



Americans are Hilarious



By David J. Gibson, MD

FOR SEVERAL WEEKS, WE ENJOYED a visit by a friend from London. It was a pleasure to watch this proper Englishman gracefully begin morphing into a native (cutoffs, sunglasses, sandal thongs and a tan). Along the way, he made a number of observations that allowed me to see California from another culture's perspective.

A dinner at Morton's in San Francisco comes to mind. We were seated. Drinks were served. Then the waiter came to our table with a cart to perform the trademark Morton's presentation of the food on the menu. I noted that our friend had an amused look.

The next morning we were regaled with a tongue-in-cheek description of the "nightmare" he had endured while sleeping. The Morton's waiter was chasing our friend around the restaurant with a potato the size of a watermelon, thrusting an asparagus at him like a rapier while a lobster was dancing on the table.

I will never eat at Morton's again, my favorite restaurant, without remembering this hilarious recounting of the menu presentation. That and many other enjoyable episodes got me to thinking of how we must look to others.

Last week I decided to lose, once again, the same 20 pounds I have gained and lost many times over the past five years - perhaps I have enjoyed myself too much at Morton's Steakhouse. I laced on my old tennis shoes, pulled on a pair of old cut-offs, slipped on a T-shirt and placed an old baseball cap on my head. I was now ready to walk those pounds away.

The American River Parkway is a few blocks from our house. When I got there, the paved pathway looked like the intersection of the 405 and the 101 at 5 p.m. Hordes of serious looking people in strange clinging outfits with odd helmets were vigorously peddling expensive-looking bicycles.

With my new liberation from ethnocentrism, I realized that this is hilarious. Each of these Lance Armstrong wannabees had spent a great deal to look funny. This perked my interest so I went home and looked up the cost¹ for the gear these people were wearing and riding. Here it is²:

- Bicycle - Novara Team Trionfo Bike - 2005, \$3,299
- Pearl Izumi Flow Road Shoes - men's, \$150
- Sugoi Convert Bike Jersey - men's, \$75
- Cannondale Domestique Road Shorts - men's, \$80
- Pearl Izumi Zephrr Bike Vest - men's, \$55
- Cannondale Fundamental Bike Gloves - men's, \$17
- CamelBak BlowFish Hydration Pack - 100 oz, \$90
- Giro Atmos Team Discovery Tour Helmet with Pod, \$190
- Cat Eye CC-CD300DW Bike Computer, \$180
- Innovations Ultraflate Plus Bike Tire Inflator, \$21

- Heads Up Eyewear Mirror, \$13
- Subtotal, \$4,170**

The list does not stop there.

I know some of these guys. Off the trail, their equipment and accessories include:

- CyclePro Professional Tool Kit, \$120
 - Park Pro Race Stand PRS-15 (repair), \$270
 - Saris Bones 3 Trunk Rack, \$149
 - Cycle Sport Magazine 1 year subscription, \$82.95
- Subtotal, \$621.95**
Total, \$4,791.95

You have got to admit, this is hilarious. No other culture would take a basic means of transportation used by millions of people around the world and turn it into a consumerist extravaganza.

Here is another observed phenomenon in our culture that is without doubt hilarious. We are collectively sinking into a state of depression in that we can never achieve a "normal" weight.

Recently, George Bush went into Bethesda Naval Medical Center for his annual physical examination. Mr. Bush is 59-years-old. His health was found to be in the "superior" fitness category for men his age - greater than the 99th percentile for 55-59 year-old men. These results make Mr. Bush the "most-fit" president in modern history. He has not had a sick day in the past year - and he works out 6 days a week: Workouts include bicycling (15-20 miles, 15-18 m.p.h.), treadmill (low impact "hill-work"), elliptical trainer, free weight resistance training, and stretching.

We are told that the President takes a daily multi-vitamin, low-dose aspirin, glucosamine/chondroitin, and an omega 3 supplement. Mr. Bush weighs 191 pounds (last year 199). His body composition body fat is 15.79 percent (last year it was 18.25 percent; normal for his age is 16.5-20.5 percent). His resting heart rate (seated) is 47 beats per minute. His resting blood pressure (seated) is 110/64.

Despite all of this good news, the president is officially overweight based on government standards. His body mass index (BMI) of 26.63³ is in the mid range for overweight.⁴

In 1998, 35 million Americans were shifted from a government approved "healthy" weight category to the overweight category without gaining an ounce. A host of celebrities and athletes went to bed as hunks and woke up chunks.⁵ Each is now deemed by the government as being "overweight" or "obese":

OVERWEIGHT:

