

Wearing only a smile good for a laugh

Shannon Linden | Posted: Saturday, April 4, 2015 6:30 am

Because my husband, daughter, and I competed in a Spartan obstacle race, I'm on their hit list. They send me tempting emails featuring mud-clothed competitors leaping over fire, scaling walls, and raising their hands in victory at the finish line.

Most of the time I kill these guilt-inducing reminders that I haven't crawled on my belly beneath barbed wire for 18 months. But April 1, I took notice.

I put down my coffee cup and stared in, umm, awe?

A rather ripped-up young man, a look of determination on his chiseled face and lack of clothing on his private parts (blurred out, but frankly the message was clear), was running through water. This dude was covered in mud, but not much else.

Scrolling down the screen, there were male runners pounding the dusty trails, similarly shirtless and seemingly naked, save for shoes and socks.

Next came a woman, crawling, her arms and shoulders chiseled, her bosom bare, but appropriately blurred.

“Announcing a new Spartan race heat for a new kind of Spartan!” the headline read.

“Tired of the same old races? Looking to take your obstacle course racing to something new and exciting? Register now for the new Spartan naked heat.”

Participants who competed in a test heat last year were enthusiastic about the benefits of running ... free, so to speak.

“When one of my friends who is big into Spartan races told me about the naked heat, I thought, ‘Why not? Go big or go home, right?’” one guy said.

We raced mid-September at Sun Peaks and I can tell you, it wasn't warm up there on the mountain or down in the dirt, so I'm not sure about his last line, but apparently other participants found benefits worth—exposing.

“I was worried the nudity would make it hard to concentrate, but when you're out there you get tunnel vision.”

And, “With the movement to natural terrain and obstacles, getting in touch with nature and naked racing is the next obvious state to Spartan racing.”

Of course, I couldn't resist clicking on the sign-up tab. And there it was – the official Spartan logo, race naked emblazoned upon it, and a very nude guy flying through the air, narrowly escaping the flames below his feet.

There was reassurance medical personnel would be on hand (I bet) to assist with injuries or rope burns, so I hit the official register now button and was offered \$12 off my next Spartan race with the code SPARTANFOOL.

I killed myself laughing – which it turns out is truly good for living.

Laughter is like a full body workout (or at least a good core one). It can work the ab muscles (seriously), but most of all it relaxes the body and releases tension, apparently for up to 45 minutes after.

It boosts the immune system by decreasing stress hormones, and a good laugh will release feel-good chemicals called endorphins. It even helps the heart and head with increased blood flow, plus when you're laughing your focus is far from worry. You can't be stressed when you're giggling. Even that temporary shift in emotion can cultivate healthy thoughts and feelings.

Laughter unites people. It's infectious and puts life in perspective: we just don't need to take ourselves so seriously.

Which is why April Fool's can be such a fun day. You might even call it a healthy day.

There are those who might say the Spartan racers got it wrong: for real, they should sponsor a naked race. According to the immortallife.info, clothing is crushing us. “We hide in our cocoons when we could be free as butterflies,” the site claims.

“Spartans were basically bare (there you go) and their sporting victories encouraged the Greeks to exercise nude, from whence came the word gymnasium (Greek gymnos = naked).”

Apparently, “Garments are breeding ground for filthy fungi and bad bacteria,” and going barefoot is good for sole sensation that encourages brain growth with more efficient neuron connections.

And how about superior socialization?

Supposedly, it can be found in the form of nudity, which decreases stress, sates curiosity, reduces porn addiction, and encourages increased body self-acceptance. Then there is the potential to really soak up some sun (after all, vitamin D deficiency can be an issue here in Canada).

I had a good laugh at that, too.

Then I forwarded the Spartan email to my husband, suggesting it might be interesting.

His concern: “You might get distracted. I have a feeling the guy to girl ratio is gonna be high.”

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