



The 3 H's Humor, Health and Happiness

By Bill Boyer

It has been said that “Laughter is the music of the Soul”. Yet it has an even farther reach; in fact, is beneficial in rectifying the body’s ills.

Stress, even from anxiety, knowingly can cause health problems—and laughter is the best way to cancel the negative factors that can harm your body. Studies have proven that laughing for a minute or two has the same effect as being on an exercise bike for 15 minutes, through release of endorphins. Advantages include lowering your heart rate, blood pressure and blood sugar levels.

The American Cancer Society also recommends this treatment, noting: “The value of humor has been confirmed to the point that many hospitals and ambulatory care centers now have incorporated special rooms where materials—and sometimes people—are there to make people laugh”.

The problem nowadays, though, is that folks are finding less to laugh about. ‘PC’ has placed a number of topics off-limits—though I agree with James Doss in his book *The Night Visitor*: “Political correctness’ is merely the intellectual McCarthyism that’s currently in season”.

It was simpler in earlier times of radio, when nightly broadcasts kept the whole family in stitches! Programs by Red Skelton, Fibber Magee and Molly, Edgar Bergen, Amos and Andy, George Burns and Gracie Allen, Jack Benny, Bob Hope and Abbott and Costello gave the American people humor by the bushels.

Now, with relaxation of morals, much of the supposed humor on television is too edgy. I just wish today’s youth could have grown up at least with “Laugh In” or “The Smothers Brothers”, if not the monologues of Jonathan Winters, Shelley Berman and Bob Newhart. The only comparison I’ve found today was that of George Carlin—and, of course, here

in the Midwest, the incomparable Baxter Black.

Personally, I get a kick out of British humor, and get in a few guffaws through any Benny Hill episode—and particularly the new series titled “Vicious” on the tube. On this continent, Jeff Foxworthy and his cohorts are hilarious; and I am sure, in earlier times, I would have said this about Will Rogers, as I appreciate humorists such as Jon Stewart who tackle topical issues. Humor is found in many forms, though, and during the Second World War, Bill Mauldin in his “Up Front” cartoons raised the spirits of soldiers.

Another earlier entertainer was Mark Twain, whose writings at times injected humorous insights into human nature. One of my favorite passages is found in *Letters to the Earth*, when in a discourse titled “The Damned Human Race”, he has the following summation: “Man is the Reasoning Animal. Such is the claim. I think it is open to dispute. Indeed, my experiments have proven to me that he is the Unreasonable Animal. . . . His record is the fantastic record of a maniac. I consider that the strongest count against his intelligence is the fact that with that record back of him he blandly sets himself up as the head animal of the lot; whereas by his own standards he is the bottom one.

“In truth, man is incurably foolish. Simple things which the other animals easily learn, he is incapable of learning. Among my experiments was this. In an hour I taught a cat and a dog to be friends. I put them in a cage. In another hour I taught them to be friends with a rabbit. In the course of two days I was able to add a fox, a goose, a squirrel and some doves. Finally a monkey. They lived together in peace; even affectionately.

“Next, in another cage I confined an Irish Catholic from Tipperary, and as soon as he seemed tame I added a Scotch Presbyterian from Aberdeen. Next a Turk from Constantinople; a Greek Christian from Crete; An Armenian; a Methodist from the wilds of Arkansas; a Buddhist from China; a Brahman from Benares. Finally, a Salvation Army Colonel from Wapping. Then I stayed away a two whole days. When I came back to note results, the cage of Higher Animals was all right, but in the other there was but a chaos of gory odds and ends of turbans and fezzes and plaids and bones and flesh—not a specimen left alive. These Reasoning Animals had disagreed on a theological detail and carried the matter to a Higher Court”.

Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens) also was noted for commenting: “Suppose you were an idiot. And suppose you were a member of Congress. But I repeat myself”.

We can all aver to chuckling when something tickles our minds; and often it can be a simple incongruity that strikes our funny bone (and don’t I wish that funny bones could be implanted on some of those dour, repressed and uptight people who never seem to smile).

Admittedly, my own sense of humor can at times appear warped, as I find political posturing worthy of a good belly laugh, and catch myself chuckling at the follies and foibles of our fellow citizens. Hilarity arrives in many guises, from pratfalls to expressions, as well as words. I remember laughing at Little Johnny, Rastus and ‘shaggy dog’ jokes; later, Polack jokes took center stage, and then there



was a spate of lawyer jokes. But currently, it is the misplaced intentions of misguided people that I find laughable, simply because they are so ludicrous (and examples follow that I've gleaned from the pages of the 'Only in America' column in The Week magazine).

Consider the comments of protesters on the internet when the Vermont state motto was proposed in Latin, and comments included "Vermont ain't no Latino area". And "This is America, not Mexico". (Seems redundant to state that qualifying for internet usage, should entail passing an IQ test).

Or the City University of New York instructing teachers to stop using "gendered salutations" such as Mr. and Mrs. when addressing students, "to avoid offending those who identify as neither".

How about the student group at the University of California at Irvine voting to remove the American flag from a campus building, to avoid upsetting those who see the flag as a symbol of "colonialism and imperialism". (And don't get me started on the current silliness concerning abolition of the Confederate flag).

And then there is the latest, whereby the Boy Scouts of America leaders have decided to outlaw water-gun fights, as it's not "kind" to shoot with "simulated firearms"—which include potato guns and marshmallow shooters. (I agree with one dissenter, who commented that the scouting organization is turning "boys into a bunch of wusses").

But the corker was the one about the Kansas lawmakers passing a bill that ban welfare recipients from "spending food stamps on cruise ship fares, lingerie shops, theme parks and swimming pools".

Maybe me finding these laughable, just shows that one really has to reach, some times, to find diversions. Seems like some age-old adages should be adapted to read: "Humor is in the eye of the beholder", and "A laugh a day keeps the doctor away".

But I do know for a fact, in consciously lightening your outlook, that the most fun medicine (if you can force yourself to swallow it), and the surest route to happiness (if you don't get sidetracked by pity or anger), is to learn to laugh at one's own self. ■



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