Barry Bonds: 6'2": 228 lbs: BMI 29
 David Boreanaz: 6'2": 218 lbs: 28
 Tom Brady: 6'4": 225 lbs: 27
 President Bush: 5'11": 191 lbs: 26
 George Clooney: 5'11": 211 lbs: 29
 Nicholas Cage: 6'1": 210 lbs: 28
 Matt Damon: 5'11": 187 lbs: 26
 Johnny Depp: 5'7": 190 lbs: 27
 David Duchovny: 6'0": 212 lbs: 29
 Vin Diesel: 6'2": 200 lbs: 26
 Cheryl Ford: 6'3": 215 lbs: 27
 Harrison Ford: 6'1": 218 lbs: 29
 Brendan Fraser: 6'3": 234 lbs: 29
 Richard Gere: 5'11": 187 lbs: 26

Ethan Hawke: 5'9": 172 lbs: 25
 Hugh Jackman: 6'2": 210 lbs: 27
 LeBron James: 6'8": 240 lbs: 26
 Dale Jarrett: 6'2": 200 lbs: 26
 Bobby Labonte: 5'9": 170 lbs: 25
 Nick Lachey: 5'10": 180 lbs: 26
 Karl Malone: 6'9": 259 lbs: 28
 Dr. Phil McGraw: 6'4": 240 lbs: 29
 Mark McGuire (playing weight): 6'5": 250 lbs: 30

OBESE:

Tom Cruise: 5'7": 201 lbs: 31
 Mel Gibson 5'9": 214 pounds: 32
 Matt LeBlanc: 5'11": 218 lbs: 30
 Steve McNair: 6'2": 235 lbs: 30
 The Rock (Dwayne Johnson): 6'5": 275 lbs: 33
 Arnold Schwarzenegger: 6'2": 257 lbs: 33
 Sylvester Stallone: 5'9": 228 lbs: 34

Now, you have to agree, this is hilarious. No other country would set weight standards that only a cancer patient in the last stages of cachexia could meet. On top of that, we all feel guilty and inadequate. What a hoot!

We live in a country that artificially gins up overblown rhetoric about an "obesity epidemic" that has itself reached its epidemic proportions based upon utterly preposterous standards.

Our ever-alert hospital and pharmaceutical industries have recognized the opportunity to turn a profit in the midst of all this angst. They aggressively advertise pharmacotherapy^{6,7,8} and bariatric surgery.^{9,10}

I rarely pick up a copy of the Sacramento Bee without a paid advertisement from the Sutter Health System occupying a full page touting its bariatric surgeons.

The number of bariatric surgeries endured by Americans has grown from 13,000 in 1998 to over 100,000 today. Americans undergo these self-mutilating surgical procedures that result in a 5 percent mortality rate for women and a 10 percent rate for men¹¹ in response to a preposterous, ginned up crisis. I am still chuckling, but it is getting harder.

As for me, I will still occasionally enjoy a leisurely stroll along our beautiful American River in my old grass-stained tennis shoes, which, by the way, are paid for. I will keep trying on occasion to loose 10 or 15 pounds but I have entered a "no guilt zone." That means while I work on the weight I will still enjoy a martini while eating at my favorite restaurant. In fact, I feel so guilt free, that I am lighting up a Cohiba with a Cameroon wrapper as I write these observations.

What a hoot!

djgibson@winfirst.com

1. Source: REI.COM
2. True believers will no doubt quibble about the options selected. Do me a favor, don't write. I really don't care.
3. Bariatric pharmacotherapy is recommended for a BMI of 30, surgery is recommended for a BMI of 35 or more.
4. <http://www.bmiscale.com/>
5. All height and weight measurements were obtained through an online compendium of actor data, celebrity promotional materials, and official athletic figures found through ESPN.
6. Xenical (orlistat), a drug that blocks about a third of ingested fat, was the third most heavily advertised drug in 1999, at \$76 million.
7. As of 2002, eight drugs had been approved for weight loss. Of these, sibutramine (Meridia) and orlistat (Xenical) are approved for up to two years of use. The other medications are sympathomimetic amphetamine-like drugs: phentermine, phenylpropanolamine, benzphetamine, phendimetrazine, diethylpropion, and mazindol.
8. There are about 22 new anti-obesity drug compounds in the pharmaceutical pipeline, with two currently in Phase III development.
9. Bariatric surgery has become one of the fastest-growing surgical procedures in the United States. It is

- conservatively estimated that bariatric surgeries grew 400 percent between 1998 and 2002.
10. National hospital costs for bariatric surgeries increased more than six-fold, from an estimated \$157 million in 1998 to \$948 million in 2002, in constant 2002 dollars. Mean cost per surgery increased 12.9 percent, from \$11,705 in 1998 to \$13,215 in 2002. The largest increase in average costs was for Medicaid-covered surgeries, with an increase of 17.7 percent, despite a decline in length-of-stay from 5.8 days to 4.9 days.
 11. JAMA; Vol. 294 No. 15, October 19, 2005

Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society
5380 Elvas Avenue #100 • Sacramento, CA 95819
916.452.2671 PH • 916.452.2690 FX • Email: info@ssvms.org

Copyright © 2000-2008 Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society - All Right's Reserved