Welcome to the fifth edition, and the beginning of the second year of the AATH Humor Voice!

This time our focus is INTERNATIONAL. AATH is growing and we are reaching out around the globe to include member spotlights from all seven continents. We will also learn more about the universality of smiles and the laughter movement around the world.

We also feature important articles on humor’s role in world peace and using humor to heal human trafficking. (Yes, you read that correctly.)

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Our next issue will focus on the topic of PLAY! If you have an article to contribute, please contact the editors (listed on page 21 of this issue).
Member Spotlight  
By Roberta Gold, R.T.C., R.C., CHP

Bronwyn Roberts

I have the pleasure of sharing some insights into the wonders of my friend and colleague – Bronwyn Roberts. Bron, Australia’s original “Laughter Lady” joined AATH in 2009. After struggling with a brain dysfunction (pseudo stroke), she began researching for a human behavior (psych) assignment and happened upon AATH’s page. She had always wanted to go to Las Vegas and decided the conference content was perfect — and as a bonus she would have a stop in Los Angeles so she could have a day at Disneyland. She became hooked on AATH and we were hooked on this lovely woman from Melbourne, Australia! Bron is a graduate of the Humor Academy and although she gets mileage out of being a HAG — sharing the power of positive humor as a tool for well being and happiness with people all around the world — she can now add CHP (Certified Humor Professional) to her credentials.

I have been lucky to be able to room with Bron the last few years at our conferences. She is caring and fun, yet somehow manages to run into people who say the most awful things — as you may know if you are her Facebook friend — but she is able to shrug it off and carry on with grace and humor!

Bron brings her Let’s Laugh programs to groups throughout Australia. She is a member of the International Positive Psychology Association, a member of National Speakers Australia, an International Laughter Yoga Ambassador and an Australian representative for Laughter Yoga International. She has recently traveled to Bhutan to spread laughter and investigate the country’s Gross National Happiness index. She plans to return and continue her pursuit and spreading of happiness there.

When I asked Bron what she liked best about AATH, she said, “It is the content of the conferences and the speakers, but most of all it is the people” and that she gets a huge supply of hugs when she arrives! We are so glad Bron is part of our AATH family!

Author
Roberta Gold is a Recreation Therapist, motivational speaker, consultant, and author. Roberta is an active AATH member, Certified Humor Professional, graduate advisor for the Humor Academy former board member and all around promoter of laughter and hum
Dr. Ken Shonk is an active promoter of healthy humor and its powerful benefits. He practiced family medicine, with special interest in pediatrics and palliative care, in Kitchener, Ontario from 1972 to 2007, and has been sharing his mirthful message as a speaker since 1988.

A serious person when he began his career, Dr. Shonk quickly realized how humor in the office put people at ease. “In family practice, people have agendas. The first is a safe one, be it a rash or a cough. The second is a marriage or job that’s in trouble,” he shared. “They won’t get to the underlying issue unless you make eye contact and really listen. The quickest way to creating a rapport is through humor. I often poke fun at myself to get the ball rolling.”

Quick to insert a joke at any moment, this Canadian doctor stocked his waiting room with comics instead of heavy political magazines. He initiated The Humor Project in hospitals, which includes four Jokes on Spokes carts equipped with funny DVDs, television monitors, cartoons, and involves volunteer seniors that have been trained as clowns.

While conscious of bringing the funny to work, Dr. Shonk appreciated when patients turned the table on him. “While waiting for me in a cubicle, one patient pulled a sheet over himself and displayed a sign stating ‘Too Late.’ I gave him an extra 20 minutes because he made me laugh,” Dr. Shonk chuckled. “It put both of us at ease.”

In 1988, Dr. Shonk officially became a “Spreader” of the benefits of humor. His first presentation was at a conference called The Laughing Christian, organized by a patient who was a minister, and recognized his doc’s aptitude for humor. He has since delivered 915 “Chuckle Checkups” to a wide variety of audiences from service clubs to health and education groups, and corporate. A favorite title he often uses is Jest for the Health of it.

