

Don't Mess with Texas

I was reminded recently of God's incredible gift of LAUGHTER that He shares with us so freely. I love to laugh. Most folks who know me know this about me...whether good or bad, it's just part of the package. It's a blessing...and a curse (to quote a favorite television character of mine).

But tell the truth, what would life be without laughter? To me, humor is a treasured gift from God. He brings it into our lives almost constantly, and often, at just the perfect moment...right when we need it the most. It is one of the things I am most grateful for in my life. Seriously. I couldn't get through the day without it. And the beauty of it is that we don't have to go looking for it or create it, humor is in the world around us. We just have to be able to see it and appreciate it.

As the old saying goes, life is stranger than fiction. This often seems to be the case in my life (which is, at times, just plain old *strange*). I'm constantly on the lookout for the odd, the bizarre, the zany. (Pretty fancy word, huh? I remember learning it in kindergarten. It was a "word of the day" – along with lethargic. Remember that introspective movement that went around in the early 1990s – all I ever needed to know I learned in kindergarten? Well, apparently all I ever needed to know was the definition of zany and lethargic, because that's about all I remember from kindergarten. But, I digress.)

Some folks are connoisseurs of fine foods or priceless antiques. Not me. Nope. I live for a good laugh. Well, that's exactly what I got recently on a routine visit to a doctor's office (where else?). I was sitting in the chemo bay getting a bag of IV fluids – feeling good and visiting with a terrific nurse that was taking care of me. In walk two ladies...a mother-and-daughter combo. Now don't get the wrong mental picture right off the bat. The mother was probably in her early seventies and the daughter, I would guess, around fifty. "Mama," as her daughter referred to her, was the patient (cancer, it appeared). The daughter, obviously her number-one fan and adorer, had on a t-shirt with the word, "TEXAS" emblazoned larger than life across the front. (Finally! A link to the title – it's about time, huh?) As a matter of fact, every time I've seen her since then, she's had that same shirt on. It must be her 'taking mama to the doctor' shirt,

no doubt. So, for my purposes, these two are Mama and Texas, a truly dynamic duo.

These two arrived on the scene in royal fashion. I could tell they were talkers from way-back (as we say in this neck of the woods), chatting with every staff member and patient as they made their way to the chemo bay...and eventually to the chairs right next to me. These were, most assuredly, two of the sweetest people I've met in a while. They asked every single patient how they were feeling, including me. And they weren't just asking to be polite, they were genuinely concerned...hoping their fellow patients were feeling as well as possible.

Not only were these two messengers of mercy, they were – again, as we say in these parts – *country come to town!* Mama and Texas hail from rural Alabama (and yes, there ARE actually parts of Alabama that are not rural!)...and they were hilarious! Their undeniable Southern accents echoed throughout the doctor's office as they asked questions and relayed tales that were true classics in their own right. For those of you reading this that are from the South, the best part of all is that you know these people. Of course I don't mean literally, but I know that folks like them have crossed your paths...and are probably dangling from a branch or two in your family tree, if truth be told. They are your Grandmaw Lulas, your Aunt Charlies, your Bobbie Fayes and Jimmy Sues. They are the Piggly Wiggly in a sleepy Southern town...that intangible thing that makes the South, well, the South.

Mama and Texas made their mark on me that day at the doctor's office with a conversation that involved the two of them, a nurse, and me. It went something like this...

(*Disclaimer – if you have trouble reading this 'phonics' version of the English language that follows, just ask a friend from the South to interpret. Whether they're willing to admit it or not, it's a dialect they understand...and have probably spoken at some point along the way.)

Texas: Mama, is that her?

Mama: Yeah...I think so. She's the one that drew my blood last time. Hmmm...

Nurse: How are you two today?

Mama: Well, I was OK til I saw you a-heading toward me with that needle in your hand. You know, the last time I's in here, you tried to stick me with a needle and it didn't go so good. By the time you was dun, I was so bloody I

looked like I'd dun fought the Civil War! I've been calling you The Gen'ral since then! I don't want that to happen again.

Nurse: Oh no! (She laughed – she's a GREAT nurse and person...can laugh at herself with the best of them!) Well let's hope that's not the case today! I'll do my best!

(A few moments – and a successful attempt to draw blood – passed.)

Mama: Woo! You dun good! You got it on the first try! I'll change your name from The Gen'ral to Queenie. Good job, Queenie!

Texas: Nurse Queenie, I got a question to ask you. We gotta have somethin for Mama. You know the last time we was in here, she was real sick at her stomach. And you give her some of that medicine to make her better.

(*Note: I'm leaving out the product name because it's a wonderful medication – and I don't want to speak badly of it at all! I've taken it, and it certainly does the trick to get rid of nausea. HOWEVER, it has one MAJOR side effect. It will knock you out...completely. To say it causes drowsiness is a *gross* understatement. It causes a sleep that even Rip Van Winkle didn't experience. It goes to work almost immediately after taking it – both relieving nausea and causing *extreme* grogginess. Personally, I've been known to sleep for six to eight hours after taking just one dose...and still be sleepy the next day. That should give a better perspective on the rest of the tale.)

Mama: Woo. You shore did, and I ain't takin no more of that stuff!!

Texas: You ever had any of that?

Me: Oh yeah, and it's tough stuff! It'll make you feel better, but it knocks me out completely! I can barely take it!

Mama: Woo. Me neither.

