

Non-complainer

A non-complainer is a person who puts up with illness, misfortune, family conflict, even loss of faith, without complaining. Such a person may simply be Stoic North European—as in an Undset novel--of a farm sort we know well in the American upper Midwest. But that is only one species of the breed. A non-complainer can be a pragmatic psychologist who knows that laying a positive spin on things is the best way of making them work out. A non-complainer can even be a pessimist, à la Schopenhauer, for whom the world is indifferent to man, and in fact delights in hearing him complain.

Examples

1 I am a non-complainer. This is not a mark of virtue but of personality. I have always disliked drawing attention to my problems, and so, even in the midst of a bad cold or a fever I am likely to respond 'fine' to the question of how I am. I persist in this habit despite the fact of living constantly with people, like my wife, who 'see right through me.' On the surface, my refusal to complain seems motivated by a desire to spare others trouble, but it is only superficially that; I know what making things easier for others is, and it is not pretending to be fine when I am not. Then is my refusal to complain motivated by a desire to deceive others? Hardly, for I am unperturbed when the 'other' discovers my ruse.

2 A friend of mine has recently been diagnosed with and operated on for prostate cancer. When he discussed this situation with me he was sanguine, restricting himself to an account of symptoms, treatment, stages of recovery, and prognosis. One might almost think he had been talking about someone else. There was even a hint of black humor at the diapers he was now obliged to wear, or at some recent urinary accidents he suffered. We are both literary academics, sensitive to language, and similarly attuned to the modern skeptical world view. Perhaps this is why I heard through his narrative into the terrors he, like many of us, inevitably tries to conjure away by bland reassurance. What, after all, would he have accomplished by laying out before me the anxiety he was made of?