

The Perils of a Sense of Humor

When I first became involved in local politics a friend warned me, “You better be careful with that sense of humor of yours!” I nodded and thanked him for the advice. “Hey!” I said, looking just under his chin. “What’s that?” He looked down just as my index finger was coming up, “twanging” his nose. Yes, it was incredibly juvenile behavior. But the timing... was superb.

From the stories that my relatives have told me and from having personally experienced 55 family Thanksgivings, I can assure you that this is inherited behavior. My father and his brother Charlie in particular had brutal senses of humor... which made the harsh life that they experienced as kids easier to deal with. At a very young age they were often left alone in the woods to tend the cattle and also to trap raccoons to sell... by hand. To make things even more interesting these animals had to be brought in alive.

The process went something like this. After a raccoon was spotted high in a cypress tree, my dad (being the smallest and easiest to bully) would climb up the tree with a stick. His orders were to convince the animal to jump 60 feet to the ground by swatting at it like it was a raccoon piñata. Prior to doing a really bad flying squirrel imitation, the raccoon would first ‘lighten his load’ by emptying the contents of his bladder, bowels and stomach... onto my father. This always delighted my Uncle Charlie who would be far below on the ground, laughing hysterically and shouting helpful encouragement to his little brother. “You’ve got him now Ben!”

Once the raccoon hit the ground, both boys would chase the dazed mammal until Charlie could bop it on the head with a stick, knocking him out cold. Being the big brother, he would grab the unconscious critter by its ringed tail and carry it proudly back home.

However, on this particular hunting trip, Mother Nature decided to show off her own sense of humor by waking up the boy’s un-amused captive. It immediately wrapped all four furry legs tightly around Charlie’s thigh and started chewing. The once proud hunter proceeded to try every dance, jump, roll, scream and evasive maneuver known to man in an attempt to dislodge the angry masked mammal from his leg. My father stopped laughing just long enough to put a hand on each side of his mouth and yell... “You’ve got ‘em now Charlie!” The raccoon soon lost his taste for the boy’s boney leg and took off for the deep swamp, leaving Charlie unharmed, furious, and running towards his still laughing little brother.

I suppose the advice my friend was trying to give me and the lesson that my father learned from his big brother were the same. The transition from laughter to “Uh-Oh!” can come pretty quickly and the price for others not sharing your sense of humor can be painfully expensive.