Presentations cover a plethora of topics including appropriate, timely and tactful humor, the science of psychoneuroimmunology, gender differences in humor, use of humor in death and dying, aging, and interpersonal relationships, to name a few. Dr. Shonk eagerly anticipates the day he presents his 1,000th talk. “At first, we took a fair bit of flack from my medical colleagues as the material was not scientifically sound. Now we have 30 years of research to back it up,” shared Dr. Shonk.

A great big stuffed bear named Mutsy accompanies him at his presentations. Audience members are welcome to hug Mutsy, which goes over well with women’s groups, but can be a bit tricky with the businessmen!
Member Spotlight, Dr. Ken Shonk (continued)

At the same time as his interest in humor was blossoming, Dr. Shonk was diagnosed with Chronic Inflammatory Demyelinating Polyneuropathy (CIDP), just four weeks after receiving a routine Hepatitis B vaccine. His hospitalization gave him the perspective of illness through the patient’s eye. While spending six weeks in a wheelchair unsure if he would be able to walk again, he used humor as a steadfast tool to get him through. Although he still experiences some symptoms, he was able to return to his practice, focusing on what he can do rather than on what he cannot do.

This Humorologist continues practicing occupational medicine today; has been involved in The Humor Project, directed by Joel Goodman, for many years; is an outdoorsman; looks forward to wilderness and white water canoeing; enjoys a book club for men that he initiated; plays bridge; and cherishes spending time with his wife, three children, and nine grandchildren.

To anyone who does not laugh enough, Dr. Shonk suggests: “Do a humor profile on yourself. Ask where and when you laugh the most. Usually we laugh in a social setting and cry alone. When you’re really down, turn to those laughter situations to get a little Vitamin H for Humor.”

Dr. Shonk’s resumé on www.healthyhumor.ca states, “There ain’t much fun in medicine but there is a lot of medicine in fun!” He has touched the lives of many, both in his office and out in the world, with every “lousy joke” and compassionate smile that he has, and continues to share.

Author

Wendy Singer is the Managing Editor of Inspirations News (www.inspirationsnews.com). A Certified Laughter Yoga Leader and Laughercize Workshop and Party Facilitator, she is the founder of Laughter 101: No Joke(s)! and Laughter FIT. She runs weekly Laughter classes in Montreal.
**Member Spotlight**  
**Masako Kusakari**  
“Happy, lucky, me!”

Masako Kusakari is a 2016 Graduate of The Humor Academy, a “Toastmasters All Japan” award-winning speaker, and a teacher of communications with a focus on the funny.

Surely you have been charmed by her bright smile and contagious enthusiasm at AATH conferences in San Diego, Vincennes, Philadelphia, or Phoenix.

Masako, not to be mistaken for “moussaka” (the savory eggplant or potato-based dish, often including ground meat), is a visionary.

“I want to bring more laughter to Japan. My mission is to help Japanese people lighten up and enjoy conversation using humor. Many Japanese people take things too seriously,” says Masako. “I think if we learn to be more playful, we can enjoy life more.”

Masako lives in Yokohama City, the second largest city in Japan.

She embarked upon her humor crusade shortly after the 9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011. This was Japan’s largest earthquake in 1,000 years. The tsunami it caused and the subsequent Fukushima nuclear accident were disastrous. It was during this dark time that she felt compelled to create a communications course with a focus on humor.

“I realized that conversing in the English language helps Japanese people to express emotions more easily and be more playful,” Masako says.

Masako was introduced to AATH by therapeutic humor pioneer and former AATH president Allen Klein.

In 2013, Masako’s husband gave her Allen’s best selling book *The Healing Power of Humor*, translated in Japanese. “I was thrilled!!!” Masako emailed Allen to learn more. He responded promptly. “His mail was very warm and kind. He told me about AATH and the conference in April in San Diego,” Masako says. “And so I went. It was fate. I am so grateful to Allen Klein that he wrote me and told me about AATH.”

Masako is an international AATH star and humor advocate on the rise. Masako’s web site is http://marthakusakari.com

**Author**

*By Barb Best, an Erma Bombeck Global Humor Winner, who turns hassles into humor one laugh at a time on her popular blog BarbBest.com. Her comedy material has been performed by Joan Rivers and her essays and light verse have been published in numerous print and digital publications. Barb’s latest book is Find Your Funny: The LOL Survival Guide for Teens with Joanne Jackal, PhD.*
Venezuelan born, Erika (Ruiz) Risas found her life’s purpose while performing in a middle school production as a clown. Laughter echoed from the audience and it just delighted her!

