

# *From the Heart...*

## *... Life Skills for Today*

*By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC*



### **Playing at having Fun**

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, October 1, 2010)

With a big wide world of choices, how do you play? Throughout this month, our focus will be on *Recreation & Entertainment*. Webster's New World Dictionary generally defines recreation as "Refreshment/restore life in body or mind, as after work, by some form of play, amusement or relaxation; any form of play, amusement, or relaxation used for this purpose, as games, sports, or hobbies.

Entertainment is defined as ". . . being entertained; something that entertains; interesting, diverting, or amusing thing, especially a show or performance—activities with you as audience, and participant at times.

In this tough economy, taking time for some play isn't easy finding the bucks to pay for going to a San Antonio Spurs game, a Broadway show, or a trip to Ireland. Even just going out to dinner may challenge the family budget. But I know of a great start and most of the time, it won't cost you a penny! In fact, with this you can have fun wherever you are! Know what it is?

Milton Berle, one of our nation's comedic icons, offered it to us for years. "Laughter is an instant vacation." Bill Cosby says, "You can turn painful situations around through laughter. If you can find humor in anything, even poverty, you can survive it." So, how's your laughter meter? My daughters often tease me that my laugh

at times sounds very similar to the Sesame Street Beaker Muppet. I know. Sad, but true! Fortunately, as I have grown more senior, my outbursts are a little tamer than my younger years.

Laughter is 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. Although the experts may not all agree, 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."

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. R.M. Griffin from "Is Laughter the Best Medicine?" on CBS, April 4, 2006, reported that researchers over the past couple decades studied laughter's effects on the body and turned up some interesting stats.

Blood flow of the group watching a comedy behaved normally. People who watched a drama tended to tense up, restricting blood flow. Increased stress was associated with decreased immune system response. Yet, studies showed 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.

In another study people with diabetes, after eating, first watched a tedious lecture. On the next day the group ate the same meal; then watched a comedy. After the comedy, the group had lower blood sugar levels than they did after the lecture.

The focus on the benefits of laughter and sleep really began with Norman Cousins' memoir, *Anatomy of an Illness*. Cousins, was diagnosed with Ankylosing Spondylitis, a painful spine condition. Watching 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.

While researchers continue to debate whether other conditions predispose people to experience better health and wellbeing, 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. The benefits include reduced tension within the marriage. Lifts the spirit, bring couples together, and keeps relationship new. The Stritofs encourage us to be aware of humorous moments each day; and share at mealtime something funny that happened to them. And watch classic movies and comedies together.

Think about ways you can bring more laughter into your life and your loved ones. Remember, laughing together doesn't mean you "laugh at them." Don't misuse your funny bone to put down someone else. It's no fun to receive it. And if you try to dish it out, you will find not too many people will stay around long. Share laughter that encourages and brings a smile to yourself and others. In the next article, let's find out ways you can have fun that refreshes, helps you chill out and laugh a little or a lot, and supports wholeness in your life.

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Sharon L. Benedict, MS, ACC, is a certified life wellness coach-consultant, specializing in life skills, wellness, and creative arts development for individuals, businesses and organizations ([www.harvestenterprises-sra.com](http://www.harvestenterprises-sra.com)). She welcomes your questions and comments and can be contacted at [seekreachachieve@gvtc.com](mailto:seekreachachieve@gvtc.com).

# *From the Heart...*

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### **Ways the nation plays**

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, October 8, 2010)

No matter how tough our money problems grow, our nation's people still find ways to play. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, "As leisure time and personal incomes have grown across the Nation, so has the arts, entertainment, and recreation industry." This industry includes about 115,000 establishments, ranging from art museums to fitness centers. Practically any activity that occupies a person's leisure time, excluding the viewing of motion pictures and video rentals, is part of the arts, entertainment, and recreation industry.

The diverse range of activities offered by this industry can be categorized into three broad groups—

- ***Live performances or events***
- ***Historical, cultural, or educational exhibits***
- ***Recreation or leisure-time activities.***

So says the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Yet, I wouldn't leave out going to the movies and video rentals, one of our nation's most active pastimes.

