

## Smiles and chuckles are amazing gifts to share

by MARK PAVILONS

Congratulations if you're reading this! It means you're alive and if that's not reason enough to smile, I don't know what is!

I'm smiling as I write this.

As stressful as the world is at times, I make it a point to laugh several times a day. It's a known fact that daily bouts of laughter decrease stress hormones and increase immune cells and infection-fighting antibodies. The bottom line is you feel good when you laugh and your body thanks you!

This is part of my physical fitness regime! I find it much more pleasing than doing sit-ups or jumping jacks. Give me a huge dose of daily laughter anytime.

Lately, given the circumstances, we've been given only two options in our daily living ? to laugh or to cry. I choose chuckles.

Even Shakespeare believed the wrinkles (laugh lines) were well worth it.

It's a weapon in our arsenal to combat everything from fear, anxiety, depression, frustration and anger.

It's also unique to our species. While some animals have been known to crack a smile, it's not proven that they laugh. But I have a sneaking suspicion that dolphins have a sense of humour.

That's really interesting if you think about it. In all of creation and the massive design of all things in the universe, we were given the ability to smile and laugh. There's no real practical use for it, and it does little in terms of survival of the fittest.

But laugh I will, all the way to my final resting spot.

At times, I think laughter is the only thing that keeps me going. It's fuel for my tank. I'd like to think my weird sense of humour and constant laughter is a bit of a bright light for others around me. We all know laughter can be contagious.

And yes, I have some rather well exercised lines around the edges of my mouth. Well worn, indeed.

Lately, I've burst out laughing and keep it going for several seconds, to the point of watery eyes. My better half looks at me with eyebrows raised, but refrains from pointing out how weird I am. Well, almost always refrains.

I am just letting go, letting loose and opening up. Maybe the past year has caused pressure in my corked bottle and it's time to burst.

I find laughter to be a bit of a roller coaster ? the faster it goes and rolls, and more enjoyable it is. If we could only bottle the stuff!

As soon as the vision of newborns improves, around 6-8 weeks, smiles develop. It's a response to seeing mom and dad making those goofy, but reassuring faces.

Most babies will start laughing around three or four months. They respond to touches, funny noises and games.

It's so weird when you think about this evolution. Newborns are helpless. They can't survive on their own. Their lives consist of eating and pooping.

And yet, for some mysterious reason, they have the inherent ability to smile and laugh. Some researchers believe it's inherent and not learned behaviour. Cool.

I don't always understand cat videos on the internet, but I can watch babies laughing all day long.

Smiles and laughter do seem to be dead give-aways for human emotions. They're signals, not just between fellow humans, but to the whole planet. They say talking to plants helps them grow (likely due to carbon dioxide emissions), so imagine what laughter does.

My dogs always respond when they see me smiling. They will begin to wag and often get up and approach me, without a single word being spoken. They also "huff" when playing or having a good time. I find that strange, yet comforting. Maybe they do, too.

I recently discovered, via videos on the internet, that some animals display a sense of humour. I've seen an elephant purposely take and hide a woman's hat. A dog and turtle were actually playing with a ball in someone's back yard. Scientists have measured laughter in rats, especially when tickled. Chimps and bonobos, our closest relatives, boast the most laughter-like kind of panting.

So, my fellow human beings on Planet Earth, one could extrapolate from this that laughter is a constant in our universe! Yes, I know that's quite a revelation. What if laughter and a sense of humour are innate, deep-rooted and even genetic? Then deep space, and our fellow creatures in the universe are laughing at us right now!

OMG, can you imagine an alien version of The Three Stooges? I'm smiling just thinking about it.

Maybe it's a yin and yang kinda thing opposing and complementary cosmic energy. It's all about balance. If we have pain, suffering and dread, why not balance it all out with joy, happiness, laughter and slapstick?

Many of us human specimens look for the deeper meanings in all things. We unravel the complex, trying to decipher weird cosmic forces. We create over-the-top mathematical formulas and space-time theories.

What if it all comes down to that proverbial "kick me" sign on the back? What if our entire reality is contingent on creating laughter, and sending these sound waves out into space?

God gave us many things and our sense of humour is one of his most precious gifts. Mother Teresa said peace begins with a smile.

Use it daily, and use it often. It will do you a world of good!

And take some of Roy T. Bennett's advice: "Spend your life with people who make you smile, laugh, and feel loved."