



It's a Blonde Thing —

You Wouldn't Understand

By Vicky Jo Varner

I love blonde jokes. I really do.

Mind you, I *am* blonde, so I have the privilege of telling all the blonde jokes I want. It's too bad blonde jokes have so little to do with actually being blonde!

See, the ordinary blonde joke is a way we openly express intolerance in our culture. While the media tends to play up differences in race and gender and point at them as being our major barriers to tolerance, the truth is that intolerance is more widespread and insidious than that.

*How do you know a blonde's been using your computer?
There's whiteout on the screen.*

One blonde says, "Which is closer, the moon or Florida?"

The other blonde replies, "Helloooooooo . . . Can you see Florida?"

If you are like the typical American, you probably pride yourself on being tolerant. Issues about gender, race, nationality, sexual preferences, religion and even politics don't impact you all that much. Tolerance is not something you lose sleep over.

Let's deconstruct the garden-variety blonde joke. The formula's simple: ridicule stupidity. "Blonde" is a euphemism for "imbecile."

Our American culture employs humor of this sort to belittle stupidity. Its message is clear: vapidity is not tolerat-

ed. In this way, the American Collective masks a secret dread that we might actually *be* stupid despite our best efforts. It's an inferiority complex of enormous magnitude. We go to extremes to disguise shortcomings of competence. We would mortgage our souls to guarantee we're never viewed as lacking brains.

Someone I know has internalized this cultural stricture against stupidity. She habitually calls people "idiots" whenever they don't think like her. Commuters on the freeway are idiots; people at work are idiots; some family members are idiots. It's the derogatory term she reaches for reflexively anytime somebody doesn't think like she

*What do you call a blonde wearing a leather jacket on a motorcycle?
Rebel without a clue.*

does. Any infractions incur immediate castigation.

When we scrutinize her behavior, we discover what she really can't tolerate is the gnawing fear inside herself that *she* might be stupid (her high IQ notwithstanding). And if you suppose calling other people "idiots" is demeaning, you ought to hear the names she calls herself! Usually a stream of belittling expletives comprises her standard self-talk. Paradoxically, she would never permit anyone else to address her in the abusive way she talks to herself.

A blind man walks into a bar. After a couple of drinks, he yells out, "Who wants to hear a blonde joke?" The place goes silent. Then a husky female voice says, "Before you tell that joke you might want to know the bartender's a blonde. The bouncer's a blonde. I'm a six-foot, two-inch blonde with a black belt in karate. The woman on your right is blonde and she's a professional weight lifter, and the woman next to her is a blonde professional wrestler. Do you still want to tell that joke?" The blind man thinks for a moment and says, "Naw! Not if I have to explain it five times."

Is there a price for that?

Beyond the overt intolerance for others (making her unbearable to be around), an anxiety about looking foolish permeates her every waking moment. She can't don a Hawaiian shirt because she might appear "stupid"; she

won't go sightseeing because tourists look "stupid"; she dare not go back to school because she might look "stupid"; she won't pursue her secret passion to play the violin because she's afraid of looking "stupid."

Fear of looking foolish plagues her at every turn, until she lives a rigid, confining lifestyle that barely allows her to breathe. In this era of terrorism and draconian measures, she remains the greatest perpetrator of oppression against herself!

This fear of looking stupid can desolate our lives. The person who never fails or makes mistakes is unlikely to make *anything*. After all, the way to avoid looking stupid is to say nothing, do nothing . . . be nothing. What a dreary life that is!

The way out is through compassion. Practicing tolerance for our shortcomings grants us space to risk and grow. We achieve more when we are flexible and open to trying new things. Growth results just from being patient with our own progress. Helpful alliances form when we give and receive support. More opportunities materialize when we are insistently kind to ourselves and others.

I say, forget about tolerating obvious differences between us, the things we can actually see. What's truly difficult is to interact with people who think differently from us, to abide people we consider "stupid." That's a bigger struggle. Self-help, divorce and therapy are all manifestations of our inability to cope with people who think differently from us. Dealing with people whose intellectual perspectives challenge ours is the most difficult trial we can face.

Enjoying blonde jokes encourages me (in a gently self-deprecating fashion) to exercise compassion for myself and others. They remind me to hold life lightly, and always seek the jewel in adversity. Practicing conscious forbearance with others is how I develop myself as a human being.

True diversity is about tolerating people who think differently. Tolerance is learning to appreciate and honor others' gifts, and discovering how to value their contributions. Once we learn to respect and honor others' brilliance, they invariably astonish.

A blonde goes into a New York bank and asks for a loan of \$1,000. The banker demands collateral. The woman says she'll put up her new BMW. The banker takes the car, and gives her the cash. Two months later, the blonde returns and pays back the \$1,000 plus \$50 interest. The banker is amazed. He asks, "Did you have a windfall of some kind?" The woman replies, "No, I'm quite wealthy." The banker says, "Well! I understand now how you could afford a BMW, but if you're so wealthy, how come you borrowed \$1,000?" The blonde replies, "Where else can I park my car in New York for two months for only \$50?"

Vicky Jo Varner is a self-discovery specialist who relies on multiple models of psychological type to coach her clients. She practices tolerance with her husband, and confesses that her roots aren't blonde. You can visit her Web site at www.TypeInsights.com