

## **A good hearty belly laugh lightens up the blackout**

**By Ruth Ostrow**

I'M in a hotel room in Adelaide, trying to pack my things, when suddenly there is a power blackout. Standing there with my undies in one hand, toothbrush in the other, in the dark, I am forced to put everything down, and get into bed. Which is a good thing.

I need an early night. I'm on my book tour, travelling the country speaking for two weeks, and about to catch a red-eye flight to Perth.

As an addict of late-night hotel movies, I've decided it's a godsend the electricity has gone off, so I can get some sleep.

Toss, turn, toss, turn. Sleep is hard to do at 10pm when you're used to being up late. But finally I count enough sheep and drift off to Nod.

I am woken by a bang.

"Blah Blah Blah," comes blaring out of the television as the lights come on, the heating comes on, and the room is once again high-voltage. It's now about 11pm.

I walk around in a daze, turning off the tele, turning off the lights, and get back into bed. "Blah blah blah." It's coming from the adjoining room, just behind my bed. The power surge has turned their TV on full volume.

There is obviously no one in the room or they'd be deaf by now. I ring reception.

"Which room is it -- to the left or to the right?"

"Ummm left, ummm no right, ummm look just follow the noise."

I wait for relief, feeling very tense.

I've been trying to laugh for days as stupid thing after stupid thing has happened on this trip.

Laughing is great for health. It opens up all the energy channels, lets in oxygen, and produces feel-good chemicals.

It's been proven that laughter helps people get over chronic pain, and even has a long-term curative effect as promoted by US doctor Patch Adams and now backed up by science.

I have been trying to encourage it to ease the stress of travelling, gruelling schedules, and overall silliness.

Earlier, in a Brisbane hotel, I had asked for a coffee. It was packet coffee and came in a baby cup like a shot of medicine.

I want a real coffee, a cappuccino, in a big cup, I told the waitress who was giggling and finding it hard to understand.

She came back with the biggest cup you've ever seen -- probably one of the room vases, with a tiny dot of coffee and masses of warm, sickly milk.

Planes cancelled, constant delays, I've been struggling to stay chilled whilst feeling utterly out of control.

Waiting for the concierge I can feel an onset of anger. Laugh, I say to myself. This is funny.

Suddenly there is total silence. The power has gone off again.

"Reception, did the man turn off the TV before this latest power blackout? Because if he didn't, it will come on again when the power returns."

"Yes madam. All done. Good night."

"Blah, blah, blah." I wake in fright. The power is on again.

"Reception, the TV next-door is going again."

"Sorry, he came up before, but it was quiet."

"That's because of the power blackout," I protest, feeling like I'm in a Monty Python skit.

"Please send someone up now."

"Is it the room to the right or the left?"

"Just send someone," I moan.

It's about midnight. There's a knock on the door. I point to the room, we creep in there together and the concierge pulls out the plug.

"Shouldn't you turn down the volume first in case the neighbours come home and plug in the TV?"

"There is no one in this room," he assures me, even though I can make out a bag in the dark. I'm too tired to argue.

It is 1am then 2am. I'm worried because I have to be up at 6am.

I need sleep because I'm speaking to 200 people the next night. I count the amount of hours of sleep I won't be having and finally drift off.

"Blah blah blah." Predictably, the neighbours have come home. They've plugged in their TV. I thump on the wall in frustration. It is now 3am.

I lie there staring at the roof. I am going to start crying, and then it comes to me. The image of Bill Murray in *Lost in Translation* -- the in-house movie I watched the night before -- stuck in a hotel room, fiddling, twiddling, accidentally pressing the treadmill too fast and that face he makes as he struggles to comprehend the utter loss of control -- literally and metaphorically.

And I start laughing -- loud, raucous laughs, wild belly laughs, at my memory of one of the funniest movie scenes I've ever seen, and me in the hotel room, 3am, exhausted, surging electricity and giant coffee cups, the frustration draining from

my body as the neighbours thump on my wall in return, which makes me laugh harder.

I fall asleep, a deep sleep, with a smile still on my face.

When the wakeup call comes a few hours later, I get out of bed feeling surprisingly energised and full of good health.

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