When Erika arrived in Miami (after leaving an unsafe Venezuela) with her whole family, her now extremely busy lifestyle left no room for laughter. Her four young daughters kept her very occupied helping her learn English and get acquainted with the American culture. The stress of trying to fit in created a wallop of illness upon Erika in the form of early onset menopause, depression and insomnia. Her insomnia lasted eight months, it was so debilitating! Imagine the stress she had to endure while getting used to a new life!

Working as an activities director in a senior center in Miami was an important step in Erika’s laughter pursuit. She’d tell jokes twice a day to her early onset Alzheimer’s participants to help them have simple enjoyment. She included dance-like movements and Brain Gym exercises. Her colleagues called her class: Fun Brain Fitness.

Right around this time Erika had heard about India’s Dr. Madan Kataria’s approach to good health in the form of laughter yoga. She flew to Chicago and got certified as a laughter yoga leader. On the first day’s training from morning thru the afternoon, her first good night’s sleep occurred since the beginning of her insomnia. As it turned out, the laughter and its breathing techniques did wonders for her health. The laughter yoga practices were so beneficial for her she wanted more training. So at the time of the Orlando AATH conference, Dr. Kataria was presenting a week long laughter yoga training program nearby which Erika took. Once certified as a laughter yoga instructor, her education on therapeutic humor was next. AATH and its teachings were a dream-come-true because now she would be able to explain the difference between laughter yoga and how the brain works wherever she’d presented.

All the knowledge regarding laughter, healthy humor, as well as the scientific explanations, plus how it benefits the body and brain is just what made this “clown” thrive.

Finding her mission has been paramount. She spoke before a Miami congregation about laughter yoga and the attendees raised the roof with excitement. Everyone was so joyful! That moment cemented her belief in what she needs to do; telling the world it needs more laughter!
Member Spotlight, Erika Risas (continued)

“The more you laugh, the more you laugh,” Erika explained. “Try laughing for 60 seconds, your body will feel different,” plus “all small joys add up.” After that, trips to many Spanish-speaking countries started to appear on her calendar. Erika went back to Venezuela four years ago to present Laughter Yoga at a Health Expo. She’s also been to Spain, Guatemala, Portugal and Italy. Since she has an amazing ability to connect so many audiences, Dr. Kataria has honored Erika with a special Laughter Ambassador status and certificate.

She’s been interviewed on the Spanish CNN, as well as many other Latin news stations. One such interview was repeated over and over on so many Latin American TV stations that she received over 800 followers on Instagram!

“The more you laugh, the more you laugh.”

Her family is so proud of Erika’s accomplishments. Her father has become her #1 fan, constantly seeking articles written about her in the press. For Erika, her most recent Humor Academy graduation was a major highlight as this was her very first graduation ceremony she was able to attend.

AATH is fortunate to have her bi-lingual ability as it will continue to be an asset for the laughter community, as she is a true Certified Humor Professional.

Author
Barbara Grapstein is a longtime member of AATH and the founder and CEO of Healing Headbands Project Inc., a nonprofit organization that inspires others to develop a healing mindset by integrating laughter with art. Barbara is healing the world, one headband at a time.

Member Spotlight By Laurie Young

Percy Penguin

“I know he likes a good laugh but I think he may be going too far.”
Member Spotlight
By Kay Caskey

Harald Eide Ellingsen, that funny Norwegian

“Takk for sist.” When AATH members greet Harald Eide Ellingsen, this is what they would say if they could speak Norwegian. Takk for sist means “thanks for the last time I saw you.” The meta message is “I had such a wonderful time talking with you.” No wonder... Harald has been designated as “one of the most brilliant story tellers ever heard.” AATH is indeed lucky to have Harald as a new board member, as well as working on our website.

He lives and works in the oil capitol of Norway, Stavanger. He was born outside this third largest city in Norway and says, “I love it; I wouldn’t, couldn’t live anywhere else.” Harald has two children — 14-year-old twins, Ingrid and Eric. Working for the Conservative party of Norway, Harald works behind the scenes, writing speeches, press releases and has also written some jokes for Erna Solberg, the current prime minister.

