

From the Heart. . .

. . . Life Skills for Today

By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC



Having Any Fun Yet?

After a very long work week plus another ten hours of overtime, I'm sure you are saying to yourself, "It's time for some fun!" So, what kind of R&R do you like to do? Is it taking in a movie, trail blazing in the hill country, fishing on the lake, or crossing the ocean to cruise through some castles in Ireland? Or is it just putting your feet up and sipping your favorite drink concoction as the breeze rustles through the trees?

I know of a great start and most of the time, it won't cost you a penny! Know what it is? Milton Berle, one of our nation's comedic icons, offered it to us for years. "Laughter is an instant vacation." Laughter is also the therapeutic voice of healing for both body and soul. I would imagine that if more shared some time laughing together, much of the disagreements, ailments, violence, and even wars would fade...at least for a time.

Although the medical and mental health experts are still uncertain about the benefits of laughter, there is evidence that we do physiologically change with laughter. Steve Wilson, M.A., CSP, a psychologist and laugh therapist, tells us that "The effects of laughter and exercise are very similar . . . Combining laughter and movement, like waving your arms, is a great way to boost your heart rate" (Griffin RM. CBS, April 4, 2006, *Is Laughter the Best Medicine?*).

William Fry, a pioneer in laughter research, claimed it took 10 minutes on a rowing machine for his heart rate to reach the level that only one minute of hearty laughter achieved.

Researchers over the past couple decades studied laughter's effects on the body and turned up some interesting information (Griffin).

- **Blood flow**—Researchers at the University of Maryland studied the effects on blood vessels when people were shown either comedies or dramas. After the screening, the blood vessels of the group who watched the comedy behaved normally — expanding and contracting easily. But the blood vessels in people who watched the drama tended to tense up, restricting blood flow.
- **Immune response**—Increased stress is associated with decreased immune system response. Some studies have shown that the ability to use humor may raise the level of infection-fighting antibodies in the body and boost the levels of immune cells, as well.
- **Blood sugar levels.** One study of 19 people with diabetes looked at the effects of laughter on blood sugar levels. After eating, the group attended a tedious lecture. On the next day, the group ate the same meal and then watched a comedy. After the comedy, the group had lower blood sugar levels than they did after the lecture.
- **Relaxation and sleep.** The focus on the benefits of laughter really began with Norman Cousins' memoir, *Anatomy of an Illness*. Cousins, who was diagnosed with ankylosing spondylitis, a painful spine condition, found that a diet of comedies, like Marx Brothers films and episodes of *Candid Camera*, helped him feel better. He said that 10 minutes of laughter allowed him two hours of pain-free sleep.

These researchers continue to question whether these affects are caused by laughter or some other condition that predisposes people to experience better health and well-being.

While researchers do their thing, Sheri & Bob Stritof, author of *The Everything Great Marriage Book*, believe that one of the great joys in marriage is when couples spend time laughing together and enjoying each other's sense of

humor. Here are some benefits of laughter and humor they believe we can experience, including ways to increase laughter in your marriage.

- Laughter is a marvelous gift for enhancing your day and reducing stress and tension.
- Laughter lifts the spirit and brings couples closer together.
- Having a sense of humor as a couple can help keep your relationship fresh.
- Be aware of the humorous moments in each day.
- Make it a habit for everyone in your family to share at dinner something funny that happened to them.
- Take delight in comedies on television and at the movies.
- Watch classic funny movies and television shows.

During the next week, think about ways you can bring more laughter into your life and your loved ones. Just remember, laughing together doesn't mean you "laugh at them." Don't misuse your funny bone to deride or ridicule someone else. It's no fun to receive it. And if you try to dish it out, you will find not too many people who want to be around you very long. So share laughter that lifts, encourages, and brings a smile to yourself and others.

Next issue will cover a variety of ways to have fun locally that refreshes, helps you chill out and laugh a little or a lot, and supports wholeness in your life.

You don't stop laughing because you grow old. You grow old because you stop laughing."

(by Michael Pritchard)

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Fun is Just Around the Corner!

