



**CATHERINE AND PAUL BEZOOYEN WITH
A PAIR OF THEIR GIGGLES**



THE FUZZ THERAPY OF GIGGLES

By David Morrison

*“The most sophisticated people I know—inside they are all children.”
—Jim Henson (1936–1990: creator of The Muppets)*

I cannot recall the last time I laughed as hard or long. Bent double, gagging for breath with tears rolling down my cheeks, I had to turn away in fear of literally collapsing with mirth. It took a glass of water and a minute or so of deep breaths to compose myself, even then while struggling to contain outbursts of involuntary titters.

In the tradition of fuzzy, bug-eyed, primary-coloured puppets such as Sesame Street’s Cookie Monster, Giggles are an absolute hoot. So when my wife Susan and their co-creator, Catherine Bezooyen, were locked in a wacky dialogue via their respective Giggles, I just about fell to bits. Key to this was because they were not looking at each other at all, but intently only at the other’s puppet, completely lost in the characters they were creating on the spot. It was a magical and truly hilarious scene.

We first encountered the Giggles at the Nautical Days festival in Co-mox on August 1. As we prepared to head home after visiting friends’ stall there, they said: “Whatever you do, don’t miss the ‘Giggle people!’” So we swung by the ‘Giggle people’s’ stall and met Catherine’s husband, Paul. Within moments, the former Architectural Technician was entertaining Susan with a Giggle on his arm. I watched entranced as

she quickly fell under the puppet’s spell. Cooing and whispering to it and stroking its head, not for one moment did Susan consider it was actually Paul’s hand receiving her tender caress! Such is the magnetic personality of a Giggle.

Like so many great ideas, these delightful puppets came into existence by accident. As Paul explains, it was when the Bezooyens were exploring work options, having made a leap of faith move from Calgary to Nanaimo with no grand plan in place:

“We didn’t know what we were going to do, but we knew we’d figure it out when we got here. I had this vision of becoming a musician, doing music full-time, and we were going to be fine. Then I started networking with the music community and found out the hard way that it’s a tough thing to get into. Then in Spring 2007, after we’d renovated the house, we had to seriously start thinking about how we were going to make a living. Catherine had this old hand puppet she loved, then had this inspiration and ran with it. We still say to this day that it came from the universe: Catherine, try this! She had not sewn since Grade 6, but in hindsight all these little kernels were placed down and all we had to do was follow the trail.”

“I’m usually not that type of person!” Catherine continues. “I can’t do that! I’ve never sewn anything in my life!” Indeed, her varied career to that point had included 14 years as a dog groomer and 20 years in retail—including her own businesses—but



THE AUTHOR MAKES FRIENDS WITH A GIGGLE

nary a stitch sewn with commercial intent. Or even for fun. Despite this apparently fundamental obstacle, Catherine and Paul ploughed on, obsessed by the idea, making patterns and stitching the first puppets together from towels. “It took us an horrendously long time to make them at first,” says Paul. But make them they did, improving in quality and design with every new Giggle. When confident they could unleash their creations upon the world, off to market they went.

“We did our first market in June 2007, with three puppets down on the Nanaimo waterfront,” Catherine recalls. “We didn’t sell any, but that

was alright. We went back the next week, and didn’t sell any... but then we sold one!” (Who owns that ‘historic’ first Giggle, I wonder?)

“The interesting thing though, was the reaction,” continues Paul. “The Giggles were making people laugh! People would walk past and do a double take, saying that they looked so real, and come and stroke them, give them a tickle and have a laugh. So we tried some new designs, then it started to take off when we sold five or six. We started finding new fabrics that were really colourful, and then they all started to sell. We thought we could be onto something here! Then we started

to become victims of our own success, wondering how we could make enough for the next market. It was a 12-hour day to make four or five, but then it was just learn by doing. Now we’re at this point where we’ve done 800 puppets this year!”

The success of the Giggles doesn’t surprise me at all. While the designs are not groundbreaking, their appeal is direct. They certainly do make people laugh, and they do seem like ‘real’ living entities. Whatever the age, surely only the hardest-hearted could resist engaging with a Giggle, because these are puppets vivified with real passion by the Bezooyens. They love making them and actually feel a wrench when one leaves them

for a new home. Animating a Giggle is simple enough for anyone, but a key to their cuteness is the way they embrace the puppeteer. They are wrap-around puppets, ensuring intimate interaction. "It's a weird thing, but because they wrap around you they give you comfort," observes Catherine. "It's something you can hug; it's something that snuggles with you."

This universality of the Giggles' appeal makes them a hit across the board, including in a therapeutic capacity. In the Scrapbook section of the Give A Little Giggle website (URL below), testimonials as to the puppets' impact appear from, amongst others, the mother of an autistic child and an art therapist working with dementia sufferers. Needless to say, Catherine and Paul find this—and how Giggles seem to affect people generally—very humbling.

"We've been overwhelmed by how much positive energy we get back from just making people laugh," says Paul. "We're learning something about life doing this: if you're doing something you're having fun with, it's the most joyous thing. I've never had a job when I've come home more energized from work. We get tired, but it's a good tired, a satisfying tired. It's beyond the money, it's beyond business - it's something very human. And the puppets have become a vehicle for us connecting to community. The people that come by our stand... I don't know if they're a doctor or a garbage man, rich or poor—and it doesn't matter, as the common denominator is having fun."



"We're never going to get rich doing this, but that's not the point or the goal," adds Catherine. "I'm grateful we are making a modest living with it, but as Paul says it's all about having fun, making people laugh, particularly when they might need it most. It's this that brings us so much joy."

The mission statement the Bezooyens have applied to the Giggles is 'Spreading Joy Around the World One Giggle at a Time.' As Susan and I can personally attest, it would seem they are very good at doing

exactly that. It just goes to show what can be achieved, what positive change can be effected, simply through the power of laughter. For that reason alone I hope they go on to sell millions. ●

Giggles are not available in any stores, but Paul and Catherine Bezooyen will ship anywhere. For further information on Giggles and how to purchase them locally or from outside Nanaimo, please visit www.givealittlegiggle.com. Contact Catherine on (250) 754-9896 or by email at catherine@givealittlegiggle.com



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