In 2004, The US Census Bureau reported that Americans spent about \$159 billion on arts, entertainment, and recreation. About 31% of every dollar went to amusements, such as golf, skiing, marinas, fitness/recreation sports, bowling; Gambling

16%; Spectator sports 15%; Performing arts 13%; Promoters of performing arts/sports/similar events 8%; Amusement 7%; Independent artists, writers, performers 6%; Museums, historical sites, and similar institutions 6%; and Agents and managers of artists, athletes, entertainers, other public figures 2.5%.

According to Unity Marketing Group, who publish market research and consumer insight studies on the luxury market, “Americans have an unquenchable appetite for entertainment and recreation.” Futurist Graham Molitor predicts that by the year 2015 a new age of leisure will dawn when more than half of the nation's GNP will be generated from the entertainment product and leisure industries.” We shall see if this holds true in difficult economic times. Unity Marketing stats actually reach to about \$706 billion in 2004 for entertainment & recreation.

They also categorize five types of entertainment buyers, including Entertainment Demographic Distinctives—what they buy, how much they spend, where they shop for entertainment products, and spending trends. Where do you think you fit? I’m more an Entertainment Alex than any. Yet, I might occasionally lean toward Couch-Potato Carol when I’m just worn out:

- **Entertainment Alex Just Wants to Have Fun**
- **Frugal Francine Entertains Herself Searching for Bargains**
- **Couch-Potato Carol Would Rather Watch**
- **Fantasy-Fulfillment Fred Lives in and through His Fantasies**
- **Bored Betty Desperately Needs Excitement in her Life**

For ways to have fun that refreshes, helps you chill out and laugh a little or a lot, and supports wholeness in your life, find out in the next article. You'll get tips on how to relax, play, and be together with family and friends at home, around the neighborhood, in your state, nation, and the world.

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## **Holiday Happenings—How do you play?**

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, October 15, 2010)

With all the bustling activity now happening—kids going back to school, holidays fast approaching, and having to think about who in the family is slated for hosting Turkey Day—are you feeling more like the coming holidays are more a trick than a treat? And what about the Christmas wish list you are compiling for your kids, workplace associates, and friends? How much money is really in the bank for all the special gifts you know they are hinting at? Oh well, is it possible to actually have some fun during these coming months?

Believe me, it is possible! Yet, it begins with an attitude adjustment. I and my fellow coach, Carolyn Sledge, love the word “simplify.” If we didn’t pay attention to the wisdom that one word offers, we both would crater under the weight of our “to do” lists! Whenever I am about to go over the edge of my “cliff list,” Carolyn reminds me to, “Relax!” So, I take a deep breath and slow down just enough to be free from the chaos of the list. In that moment, I somehow discover I can actually say “no thank you” or “later” to some things; and even discover that someone else actually wants to host Turkey Day instead of me. How nice to just show up and enjoy the moment!

“I asked God for all things, that I might enjoy life. God gave life, that I might enjoy all things.” This simple anonymous phrase helps me keep everything in perspective. So,

as you contemplate altering your own “cliff list”, here are a few ways to have fun that refreshes, helps you chill out and laugh a little or a lot, and supports wholeness in your life. Let’s start at home and in your own neighborhood. What areas do you already enjoy doing?

***At Home:***

- Arts/Crafts, Sewing, Knitting or Needlework
- Computers & Software for home use—including computer games, internet
- Music Audio/Videos, Stereo Systems, Musical Instruments
- Play w/ Pets—cats, dogs, fish, reptiles, birds, hamsters, you name it!
- Read Books, Magazines & Newsletters
- Singing, Dancing, Storytelling
- Playing w/ Toys, Balls, Games and Dolls—including riddle making, puzzles, interactive game boards, magic games, juggling, mime, skipping rope, whipped tops and hoops
- TV Program Viewing—daytime, prime time, soaps, dramas, documentary, how-to programs; TV—VCR/DVD movies & prerecorded videos
- *Do Absolutely Nothing!*

