

If It Weren't for the Laughter,

*Life Would
Be a Scream*



**Random Recollections and Amusing Musings
on the Hidden Humor of Every Day**

Kathryn Olszonowicz

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by

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Preface

Humor helps us get through life. At times, it's center stage; or at first glance, elusive. It's always asking us to view the world—and occasionally us—from its unique perspective.

Life may be serious business, but oftentimes thrives on the frivolous, its lighter side, and its legacy. I've found this especially true in those awkward, "This can't be *all* bad; there *has* to be something at least mildly amusing" moments I attract like metal to a magnet.

Early on, I learned it was easier to work through stress or face adversity with humor and a healthy dose of "irreverence of the moment;" not the kind that entertains at the expense of another, but rather the intrinsic "play" of every day experiences.

And let's not forget laughter!

From a subtle chuckle to a rollicking belly laugh or hearty, good-for-the-soul outburst, or even a tears-streaming-down-your-cheeks, red-in-the-face, I-can't-control-myself meltdown, laughter's *such* a good thing.

Even Shakespeare found occasion to write of how mirth and merriment "bars a thousand harms and lengthens life." In fact, preliminary research suggests that laughter involves biochemical changes in the body that provide tremendous physiological benefits. It can lower blood pressure, reduce stress hormones, stimulate the release of endorphins (those "happy" chemicals), and boost the immune system; a sort of "chuckle and prosper" theory that can't be mistaken for wishful thinking.

Like everything in life, humor leaves an imprint on the psyche, the spirit, and your soul.

With its power and mission to embrace and enrich us, humor beckons, cajoles, entices—and then rewards—but only if we allow it. And even without a physical presence, humor commands with intense authority to help move us forward on our journey, strengthening us in the process.

This collection looks at the lighter side of quite ordinary and sometimes extraordinary experiences that have given me pause to use humor to make a difference along my life's way.

In the face of danger, or the everyday, or an “I can't believe this is happening to me” reality, humor has befriended me. Those moments taught me at the time, and remind me today, that it is as necessary an ingredient to a contented life as is the food and water we consume and air we breathe. Like a true seasoning, humor complements and completes.

Life's what it is—and what you make it. And, of course, what you make *of* it.

There will always be good days and bad ones, too. Even in those bad times that will inevitably come more often than we care to think about, lightheartedness can soothe the weariest spirit. I should know. Life's taught me that lesson time and again. Oh yes, and one *other* unshakable truth:

If it weren't for the laughter, life would be a scream.

Who's Zooming Whom?

We are superior beings. Humans, that is. It's been proven time and time again; studies done, computations made. Data gathered, extrapolated, and analyzed. All conclude that we, as a species, sit alone at the top of the food chain. Why? Intellect. We have intellect. It sets us apart—and above—all the other living creatures with which we co-inhabit this planet.

After all, humans discovered the atom—and then split it. We invented marvelous tools and devices, which we then used to create amazing machines whose designs and functions oftentimes boggle the mind as they work to resolve problems, satisfy needs, or improve life.

We have been to the moon and back, explored the deepest oceans, and scaled the highest mountains. In fields as wide and varied as health, manufacturing, engineering, education, art, science, and hundreds more, we have created, developed, invented, succeeded, and excelled. Even now as these words are written, humans live in a space station that completes a full revolution around the earth every ninety minutes.

Who, but human beings, could have such “smarts”?

Yet why do I still wonder about, well, being “superior” and about who really is in charge?

Bambi makes me wonder.

No, not Bambi, the adorable wide-eyed forest fawn given to the world by Walt Disney, that cute-as-a-button deer whose tender story of love and the cycle of life was first told over a half a century ago and will probably endure as long as time itself.

No, I mean Bambi—the tenacious, single-minded, always self-preserving, oftentimes mean-spirited Chihuahua that joined our household when I was only seven years old.

Please don't misunderstand. I truly am an animal lover—of all creatures big and small. Although I may never wish to embrace even the possibility of being remotely close to some creepy crawling critters, there is a sacred place somewhere deep inside me that honors life itself and the life each living thing has, as I do my very own.

What makes me sure? Bambi. After all, he put that belief to the test—repeatedly.

They say Chihuahuas are one of the most loyal, sweet-tempered, and gentle of the toy breeds; intelligent and alert, with a truly unique personality. Based on my experience with *this* Chihuahua, I definitely agree—they are small!

Bambi knew exactly what he wanted, and he demanded it—no, *commanded* it—with the air and authority of a high-ranking enlisted officer who could reduce even the strongest human will to a vacuous puddle on the floor with a mere glance or twitch or blink of the eye.

Our household was his personal domain. He wasted no time, nor opportunity, to assert his authority by reminding each resident human, except for his chosen “person,” of the cold, hard facts of our proper place in this canine's life.

Take mealtimes, for example.

Bambi knew exactly when that was—to the absolute nanosecond! Never did he let you forget at what precise time he ate his meals. As the moments counted down to “dinner is served,” he strategically placed himself on the floor beneath your feet, in the exact spot where

you were sure to notice him and his desperate plight for food. You might notice or simply trip over him as those intense, piercing eyes silently followed your every move, until the overwhelming pressure commanded your surrender.