Texas: Yeah. It made her stomach better, but I ain't never seen nuthin like it. I gave her one of them pills, and we went to the Krogers. Well, that was our first mistake – we know now. But we went up in the Krogers and it all just fell to pieces. We hadn't been in there a minute and Mama started actin all crazy...talkin out of her head and stuff. I thought she'd dun lost it! Well, next thing I know, she got her a buggy and off she went! She was *all over* that place! I'd go up one aisle and she'd come down another. Over and over again. I could hear her talkin all crazy, but I couldn't catch her. She went off and put two cantaloupes in that buggy and wheeled off again. And then I saw her next with

the cold stuff. She'd dun got some Swiss cheese and put it in that buggy with them cantaloupes. I tell you I ain't seen nuthin like it. She was actin CRAZY!

(Mama sits all the while listening to this and giggling. The expression on her face at this point was priceless. Just a small, toothless grin with her rosy red cheeks. And she giggled and giggled.)

Texas: We'd dun been in there about an hour with Mama wheeling that buggy all over the store. I couldn't find her nowhere. I started goin up and down all the aisles hollerin for her, and finally I saw her...over in the pharmacy section. She's laid out on the blood pressure machine...out cold. I didn't know what'd happened. I got over there to her, and there she was, her and them two cantaloupes and that Swiss cheese. She'd dun fell out across that blood pressure chair...sleepin. I shook her and said, "What in the world are you doin??"

Mama: Yeah, that's what happened. I told her I'd dun rolled them cantaloupes and that Swiss cheese around as long as I could. I had to find me a place to sit down. So I fell out on that blood pressure machine.

Texas: It beat all I'd ever seen. She'd dun rolled them cantaloupes and Swiss cheese around that store for a hour! And you know what? We don't even eat cantaloupe!!! And I ain't never had no Swiss cheese before!! I don't even know what you do with it! What do you do? Do you cook somethin with it? What do you do with it?? I ain't never eat it before, and I ain't likely to start now. I ain't got NO idea what she was thinkin!!! Beats ALL I ever saw!!

Mama: Yeah, I just couldn't take it no more. I had to sit down. That blood pressure machine was the only chair I could find in the whole place.

(Mama's giggles continue...)

Texas: I had to get her out-a-there!!! 'Fore she bought anything else we didn't need! We paid for all that stuff and I rolled Mama out to the car and put her in 'fore she got a chance to do anything else crazy! I finally got her home and got her in the bed. She got up a few hours later, and we had a good laugh about the whole thing. Still beats all I ever seen!! And you want to know the worst of it? We cut them cantaloupes last night, and they's the bitterest, sourest things I ever tasted!! They's ruined!! I ain't never. And I still got this Swiss cheese. I reckon I'm gonna have to find something to do with it. Or give it to somebody. Can you believe??

(Mama continued to giggle all this while...a little proud of herself, I think!)

Texas: So, Nurse Queenie. Do you think you could get us some other kind of medicine for her upset stomach? Cause I dun threw all them other pills away 'fore she could get her hands on another one! I ain't goin through that again!! That's the truth!

Well, by this point, "Nurse Queenie" and I have completely lost it. We are both crying, because we're laughing so hard. By NO means laughing at these two, but laughing WITH them for sure!! We both know this medication well and can just envision these two on their adventure at "the Krogers!" I'm pretty sure that most everybody can relate. We've all taken some kind of medicine along the way that took over our position as master of our own senses. We've all been so groggy we couldn't keep our eyes open or our heads up...and most of us have taken medicine that made us feel 'loopy,' for lack of a better word. Yep. We've all been there. Fortunately (or perhaps, UNfortunately), most of us take this medicine in the privacy of our own homes...or in a hospital – where we're in a controlled environment. But this duo's tale of mixing medicine and 'making groceries' (as my husband calls grocery shopping) is one for the record books. It's a tale that, in my opinion, should be retold. So I'm obliging, and telling it whenever I can.

Every time I go to the doctor now I ask about these two incredible ladies – who laughed in midst of what most folks would call pretty grim circumstances. They found the humor and focused on it. Instead of letting the nausea, the chemo, the cancer win, this duo took over...and chose to find the laugh buried in all the mud, muck, and misery. That's what having God in our lives will do. It allows us to see the opportunities to smile and laugh...no matter the circumstance that surrounds us. It's with great admiration and affection that I write this tale today...hoping that I can touch someone else's life at some point in the extraordinary way that these two touched mine.

That day at the doctor's office – when Texas and Mama came into my life – I needed a laugh. I wasn't having a bad day by any means, but I had come to the doctor expecting to be in and out in ten minutes. Instead, I ended up needing a bag of IV fluids and spent several hours there. It was during that time that Texas and Mama showed up...and absolutely made my day. Perhaps it wasn't really the IV fluids that I needed that day, but the endless laughter and unbeatable smiles that God brought to me in the form of Alabama's pride and joy.

He knows when we need a laugh...and a lift. I am convinced that laughter is a true gift from God. (And I also think that He enjoys a good laugh Himself from time to time!) For me, laughter is an outward sign of a joy-filled heart. And a joy-filled heart is what gives us the ability to laugh (literally!) in the face of

despair. It helps us to endure what we think we can't...with a smile on our faces.

I think of all the wonderful friends and family members that God has blessed me with, and one thing they all have in common is their love of laughter. I have countless memories of time spent with each of them, and even at our darkest hours, each of those memories includes laughter...the evidence of lives overflowing with joy.

Psalms 126:2 – Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy.

What more can I say? If your life isn't filled with laughter and joy, I encourage you to seek the source. Get to know God – and the never-ending joy that a life with Him will bring. And for those of you that do know Him, take a step back every now and then and look at all the laughter He's placed around you. It's pretty incredible. And it makes each day worth living.

For those of you that will read this that have laughed with me in the past, will laugh with me in the future, and especially for those who laugh with me on a regular basis, I thank you...from the bottom of my joy-filled heart.



 **one amazing journey**

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starkville, mississippi
laura@oneamazingjourney.com