

THE LACK OF A SENSE OF HUMOR IN YOUNGER GENERATIONS

An essay by Richard Thielmann

We recognize there are certain people who have an innate sense of humor; they are just naturally funny, in their life perspectives and comments. Some of those people have actually honed that affinity for humor to professional skill, a la Jerry Seinfeld, Steve Martin, Chris Rock, etc. What we of older generations have noticed is that young people have scant Sense of Humor. This is not merely generational fuddy-duddiness. It is real, as testified to by Seinfeld, Rock, and other stand-up comics, when they state they have ceased their comedy shows on college campuses because young people do not know Funny, i.e., no Sense of Humor.

I believe there is a reason for this phenomenon historically, as well as ideologically and politically. In the good old days, when those of us in the older generations were young, we did not have TV, smart phones, computer tablets, laser tag, and other electronic devices to continually divert our attention. The family was primarily the center of activities of diversion and amusement. We played card games and word games, numerous board games, assembled jigsaw puzzles, and listened to the radio – as a family. Listening to radio programs was a big deal. Often called, “the theater of the mind,” because it stimulated our brains to mentally construct visualizations from what we were hearing. Radio, beyond soap operas and dramas, brought the outside world into our homes with news. And it broadcast comedy programs. Families sat around the radio in the evening to be entertained and informed. In this family setting, we learned what Funny was. As kids, we saw our parents laughed at humor, we learned what that humor was and what it meant: irony, surprise, double meaning, misuse and misplacing of words and word structure, tone of voice, strange and different accents, the foibles of ethnicity, the structures of

personality, the sense of timing to get a laugh; these were all of the nuances and methods comedians used to stimulate us to laugh. This was the cultivating of recognition for what was funny, and we began to learn it at a young age. Parents explained why they laughed, explained jokes, and helped determine for us that laughter and humor and jokes were good for us. “Humor is the best medicine,” were watchwords for a better outlook on life and a sense of balance for everyone.

Jokes and funny punch lines from radio comedy permeated our culture. Back then, people told jokes and those jokes were repeated, told again and again. Jokes were told that today are absolutely forbidden. The PC police from victimhood groups and academia (including K-12 education systems) have put a stop to jokes or funny stories about ethnicity, profession, race, gender (even dumb blonde jokes have gone away), failings and weaknesses (the unfortunate, don’t you know, can’t make fun of them), and other subjects they deem inappropriate. Do not laugh at such and such, you may offend someone. We, on the other hand, learned Funny from those jokes.

When television bloomed after WWII, a TV set was expensive, it was a powerful fascination now that pictures came with the words, and the family gathered around the TV in the evening almost as they had done with radio. Comedy on TV added visual elements to the words to present Funny. Families were entranced and we continued to learn, in the home setting, what comedy was all about.

In the latter half of the 1960s, our society, our culture began to change. With the changes that came about, too complex for detailing here, there evolved generations of young persons not functioning within a family core. One change would be the tremendous increase of both parents working and the resulting ramifications. As the undercurrents of Marxist ideology began to take

effect in the 60s and 70s, the social negativity of their efforts left little room for humor. There are no Marxist comics, and, in fact, for Marxists, life is too serious and too earnest about which to laugh.

Where has Funny gone? It has been edged out of our culture by the liberal progressives, by the America haters, and the 60s radicals now ensconced in academia. There are those of us who still have a Sense of Humor because we learned it, have not forgotten it, and still enjoy real humor.