Harald says he is “the man behind the politician” as he is shy and doesn’t like public speaking.

This is his story: Harald was a stutterer and as an eight-year-old, he figured out he could save himself a lot of stress and anxiety if he could get kids to laugh with him instead of at him. He became the class clown and he liked the attention he received from others. His peers liked his sense of humor, his playfulness and even his teachers didn’t send him to the principal’s office to “get serious.” Harald says it best in his stand up riff about stuttering, “People say I have a stuttering problem. I don’t have a stuttering problem as such; I stutter perfectly — in every sentence and especially with every word that begins with H — which is not so good if your name is Harald and you talk about humor.” Harald goes on to riff about the problems of being a stutterer. At the end of his presentation, the audience has a new awareness of the difficulties of being a stutterer and an admiration for this very funny Norwegian who did the whole set in English.

Harald credits reading Mad Magazine as a 12 and 13 year old in helping him find his zany sense of humor and sense of playfulness.

Harald demonstrates his curiosity and delightful sense of humor in his blog, www.toiletpaterfolds.com. He has over 3,000 photos with toilet paper folds from many countries. Harald encourages his readers to check out the bathrooms wherever they travel. “Take a photo and send it to me from the bathroom to put it on the internet.” And he nonchalantly says, “… it serves no purpose except it is fun — which is exactly why it is important.”

Harald became a member of AATH in 2013 and completed his Humor II project in 2016, receiving a standing ovation for his presentation and stand-up about Using Humor in the Workplace at the AATH annual convention in Phoenix. Using positive humor and self-irony, Harald’s presentation is a combination of standup and information about the value of humor. His website includes dozens of testimonials from Norwegian associations and businesses who have heard Harald. Clearly his audiences get the message that humor goes a long way in increasing workplace productivity, decreasing employee absenteeism and just making work a fun place to be.

When I mention to Harald that I saw some of those glowing testimonials, Harald becomes very humble. Boasting is the cardinal sin of Norwegian culture and Norwegian children learn early on not to stand out or call attention to yourself. (I remember that Harald’s stand-up is mostly self-deprecating humor and ironic humor.)
Member Spotlight, Harald Eide Ellingsen (continued)

Norway is a fairly homogeneous society and very equalitarian — placing society before the individual. Norway has been ranked as one of the happiest nations in the world; the best country to raise children and by and large, Norway has an intolerance for unkindness and has the highest human development index in the world. Human development index is measured by lifespan, education level, the GDP capita per capita, low fertility rate and low inflation rate.

Although Harald is glad he lives in this social utopia, he is grateful to AATH for its culture of encouragement, support and celebrating success of the individual. He says the Scandinavian anti-bragging approach can contribute to poor self-esteem and can hold kids back from achieving. He is building within his own family and community a culture of being proud and yes, even cheering for failures. As for socializing Norwegians to smile in the first instance like Americans, he says politely, he isn’t sure that could be the Norwegian way.

One of the best gifts of belonging to AATH is meeting people of other cultures, religions, and countries. We can hardly wait until next year in Orlando where we can greet Harald and say “Takk for sist.”

Author
Kay Caskey has created a three-credit Health and Humor class for Western Michigan University. Recently it has migrated to become an all on-line class, a special challenge for a social worker who likes to sit students in circles in order for everyone to get to know each other.

Where smiling is frowned upon
By Noreen Braman
Recently, I had a wonderful correspondence with an author from Norway, courtesy of AATH member, Harald Eide Ellingsen.

To: Julien S. Bourrelle
As a Laughter Wellness instructor in New Jersey, USA, I am fond of telling people to smile for no reason, that it releases endorphins in the brain, and enhances both your wellness and the wellness of the person you are smiling at. Then I add a cultural caveat, that in some places, such as Norway, smiling at strangers is frowned upon. I had read that, in Norway, smiling at strangers means either you are mentally unstable, or American.

