

Make 'Em Laugh (Or Smile?)

Written by Jack Sparacino
Tuesday, 01 May 2018 12:57



This facetious nugget just caught my attention:

"Neighbor Slain"

"Your elderly neighbor was murdered right in front of you in broad daylight. You were cleaning the gutters while wearing a pair of Bluetooth headphones that were tuned to the BBC, listening to measured condemnations from dignified European politicians.

Meanwhile, about thirty feet away, a man wearing a hockey mask used a machete to mince old Mrs. Samuelson to bits as she returned from the store with a bag of parakeet treats. She screamed at the top of her lungs, but no one—including you—heard her. The police knocked on your door to ask if you'd seen anything, but you were inside with the TV on at top volume, shaking your head, so they moved on to the next house."

- Bob Odenkirk, Headlines You May Have Missed, in **The New Yorker**, 4/9/18

My heavens we've come eons since Donald O'Connor executed one of the all-time funniest pieces of musical slapstick when he acrobatically performed "Make 'Em Laugh." The sketch was a landmark in 1952's "Singin' In The Rain," which also starred Gene Kelly and Debby Reynolds. O'Connor's performance was so brilliantly rough and tumble it put the 5'7" lithe phenom, age 27, out of commission for days. But the show must go on, eh? And on it went for him until he died a half century later.

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And then we have our ‘make ‘em laugh’ (*not*) president, a vaudevillian orange twist on some great old days in American levity. Of late, we’ve been served up James Comey’s expose, “A Higher Loyalty.” Like most readers, I’m struck by several passages in particular. As “The New York Times” noted on 4/13: “Comey is what [the great Chicago writer] Saul Bellow called a “first class noticer.” He notices, for instance, the soft white pouches under Trump’s “expressionless blue eyes”. . . and points out that **he never saw**

Trump laugh

—a sign, Comey suspects, of his “deep insecurity, his inability to be vulnerable or to risk himself by appreciating the humor of others, which, on reflection, is really sad in a leader, and a little scary in a president.”

Flipping from Comey to “The Economist” magazine for a moment, consider this:

□□□□ *“In [Trump’s] breaking taboo after taboo he did what many in the base had long wanted to see done and hear said. He is like the ‘psychoplastic’ monsters in David Cronenberg’s horror film, ‘The Brood’: the party’s id made of flesh.”*

James Comey is no psychiatrist, nor am I, but some psychological rendering is tempting with Trump, according to nearly everyone I know. My reading of in-depth bios of famous autocrats and countless pieces on Trump suggests that, arguably, few if any really qualify as seriously mentally ill. Most gravitated through multiple normal vocations. They enjoyed common amusements (e.g., walking, golf), entertaining, lavish art displays, power clothes. And of course being the undisputed center of attention—always. All the while fighting for national greatness and castigating wide swaths of immigrants (Jews, gypsies, Muslims). A prominent psychiatrist recently concluded that rather than demonstrating mental illness – beyond world class narcissism – Trump may simply be a “jerk.” My guess is that most folks on the left would take some exception to that waiver.

Perhaps some other societal factors account for why we elected such an anger-prone paranoiac (no, Obama did not wiretap your building, etc.) to the White House. My first hunch is that there are just too many fuming, frustrated, ‘cant-seem-to-catch-a-break’ Americans around the country. Well, perhaps not in Silicon Valley, where the average salary is nearly a quarter million dollars. Or in Baptist churches, and not just in the south. Singing is just so darned cathartic.

Besides economic woes, I suspect that smart phones contribute to our nation’s patchy misery. Yes, those indispensable little devices that nearly everyone carries around – even on dinner dates. Get a load of this . . . Americans now spend five hours *per day* on average on

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their phones, about as much time as the president reportedly watches Fox for his, uh, news. Eighty-nine per cent check their phones within an hour of waking up. So what? Well, in the 1980s, 20% of Americans said they were often lonely, whereas today it's 40%. How's that for being better connected through social media? 'Hey, don't call me right now, but can I see that picture of the squirrels fighting the cardinal at your bird feeder? Or your Aunt Bonny's boysenberry biscuits?'

Back to happier thoughts. Recently, while paying my electric bill on-line, I had to prove that I was not a robot. Seriously. It took a few tries, but I soon got the hang of it. Also recently, I fell in the Publix parking lot and four nice folks hustled over to help me up and see if I was alright. Alright indeed, perhaps enough to vacation in Costa Rica, which is where approximately 80% of the all the "Wheel of Fortune" trip winners are sent. Maybe there aren't many mosquitos there, as opposed to the 17 million per person around the rest of the world.

Hey we're on a roll. Grumpy voters vs. happy citizens . . . or something.

I've bought two wonderful cars recently from Will Goure at Hilton Head BMW. Forget everything you ever suspected about car dealers, he is outstanding. Polite, thoughtful, hard-working, focused, and he got us exactly what we wanted. I would recommend him anytime and go back again if ever the need arises. Speaking of wheels, there is a lovely dog groomer named Tara Farmer who makes house calls. She features a scissor cut so her work may take a few more seconds but it's perfection. Watching her lovingly work on our girls put a smile on my face.

Want to put a smile on someone else's face without needing scissors? Next time you're getting gas, look for someone driving an old pickup truck, and the older and more decrepit (the truck, naturally) the better. Think of it as something like you could look if you live long enough; in my case, I suspect it's already happened. Sidle over nice 'n easy and say something like, 'hey, nice truck, buddy . . . that baby is a real classic. How many miles you got on 'er?' Watch his smile break out and no, no one has ever acted like I was pulling their leg, no matter how much rust or grime and debris or clutter in the cabin or bed.

Might I suggest that you **not** try a variation on this smart aleck compliment with the parents of unattractive or terribly misbehaving children. It's mean, unfair, not the least bit amusing and you'll look like Allen Funt ran a terrible Candid Camera routine. And don't offer any of them Jolly Rancher candies, either. They taste terrible and may get you run clear out of town . . . maybe in

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a grubby truck.

Let’s just stick with our old friend Donald O’Connor and think of things to “Make ‘Em Laugh.” Look for him on YouTube for inspiration, or just tickle your favorite little niece or nephew on a pretty day. Don’t have any good funny faces in your repertoire? He can help with that, too.