As I reread my article from last week, I found I took myself way too serious on the topic of laughter. Can you believe it! So, before I go any further, here are a few gems I found from Quotationpage.com to prove I do have a sense of humor (except when it comes to my husband's Texas A&M Aggie jokes!):

"Relationships are hard. It's like a full time job, and we should treat it like one. If your boyfriend or girlfriend wants to leave you, they should give you two weeks' notice. There should be severance pay; the day before they leave you, they should have to find you a temp." Bob Ettinger

"Don't accept your dog's admiration as conclusive evidence that you are wonderful." Ann Landers

"Nobody can be exactly like me. Sometimes even I have trouble doing it."
Tallulah Bankhead

"Don't worry about the world coming to an end today. It's already tomorrow in Australia." Charles M. Schulz

Even my daughters say I make them laugh. It's not so much that I have a great wit, but that my laugh at times sounds very similar to the Sesame Street Beaker Muppet. I know. Sad, what true! I've worked hard over the past several years to retire that laugh. I'll keep practicing.

In the meantime, I've been having some fun checking out some local places for R&R and entertainment. Boerne and our beautiful hill country are

replete with every considerable recreational and entertainment venues. Here are just a sample of all the possibilities to satisfy anyone's interest and taste:

For Bikers, Hikers, Kayakers, Bird watchers:

- Cibolo Nature Center, (830) 249-4616
- Guadalupe River State Park, (830) 438-2656
- City Of Boerne, Parks/Recreation, (830) 249-9511
- Saturday Paddlers, Joline Moore, riverjomo@aol.com, (210) 861-1211

For Entertainment Lovers:

- Boerne Community Theatre, (830) 249-9166
- Cibolo Arts Council—Boerne Festival of Art & Music 2006 (Oct 19-22)

For Golfers:

- Foresight Golf LLC, (830) 249-7528
- Tapatio Springs Resort & Conference Ctr., (830) 537-4611

For Hunters, Wildlife lovers, Dude Ranch/horseback Riders, R&R

Resorts:

- Joshua Creek Ranch, (830) 537-5090
- Pipe Creek Ranch, (214) 369-8703
- Rancho Cortez, (214) 369-8703

For Sports Enthusiasts:

- South Texas Training Facility, (210) 383-0807
- City Of Boerne, Parks/Recreation, (830) 249-9511

For Touring, Sightseeing, Historical Sights, Lounging, Resort

Accommodations:

- Cascade Caverns, Inc., (830) 755-8080
- Cave Without A Name, (830) 537-4212
- Enchanted Springs Ranch, (830) 249-8222
- Agricultural Heritage Center & Museum, (830) 249-6007

Just for Kids:

- Boerne Soccer Club, Inc., (830) 755-2356
- Boys & Girls Club of the Texas Hill Country, (830) 249-1030
- South Texas Training Facility, (210) 833-0217
- YMCA - Boerne Hill Country Family, (830) 815-1040

This is just a few of the many places to see and enjoy. Boerne is fast becoming a major haven for art, antiques, restaurants, and bed & breakfasts. Kendall County is also moving forward with developing parks throughout the county with the efforts of a nonprofit organization, Kendall County Partnership for Parks (for more information call 830-388-0262).

For more detailed listings of fun places to experience, go the Boerne Chamber of Commerce website at <http://www.boerne.org/Directory/default.aspx>, or the Boerne Convention and Visitors Bureau, <http://visitboerne.org/>, (830) 249-7277. In next week's issue, we'll venture out a little further with what our great state of Texas has to offer us.

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Fun is Just Down our Texas Highway!

Texas has some of the best highways of any state that can take you to any corner of our giant Texas countryside. Whether you like urban, suburban, or rural, Texas has it all.

It may not have something as high as the Colorado Rockies. Yet, we have some of the most beautiful rolling scenery from the lowland Gulf Coast to the Panhandle. Every major metropolitan city, such as San Antonio, Austin, Dallas, Houston boasts of the world's most favorite restaurants, galleries, museums, festivals and fairs. So take your pick and get on our great Texas highways during our beautiful fall, winter, and spring seasons.

