.

Another dream crumbled and I am coming home to an empty apartment again. The family I want to create now seems so far away. I have an appointment book full of free Friday nights and the vibrator is out of storage. But I have no regrets. I followed my heart courageously the whole way, and I had loads of fun. I met and loved a man who ultimately taught me that I was worth holding out for everything I deserve.