***In the Neighborhood/Community—Fun Is Just Around the Corner!:***

- Concerts & other Arts related activities
- Dining out
- Lectures/Speaking Engagements
- Local Amusement Parks
- Movie Theatre, Live Theatre



- Museums & Art Galleries
- Neighborhood Park activities
- Shops of every variety
- Sports, Exercise—golf, tennis, soccer, basketball, baseball, water sports/kayaking, walking, hiking, running, fitness training, you name it!  
Some people actually love exercise!
- Touring, Sightseeing, Historical Sights, Lounging, Resort  
Accommodations

Next article will cover ways to play in your state, nation, and around the globe.

Remember, when making choices for the holidays, focus on ways to relax, play, and be together with family and friends at home and around the neighborhood. Keep it as simple as you can so the life you have been given is a life fully enjoyed each moment.

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## **How do you play in your community & state?**

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, October 22, 2010)

When trying to find out what's happening in your next of the woods and state, where do you go to find ways to play? For the Texas Hill Country, there is a number of websites to visit. Here are just a few:

Discover the Hill Country, <http://discoverthehillcountry.com/>

Texas Hill Country.com, <http://www.texashillcountry.com/>

Hill Country Happenings, <http://www.hchappenings.com/>

Then don't forget your local newspaper online and offline, like the Boerne Star, and local magazines such as Explore or Boerne Business Monthly. You will find all kinds of great ways to play such as for dining out, sports, park outings, historical and cave tours, special library events, nonprofit galas and activities.

As one who has a major fondness for the arts, I look for anything that is going on in the arts in my community and state. Being on the board of the Hill Country Council for the Arts (HCCArts) serving the arts throughout the Texas Hill Country, I hear firsthand all the awesome things going on with the many arts organizations and arts supporters. I highly recommend you visit the Majestic Ranch Arts Foundation facility ([www.mraf.org](http://www.mraf.org)) where you can find just about any media to dig into for any age—whether clay, stone,

drawing, printing, painting, digital & wet photography, fiber arts, glass, jewelry making, music, sculpture & metalwork, woodworking,

Be sure to visit all the galleries and studios of artists who are members of the Boerne Professional Artists association (<http://www.boerneart.com/>). And have you heard...Kerrville Performing Arts Society, "KPAS", has come to Boerne! And we want them to stay!! Be sure to buy your season tickets now ([www.kpas.org](http://www.kpas.org))! The Grammy award winning **MARIACHI LOS CAMPEROS de Nati Cano is coming November 1-2, 2010** to the state-of-the-art Sam Champion High School Auditorium! Then on February 17-18, 2011, Neil Berg's 100 YEARS OF BROADWAY, and DOC SEVERINSEN & EI Ritmo de la Vida on May 8-9, 2011, will amaze you! That's right! You read correctly-- Grammy awarding winning performers, Neil Berg, and Doc Severinsen of Johnny Carson's Tonight Show fame. So, don't wait...buy your tickets now!

Another awesome thing is happening in Boerne and the Texas Hill Country. The HCCArts has embarked on a major project to bring public art to Boerne's gateways and city landscape. They are also working on a Boerne public art master plan. On November 5, HCCArts' Business Committee for the Arts (BCA) will host their BCA speaker series with ***The Tale of Two Cities – Austin and San Antonio, Cultural Master Plans and their Economic Value***. Keynotes speakers will be Felix Padron, Executive Director, San Antonio Office of Cultural Affairs, and Janet Siebert, Austin Civic Arts Program Consultant. Both will share their experiences and insights on designing their city's cultural arts master plan. Buy tickets now at [www.HCCArts.org](http://www.HCCArts.org). You don't want to miss this!

