

Humor



I was asked to give a humorous speech several years ago, and my first thought was that I needed to be funny. I presumed the speech should be a comedy routine, but then it hit me. I couldn't do that. I'm not funny. Oh, there have been people who have said, "You're so funny." But only when I was trying to be serious and they misunderstood. So, to be funny in front of a group, they would all have to misunderstand me the same way at the same time, and I think that's a little too much to expect.

After more thought, it occurred to me that laughter and humor aren't necessarily the same thing. Maybe talking about humor rather than trying to be funny would be a better plan. We can laugh at others, but that isn't humor. Humor is the gift of being able to laugh at yourself, but to accept the gift you must first realize who and what you are. Let me give an illustration. Imagine a circle with a dot in the middle and another dot near the edge. The circle is the universe, the first dot is the center of

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the universe, and the second dot is you. There are three things you must understand. There is a universe, it has a center, and you ain't it. It is only when we realize that the world doesn't revolve around us, that we can appreciate humor.

To me, the gift of humor comes wrapped in a package, and that package is a boy. I suppose there is some humor associated with girls as well, but I have no experience. I was a boy myself. I have six sons, and I have been a Scoutmaster for many years. I understand boys. The only thing I know about girls is they are scary. So, I'll stick to boys.

Often, there is humor in what they say. My oldest son came home from kindergarten full of excitement, "I have a joke." We said, "Tell us." He asked, "How do you make a horse run fast?" We asked, "How?" "You don't feed him." Hugh then doubled over with laughter. Was there anything funny? No, but there was humor. You'll be happy to know that eventually we learned how to make a horse fast. The phone rang over thirty years later, and our son was as excited as he was when he told us the joke the first time. He said, "How do you make a horse fast? You don't feed him." Good things come to those who wait!

My second son, when he was in high school, came up with a whole litany of jokes. First, he would get everyone's attention. "OK, I have a joke." What that meant was, "Be quiet, I am the

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center of the universe right now.” Then he would start with a series of jokes. “Ask me if I am a duck. — No.” “What do a grape and a school bus have in common? They are both purple, except for the bus.”

Occasionally, the humor is in what they do. My third son, when he was attending college, went to see the movie *Cheaper by the Dozen*. There is a scene in which the boys of the family are rappelling off the roof, and Ian told us later that the people around him were whispering, “That’s so unrealistic. They wouldn’t do that.” He said he had been thinking, “*De je vu.*” He and his brothers used to rappel out of their bedroom window for fun, but he couldn’t tell his college friends—they would never believe him.

Once, I was talking to a stranger at a local lumber yard and I mentioned where I lived. He said, “Oh you’re the one.” He told me he lived a few blocks away and his son made him drive out of the way to go by our house, “Just to see what the boys are doing.”

One afternoon I came home from work and heard my three-year-old son, Owen, saying, “Hi Dad.” I looked around and finally saw him in a tree about eight feet off the ground. He was dressed in green camouflage with his face blackened, hanging in a rope harness, and holding a toy rifle. His older

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brothers had organized a game of Army with all the boys in the neighborhood, and their mother told them they had to let Owen play. Well, a three-year-old will give away your position, and they couldn't have that. So, they let him be their sniper. He was safe, out of the way, and perfectly happy.

My sons aren't the only boys who have given me the gift of humor. There have been countless Boy Scouts who have blessed me as well. What is it about boys and fire? Glen was a scout in my troop in North Carolina, and he liked fires even more than most boys. Once, he told me that he wanted to teach a fire safety class on a campout; he called it, "Fire Dos and Don'ts." I realized too late that his class was really just, "Fire Don'ts," and I had given him an excuse to do all of the things he usually couldn't get away with. "Scouts, don't ever do this," he would say as he threw white gas on the fire. That was the only time a scout clearly got the better of me.

On one trip, Glen went too far. He and a couple of others snuck away from the group on a campout and started writing words in the grass using white gas and then lighting them. North Carolina isn't as dry as Southern California, and the fire danger wasn't quite as bad as you might think, but someone saw the smoke and a forest service plane flew over to investigate. The boys dove into the brush and thought they were home free until they remembered that what they had written on the hillside, now in

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clear blackened letters was, "Troop 941."

I started a new troop in Simi Valley, and on our first campout the boys were in tents, but I was sleeping in a hammock under the stars. At about 4 AM, I heard a zipper and saw a shadowy form emerging from a tent. I asked if there was anything wrong and Steven said, "No, I just have to go to the bathroom." A few minutes later I realized he was just wandering around the campsite. I asked if he was going back to bed and he said he couldn't sleep. Pretty soon he said, "Mr. Hulse, I'm cold." I told him it was warm in his sleeping bag, but he didn't take the hint. Then he asked, "Can I build a fire?" I desperately wanted him to go to sleep so I could, but I reminded myself that this was his campout, not mine. "Yes, you can build a fire." Then he asked, "Do you have any matches?" I said, "Yes," and then waited in silence. He finally asked, "Can I use them?" I gave him the matches and he started trying to light a fire. His idea of lighting a fire was holding a match under a log and wondering why it wasn't blazing. Soon he asked if I had any more matches. I told him I would give him two matches, but he had better think about how to use them. After he had used the first one, I gave him a little speech. I told him he wasn't going to freeze to death in May in Southern California, but there were times when building a fire might mean the difference between life and death. I told him to imagine that it was really cold and he had only this one last

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match. I asked him, “Now, what are you going to do?” He took on a serious expression and looked into my eyes as he said, “Die.”

Yes, humor is a great gift, and it can only be given with simplicity and innocence. I was tucking my youngest son into bed one night when he was four. I started to leave the room, but paused and looked at him.

Then I said, “Boy, I love you.”

He gave me a puzzled look and said, “Of course, what is there not to love.”