But don't forget to stay close to home for Boerne's music and arts festivals and Dickens on the Main in December. In the meantime, the Federal Recreation website for Texas (<http://www.recreation.gov/advancedsearch.cfm?states=TX>) offers an extensive link to everything from Auto Touring, Biking, Boating, Camping, Climbing, Historic/Cultural Sites, Educational Programs, Fishing, Fish Hatcheries, Hiking, Horseback Riding, Hunting, Lodging, Off-Highway Vehicle Access, Recreational Vehicles, Museum/Visitors Centers, Water Sports, Wildlife Viewing, to Winter Sports. Just click on the link above and choose whatever suits your fancy.

To give you a little closer glimpse into all the fun and interesting regions of Texas to visit, here's a summary of each region for your consideration offered by Go Texas About (<http://gotexas.about.com/od/texasvacations/a/TexasRegions.htm>). Check out each region for activities, sights, and events of interest throughout the year:

Panhandle Plains

The Texas Panhandle is formed by the convergence of Oklahoma and New Mexico. The rectangular region between these two Border States is the Panhandle. The Panhandle Plains extend east nearly to Ft. Worth and south to an area just below I-20. Amarillo and Lubbock are the two most recognized cities in this region.

Big Bend Country

Also known as West Texas. El Paso is the most recognized city in this westernmost region of the state. However, most visitors looking to vacation in this area do so in Big Bend National Park. The Rio Grande River and Davis Mountains are also popular sights.

Hill Country

Probably more talked about than any other region of Texas, the Hill Country encompasses the area west of I-35 to the Big Bend region. Austin is the urban center of this region and draws an eclectic blend of visitors. However, smaller bergs such as Fredericksburg, Wimberley, and Kerrville charm plenty of tourists as well. In addition, the area's many lakes and rivers, Lost Maples State Park [(830) 966-3413], the LBJ State Historical Park, and Enchanted Rock [(325) 247-3903] are popular attractions.

Prairies and Lakes

The region sandwiched between the Panhandle Plains and Hill Country to the west and the Piney Woods to the east is known as the Prairies and Lakes. Dallas and Ft. Worth are the major population centers, but this region also includes college towns such as Waco and College Station. As the name suggests, this region's many lakes and reservoirs are a top draw for fishermen, water skiers, and water sport enthusiasts.

Piney Woods

Sometimes referred to as Deep East Texas, the Piney Woods are comprised of the state's easternmost acres, many of which are covered by towering pine trees – hence the name. Many of the state's historic oil towns such as Kilgore, Marshall, and Longview are located here. The area's rich history is also reflected in the town of Nacogdoches, which was originally established as a Spanish fort in the mid-1700s. This region is also known for its numerous lakes, including Caddo, the only naturally formed lake in Texas, and is home to the Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center in Athens.

Gulf Coast

This region is a long, narrow strip of land running from Sabine Pass south to the Rio Grande River. In between are a variety of coastal communities ranging from the marsh-surrounded Beaumont to tropical South Padre Island, as well as the historic towns of Galveston, Port Isabel and Brownsville. Corpus Christi is another popular coastal destination and includes the Texas State Aquarium, USS Lexington and Padre Island National Seashore (<http://gotexas.about.com/od/southpadreisland/>).

South Texas Plains – The funnel shaped region from San Antonio south to the Mexican border is referred to as the South Texas Plains. **San Antonio**, of course, is the area's top draw with more attractions than one can hope to see in numerous trips. However, don't overlook the regions other history-rich towns such as Mission, Goliad, Laredo, and Kingsville. The area is also home to famed bass fishing destination Falcon Lake, as well as the World Birding Center.

San Antonio Recreation

Restaurants, Parks, Galleries, Theatres, Golf Courses, Museums, Public Art, <http://www.sanantonio.gov/recreation.asp?res=1024&ver=true>

Fiesta San Antonio, <http://www.fiesta-sa.org/>

San Antonio Zoo, <http://www.sazoo-aq.org/>

Sea World, <http://www.seaworld.com/SWT/default.aspx>

Fiesta Texas, <http://www.sixflags.com/parks/fiestatexas/index.asp>

Enjoy the adventure—Go Texas!