Then on November 20, HCCArts will host with many partners the ***Western Trail Community Day***, free to the public. On this special day, celebrate with family and friends Boerne's western cattle drive heritage of the late 1800s—and support the vision of public art for Boerne's gateways and city landscape. You will be able to pick up a community day art & heritage venue 'trail map' for your family; and visit each HCCArts' partner-location to experience the old west, the visual arts, and the unique heritage of our community. And by all means visit Robert Summers' Longhorns that have been temporarily installed near Ye Kendall Inn to give you a glimpse into the beauty and value of public art for our community. Then donate to HCCArts' Boerne Public Art Fund on their website to support the purchase of public art for Boerne.

These are just a few of the possibilities for playing in my neighborhood of Texas. Next article will cover ways to play in the nation and around the globe. Remember, when making choices on how to relax, play, and be together with family and friends in your community and around the state, fully enjoy every moment.

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## **How do you play in our nation and around the globe?**

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, October 29, 2010)

For many years as we were raising our daughters, my family would venture off during the summers to the four corner states—Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Utah. With a pop-up trailer in tow, we would travel the miles from Texas, as my husband would make up stories from a word each of us would give him. We never could guess what he would come up with. But it was so much fun, and the driving hours flew by.

All of sudden we were at our destination, such as Bandelier National Monument, Gila Cliff dwellings, and old town Albuquerque. Before leaving New Mexico we would explore the old mining, ranching and railroading towns. Then off to Colorado Estes Park, Silverton, and Mesa Verde. We would cross over to Utah and Arches National Park, Bryce Canyon National Park, Zion National Park, and Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park.

We eventually landed in the Grand Canyon, Arizona; then Flagstaff, to check out their downtown scene and walking trails. After doing a little cave touring, we ended up at Canyon de Chelly National Monument. And we never left Arizona without spending some desert time at places like Sonoran Desert National Monument. In between, we visited just about every Native American reservation and park.

By then, our girls were definitely ready to come home to get away from Mom and Dad! Our daughters are now all grown up, but we all have many beautiful memories of those camping and touring years together. Today, in our more senior years, my husband is still the adventurous one...with a trip to Peru and the Amazon with [Earth Watch](#) studying hummingbirds. He still has plans for Australia and New Zealand, hopefully with one of our daughters who also loves to travel and experience new adventures. For me, I'm more of a nester but still like to travel in the good ole USA.

What adventures in our nation and around the world has your family experienced? Have you made any plans yet for your next one? Here are some ideas for traveling in the US—***Fun is Just Down Our Nation's Highways!***

- **Dude Ranch/horseback Riders**
- **Hunting**
- **Lounging, Resort Accommodations**
- **Parks of all types—Amusement, State, National, Private**
- **R&R resorts**
- **Touring, Sightseeing, Historical Sights**
- **Caving Tours**
- **Wildlife adventures**

How about around the globe? Start dream traveling the world with these possibilities.

Here is a few ***For the Roughing It Crowd:***

- **Camping**
- **Climbing**
- **Fishing & Fish Hatcheries**

- **Hiking/Biking Trails**
- **Horseback Riding**
- **Hostels**
- **Hunting**
- **National & World Parks**
- **Off-Highway Vehicle Traveling**
- **Water Sports**
- **Wildlife Viewing**
- **Winter Sports**

I wouldn't want to forget ideas...***For the Tourist in general:***

- **Auto Touring**
- **Boating**
- **Educational Programs**
- **Historic/Cultural Sites**
- **Lodging**
- **Museum/Visitors Centers**
- **RVing the countryside** (rent before you own)

We all know it is loads of fun to dream and plan an adventure. However, with this tough economy, budget planning is also essential. And there are lots of economical offers out there at this time. I couldn't begin to give you a complete list of online resources. Here is just a short list to get you started:

American Trails, <http://www.americantrails.org/>

Fodor, <http://www.fodors.com/>

Frommers, <http://www.frommers.com/>

Hostels, <http://www.travelingusa.com/Places%20to%20Stay/Hostels>,

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

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

National Recreation & Parks Association, <http://www.nrpa.org/>

Rails to Trails, <http://www.railstotrails.org/aboutus/index.html>

Recreation.gov, <http://www.recreation.gov/>

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

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