



Cannon Blast

Classics

HAVING FUN AT THE EXPENSE OF OTHERS

By Bart Cannon

Having fun at the expense of others may provide a few laughs and some cheap entertainment, but its negative effects can endure for a lifetime.

Our weekend celebration of my parents' 50th wedding anniversary was drawing to a close. I checked out of Vicksburg, Mississippi's Cedar Grove Mansion, traversed the brick sidewalk under the restaurant's green awning, and rejoined my family on the patio by the swimming pool. My dad was leading my sister and a few of the grandchildren in some high stepping choreography, complete with giggling and boisterous laughter.

At the coaxing of her Uncle Jeff, my daughter, Melissa, readied herself to perform the cheerleader move that separates the contenders from the pretenders, the "herky." When I walked up, Melissa stopped, shrugged with folded arms, and peered sheepishly at me with those beautiful blue eyes. Uncle Jeff urged her to continue, but she responded, "No, he'll make fun of me." After obtaining my assurance that she wouldn't be sacrificed on the altar of ridicule, Melissa executed a very proficient herky.

As the ensuing applause and verbal affirmations subsided, my thoughts shifted to why Melissa assumed that I would make fun of her. Cannon boys do have a long-standing reputation for "carrying on a little foolishness." Pranks and joking around come so naturally to us that our DNA must be to blame.

My mental archives rolled back to the 1960 Cannon Reunion. A throng of Cannons from near and far returned to the old home place of my great grandfather, Charles Washington "Wash" Cannon. The festivities always included dinner on the grounds, exposition of assorted tall tales, and some type of athletic contest. Since three of Wash's boys, Maver, Ernest, and Reg, dominated Neshoba County basketball during the roaring twenties, each new generation must demonstrate its worthiness to carry the torch of Cannon athleticism.

After lunch, some of the grown-ups recruited four Cannon boys for a foot race in Paw Paw's front yard: Glenn, Larry, Ronnie and the chunky, uncoordinated, slow-afoot Bartley. Glenn later became an All-American defensive back at Ole Miss, and Ronnie played basketball for Mississippi College. Larry wasn't in their class, but he wasn't in my class either. I was the youngest, but I wasn't too young to recognize which way the deck was stacked.

My fervent negotiating failed to gain clemency, so I took my place at the starting line. "On your mark. Get set. Go!" The Race was on. The other horses took off with the speed of light, while I grunted, churned my legs, and pawed the air. I lurched forward with a quickness and agility somewhat akin to running on flypaper. As anticipated, I laid solid claim to fourth place.

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I don't recall the NFL using instant replay back then. In fact, the idea may have originated with my grandfather's friend from Alabama, Paul Mann. Paul brought his newfangled reel-to-reel camera to the reunion and recorded the day's festivities, including The Race. That night, everyone gathered together for a special treat, our first home movie.

The camera rolled, and The Race started all over again. Only this time, our projectionist enhanced the crowd's enjoyment by alternately running the film backward and forward. The resulting comical movements of my load of baby fat proved to be the life of the party. The laughter grew louder with every start and stop of the camera, and I sank a little lower in the chair each time.

Paul Mann and the others who enjoyed themselves at my expense meant no harm. Neither did I that Saturday afternoon at Cedar Grove Mansion, but kids can't always discern when someone's joking or serious. We need to provide an atmosphere in which kids can take calculated risks without fear of being the brunt of someone else's insensitive joke, no matter how well intentioned. Such incidents impart a fear of failure and discourage young people from using failures as learning opportunities and stepping-stones to success.

Maybe that's why the Master said, "And just as you want people to treat you, treat them in the same way." (Luke 6:31 NAS).

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