

Laughter saved the human species!

by MARK PAVILONS

?Laughter is the shortest distance between two people.?

Victor Borge didn't know how right he was when he said that.

Charles Dickens noted that nothing in the world is so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good humour.

This truly human quality, one we take for granted, is likely responsible for us being at the top of the food chain.

A simple joke, and the resulting laughter and giggles, uses language skills, symbolism, abstract thinking and social perception.

Few of our peers on earth have those skills. We know that monkeys, dolphins and even elephants have a sense of humour. But can they tell a really good knock-knock joke?

When smiling became a thing among our distant ancestors, it was a sign of submissiveness.

That, in itself, allowed us to extend our lives from the threats of the more dominant of the species.

When our modern species (homo sapiens)?showed up on earth roughly 250,000 years ago, we went through what scientists believe was a rapid, accelerated brain development. The development of language, and the limericks that followed date back some 150,000 years ago.

It's thought that our brains grew because we needed to figure out how to live together in what became society. Mimicking, gesturing and grunting can only go so far. No one found that funny in the least.

As Dickens pointed out, laughter is contagious, so even the lower foreheaded members of our tribe could still get a chuckle out of things and feel like part of the group. Maybe that's where the term ?chuckleheads??originated.

Laughter, according to Spanish scientists Navarro and Marijuan, ?should be considered as a highly efficient tool for inter-individual problem solving and for maintenance of social bonds.?

Wow, all that from watching one of our neighbours hit their head on a low-hanging branch.

Laughter helped our ancestors learn how to talk to one another.

So, my friends, it's only when humankind developed a sense of humour that we excelled. While other species (apes) have remained stagnant for thousands of years, our sense of humour sent us right to the top of the food chain. Some could argue that it's an essential part of our species and, like a good breakfast, it's the best way to start the day.

And humour is an essential part of humanity to this day. Sure, some of us find very little to laugh about these days, but there's always something.

As Shirley MacLaine once said, ?the person who knows how to laugh at himself will never cease to be amused.?

Experts say the first written joke was found on a Sumerian tablet dated 1,900?B.C. It had something to do with a woman farting in her husband's lap. This proves one of the longest standing truths of all time ??arts are funny.

Apparently, laughter is symmetrical ? your guffaw sounds the same forward as it does backward. Yes, someone was paid to research and record such a thing.

Some mammals, like rats, also show ?tickle-induced vocalizations.? There comes a time in every person's life where they fear being tickled to death.

Elephants and dolphins may not vocalize their laughter, but they've been known to play tricks on their human counterparts. This is evidence that the creatures we share our planet with are not dumb at all, and share some of our best qualities.

Laughter is, indeed, the best medicine and this has been proven time and again. Laughing increases your oxygen intake, lowers your heart rate and blood pressure, and boosts your immune system. So, toss away those pills and act silly, for at least 15 minutes a day!

The only challenge is refining that all-empowering sense of humour. It's a learned behaviour and it's not innate like smiling.

Therefore, the funny bone is one of the most important parts of the human body. Perhaps our kids should be taught Laughter 101 in pre-school, so when they enter Grade 1 they're well-armed to defend themselves with some quick one-liners.

What's more, laughter itself is one of Nature's best ?home remedies.?

Laughter reduces the level of stress hormones like cortisol, epinephrine (adrenaline), dopamine, and growth hormone. It also increases the level of health-enhancing hormones, like endorphins. Laughter increases the number of antibody-producing cells and enhances the effectiveness of T cells. By turning to laughter we become stronger.

The Mayo Clinic notes that laughter isn't just a quick pick-me-up, but has long-term effects. Positive thoughts (humour) can actually release neuropeptides that help fight stress and potentially more-serious illnesses.

Laughter can relieve pain, make it easier to cope, improves your mood and helps you connect with other people, just like our cave-dwelling ancestors.

I have also read that if you're in a really bad mood, and sitting all alone, try smiling. This simple act also releases the hormones and gets you out of your funk much quicker.

And it's spreading, my friends. I've heard someone has created ?Laughter Yoga.?? Now that's a pose I can handle!

There are times when my internal funny bone is set off, and I just giggle, then laugh out loud at what's going on in my head. My family members share the concerned look that Dad has lost it, but I?just laugh it off.

If you want to crack up in stitches, laugh your head off, go ahead. I hope you have the last laugh and are laughing all the way to the bank.

I encourage everyone to roll in the aisles and contrary to popular belief, life IS a laughing matter.

If you're not sure whether to laugh or cry, choose the former.