And then there were the countless times he needed to go outside. Well, he mostly *wanted* to go out and it had better be Exactly. When. He. Decided. Of course, owning a dog comes with several undisputed responsibilities, the least of which is taking or allowing the dog outside. What was a simple fact of life for other dogs was an edict of human obedience for Bambi.

He dictated the precise moments—whether 2:27 a.m. or 4:11 a.m.—when nature unmistakably called him. And it was my distinct duty—*nay, honor*—to dress in a flash, get him on a leash and outside, for what I recall and can only describe as a “leisurely” backyard stroll.

Sniffing, searching, and I dare say investigating each and every single blade of grass, nook and cranny, and inch of concrete along the way. He strolled and sauntered; paused and hesitated—and stopped, always stopped, seemingly captured inside a placid, statuesque stance. In silent, patient anticipation, as if some much-ballyhooed event was about to occur, and he was bound and determined to be present, front and center, to enjoy the experience.

But mostly, he would simply stare into the darkness, his nose anxiously searching to discover some mysterious whiff; stopping to gaze up at me as we both stood there shivering in the bone-chilling icy drizzle of a late fall’s morning, or the brisk, whipping snowy winds in the absolute dead of winter. He would stand there for what seemed like an eternity to me, just long enough for a paw too cold from the inclement weather to be limply lifted up, my signal to scoop him up and rush us both back inside.

Rain, sleet, or snow never dampened Bambi’s spirit. He always persevered. And I was always there—to bear witness.

Yet, above all else, Bambi was single-minded in his fierce loyalty to be with his chosen human. Hey, it was a great attribute if

you happened to be the apple of this canine's eye. Unfortunately for me, the "chosen one" was my mother.

I only placed second in this winner-take-all competition. The problem with such a prestigious honor was that, when my mother was away, he deemed me an acceptable substitute, worthy enough to be kept company for hours by this persnickety pooch that preferred to wile away the time he was without my mother...*on my lap*.

Oh, what an adventure it was! Reading and often doing homework with opened books and papers scattered about, Bambi would boldly approach. Without hesitation, he would jump up and brazenly plop down, curling up smack dead center on my lap, sending books sliding and papers flying. Never once was my surprise of this audacious ritual a cause for *his* concern.

So there we were, as I tried not to disturb this sleeping giant among toy canines whenever I moved a muscle, Bambi simply slept. And on those rare occasions when I slipped up, his instantaneous, almost imperceptible twitch of the head and slow, gravelly growl reproached me mercilessly.

Only once did I try to interrupt this impertinent behavior. One look at his ears flared to the sides and his larger-than-life incisors (they call them *fangs*, don't they?) and menacing growl was all the training I needed to take a direct approach. I was convinced that to survive this ordeal with still some semblance of human dignity left, I needed to be shrewd and cunning, sneaky and well, perhaps a bit ruthless, if necessary.

I needed a plan.

I devised a cunning ploy that worked in great part to the element of surprise. Moving e-v-e-r so slowly to put papers and notes aside and bracing myself—one hand on the armrest, the other on the back cushion—I quickly stood up. Startled, Bambi simply slid to the floor! Granted not the most polite thing to do, but it was the only way I figured would maintain peace in the household and a tiny bit of human dignity for myself—and not shed a drop of blood in the process!

Sure, I could point to numerous other examples that demonstrate how perplexing the “humans as superior” dichotomy really is to me. For through the years, countless other animal lives, long after Bambi, have been inexorably woven into mine, adding to the weight of this uneasy feeling.

Call it a sense, a belief, a gosh-darned truth that is somehow eerily bothersome, and the reason why I just can’t help but wonder if people really do have an edge over other living creatures.

But wait! Such a preponderance of ideas must be set-aside now for another time. For the two cats that currently own me have just begun their carefully choreographed “time to eat” ritualistic parade. It commands my undivided attention—and demands immediate action. And, if I have learned anything at all through decades of pet ownership, in the grand scheme of things, mealtime is a much more important matter than, well, *anything* else.

So I study the labels of the cans stacked on the shelf in the cabinet to decide tonight’s feast from among the few choices left after the many trial-and-error brands and flavors they have rejected and discarded over the years. Will it be a delectable poultry selection or subtle, yet enticing seafood entrée? Or could today be the day that even these time-proven choices become passé, and my quest for new, tasteful incredible edibles begins anew?

As I struggle to make a decision that will be unanimously accepted by the household majority, the thought about life and “our” superior place in the universe still hauntingly lingers. I may never truly resolve this question enough to answer it completely, yet I am certain of two things: I will wrestle with the question, and continually question my own answer in this mental tug-of-war.

But if the question were posed to my pets—past or present company alike—their answer would be quick and loud and long. It would unmistakably reiterate—in no uncertain terms—who’s always in command and keeping everything in proper balance for this mere human being.

For while we may have many doubts, pets *never* have any as to who's zooming whom.

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