

## Humor Me

By Ronald P. Culberson

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### “What’s So Special About Celebrities?”

Most of us love celebrity encounters. I can hardly walk in public without fans of the column hounding me for autographs, photos, and articles of clothing. OK, not really articles of clothing. Or autographs. And no photos that I’m aware of. But, my point is this: We are inappropriately captivated by celebrity-ism.

I was attending a conference for professional speakers (lots of talking, not so much listening) in Orlando, FL. We’d just returned from dinner and I noticed security guards scurrying around the hotel. They weren’t the dark-suit-and-tie-trying-to-blend-in-but-can’t Secret Service but were guys wearing black t-shirts, black pants, and Barney Fife egos.

They were there because Disney World had opened an *American Idol* attraction that day and the after party was in our hotel. The intensity of the scurrying and the red roping implied that the Idols were on their way to the hotel. My Celebrity Encounter Meter shot up to the red zone.

I immediately scouted out a place to watch. Of course I did this nonchalantly so as not to look like a fan but like a peer. Secretly, I imagined meeting one of the Idols and that he (or most likely she) would say, “Oh you’re a funny speaker? I really admire that. You should come to our party.”

At which point, I would mingle the night away and get my photo in *People* magazine looking “chummy” with Paris Hilton. I know what you’re thinking. And no, I don’t have posters of Paris Hilton in my home. Not since my wife found them.

And don’t pretend you’re not the same way. Everybody loves celebrities. We want to watch them, meet them, and have their children. OK, maybe that’s just me. But as a society, this whole celebrity watching, paparazzi, camp out in their yard thing is out of control. But back to my celebrity story.

Our association’s office was conveniently located near the entrance to the hotel where I could hide behind closed doors and watch the limos arrive. For an hour with my nose pressed against the glass, I witnessed limo after limo delivering nobody I recognized. Then, just as I was getting discouraged, Carrie Underwood, Ruben Studdard, and David Archuleta arrived.

I screamed like a fifth grader. My Celebrity Meter was overheating. But I needed personal contact. So I cracked the office door to get a closer look as they walked by.

Out of nowhere, Barney Fife appeared and muscled his way into the office. He said, "You can't be in here."

I said, "This is our conference office."

"No it's not."

"Yes it is."

He said, "No it's not. Besides, you're just looking out the window. You have to leave."

The next day, I thought of a hundred witty things I could have said, but at that moment, all I could muster was, "OK."

Deflated, I headed back to my room but I walked very slowly in case a celebrity walked past me in route. Then, I spotted a bench slightly down an intersecting corridor. I sat on it and began studying my phone as if I was checking my stocks or monitoring the war in Iraq. Nobody noticed me.

For the next hour and a half, I sat undisturbed as a dozen *Idol* finalists and their posse's paraded by. It was awesome. And even though no one invited me to the party, I went to bed that night on a high after wasting nearly three hours doing nothing.

Just because someone can sing, play football, or act, we think they're special. We'll buy soup because an athlete eats it. I'd be more inclined to take his advice on jock itch. We trust politicians to create our laws and yet a number of them don't even follow them. We believe in products sold by actors whose entire career is based on pretending. Go figure.

Instead of drooling over celebrities, I wonder if we shouldn't instead be fans of teachers, cops, and that guy who buffs the hospital floors seven days a week. They're doing something really valuable. And while it's a good idea, unfortunately, their jobs are not as sexy. So, we'd rather rub elbows with Academy Award Winners, Super Bowl MVP's, and authors of humor columns.

Celebrities are no different than the rest of us except that they're really good at something and they make a lot more money than we do. Otherwise, they're just people. If I could spend as much time doing good for others as I do watching the rich and famous...well...I'd never have seen all those *American Idols*. It was so cool.

Until next time, just humor me.

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