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Dream Traveling the US and the World

For the Benedicts, our favorite spot to vacation are the four corner states. In addition, one of my husband's favorite dreams is to see Ireland and Australia. Hopefully, we will start to plan for it before we get too senior!

What are your favorite spots in our beautiful nation? What favorite world travel dream do you have? Do you want to see the Colorado Rockies, the New Mexico mesas, the bright lights of New York, or the Castles in Ireland? Hopefully, making plans can be all part of the fun too. Yet, make sure your budget can handle it, and your companions love the destination as much as you do. While you may love the idea of staying in hostels and roughing it, your friend may instead envision a five-star hotel. There's nothing more deflating than a Winnie the Pooh friend like Eor on the road with you!

Choosing where to go can take months to plan. So, start early. You will not only save yourself a lot of headaches but also some major dollars along the way. It's always a good idea to ask those who have already taken the trip about their experience. Who did they use to help plan the travel? How much did it cost? Where did they stay along the way; and what special spots did they particularly enjoy?

Spend some time cruising the internet about that dream place you want to go. Go to your library and bookstore for related travel books and tips. Contact the Visitor's Bureau and Chamber of Commerce for the US region you want to visit. Ask them to send you a packet of information for tourists; but always tell them what is of particular interest to you.

For around the world, most countries have a Tourist Board you can access online, such as for Ireland, <http://www.ireland.ie/>. In addition, visit their government site to learn more about the country of interest. This is particularly important when traveling global regions that may not be as safe as others. Your search will help you assess the risk you may face, what is required as part of your travel preparation, and when the best time to visit is.

While you ponder where to go across the nation and around the world, here are some resources for cruise through for ideas and helps:

For the Roughing It Crowd

Trails, www.trails.com = Trails & Topo Maps for Hiking, Mountain Biking, Paddling, Skiing, Hot Springs, Climbing and More. Planning a day hike, mountain bike ride or backpacking trip? Then you have found the right place! Trails.com has the most comprehensive collection of trail descriptions and trail maps available on the Internet, now totaling over 30,000 trails! Each trail comes with a detailed route description, driving directions, guidebook-quality trail maps, photos, and trail ratings and reviews from our members.

Rails to Trails Conservancy, <http://www.railtrails.org/index.html> = Rails-to-Trails Conservancy is a nonprofit organization working with communities to preserve and transform unused rail corridors into trails that enhance the health of America's environment, economy, neighborhoods and people.

National Park Service, <http://www.nps.gov/> = Most people know that the National Park Service cares for national parks, a network of nearly 400 natural, cultural and recreational sites across the nation. The treasures in this system – the first of its kind in the world – have been set aside by the American people to preserve, protect, and share, the legacies of this land. People from all around the world visit national parks to experience America's story, marvel at the natural wonders, and have fun. Places like the Grand Canyon, the Statue of Liberty, and Gettysburg are popular destinations, but so too are the hundreds of lesser known yet equally meaningful gems like Rosie the Riveter in California, Boston Harbor Islands in Massachusetts, and Russell Cave in Alabama.

Hostels, <http://www.hostels.com/en/index.html>

The Hostel Handbook Online Listing (US & Canada),

<http://www.hostelhandbook.com/listings.htm>

Traveling USA-Hostels, <http://www.travelingusa.com/>

The World Outdoors, <http://www.theworldoutdoors.com>

For the Tourist in general

Recreation.gov, www.recreation.gov = Recreation One-Stop is one of the E-Government initiatives in the President's Management Agenda to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and customer service of the recreation programs. The Recreation One-Stop initiative is intended to enhance customer satisfaction with recreational experiences on public lands.

My Travel Guide, <http://www.mytravelguide.com>

National Geographic Online, <http://shop.nationalgeographic.com>

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