At a recent conference of the Association for Applied and Therapeutic humor, I asked member Harald Eide Ellingsen if this was really true. He smiled at me, and said, yes it was. This week, he sent me the link to your book, the Social Guidebook to Norway. Well, I think your cover says it all. :) I will continue to caution my presentation attendees about being cautious about cultural differences regarding smiling and laughing in other areas of the world. And yes, I love the smiling photo of the author, Julien S. Bourrelle.

Best regards,
Noreen Braman

Author
Noreen Braman is living on the Smile Side of Life in Jamesburg, New Jersey. An award winning writer and graphic designer, she also shares her love of mirth as a certified Laughter Yoga Leader.

The Social Guidebook to Sweden
An Illustrated Introduction
Julien S. Bourrelle
Illustrations by Richard Lund

From: Julien S. Bourrelle
Thank you very much for your email, it was a pleasure to read you!
You may also want to check out our blog full of free resources www.thesocialguidebook.no
My very best regards from Trondheim, Norway.
Member Spotlight
By David Mann and his Humor Academy Level 1 Team

Olubunmi Diala

This year's conference was graced by the presence of Olubunmi Diala who enrolled in the Humor Academy Level I and stayed for the conference itself. She came all the way from Jos, Nigeria and did not travel lightly, bringing with her a baby. Fortunately, her mother-in-law, who served as a wonderful sitter while “Bunmi” attended classes, also accompanied her. Bunmi also has two boys at home, ages four and seven.

Bunmi is a Senior Registrar and physician at the Department of Family Medicine, Jos University Teaching Hospital in Jos, Nigeria. She learned about AATH over a year ago while doing some personal studying about the health benefits of humor. Since then, her passion for the use of humor in the fields of medicine has been growing.

Coming to the United States to visit relatives, she decided to check it out. She was interested in ways to apply humor in her everyday experiences and network with other people who are like-minded. The Humor Academy Level I continues to provide that opportunity with the monthly phone meetings and journals where members share their monthly humor experiences. She talks about simple things, like when she found herself on weekend duty at an affiliated community hospital far from the comforts of home. She decided it would be fun to cook the Sunday meal for all the staff and nurses. Bunmi shares how, “Word went around that the doctor was providing lunch. The day was filled with laughter. It's amazing how such a little thing can make such a big impact. A little bit of creative thinking can make a lot of difference.”

Bunmi enjoys playing a game with her boys, which involves singing in her local language while tapping their laps in time to the tune. The game is called “monini monini” and always ends in a lot of ticking and giggling. Then, she says, the boys ask to start over again.

Author
David Mann found his calling early in life by making others laugh as a class clown. He is Camp Director for Camp Boggy Creek. Founded by Paul Newman, it is a camp where children with serious illnesses and their families can forget the word “no” for a little while, and embrace the promise of “yes.”

Olubunmi Diala with Mary Kay Morrison

Africa
The universality of smiles and laughter  By Piotr Pluta

Some years ago, I was hitchhiking with friends in rural Serbia and we were a little lost. I approached an elderly man sitting on his porch, just off the road, to ask for directions. He did not seem happy about it, but I did not have a choice:

‘Excuse me sir, do you speak English?’ Slowly but decisively, he turned his head side to side and uttered a short ‘no.’ I tried Spanish: ‘¿Habla usted Español?’ Same answer, this time entirely muted. I kept on going, naming every language one of my friends or I knew: ‘Govorish po-ruski?’, ‘Deutsch?’, ‘Italiano?’, ‘Polski?’ Nothing, nada, Nichst… Despite my polyglottic show-off, we were unable to communicate.

‘Parlez-vous français?’ he shouted out suddenly. I had listed almost all main European languages before him, but none in our group knew French! The punchline was obvious and we began to smile, chuckle, then we all burst out laughing. The old man raised himself slowly and went to his house to get a notepad to draw us a map...

Despite not one common language between us, we could communicate that we both saw how absurd and comic the situation was and we had friendly intentions towards each other. All by the means of smile and laughter.

... But, why is it so that people around the world can convey: ‘it’s OK, it’s safe, I trust you, I don’t want to hurt you, I want to connect with you,’ with a single smile despite cultural differences?

Smiling and laughter cross the greatest cultural barriers. Paul Ekman, an American psychologist who pioneered research of facial expressions and their relation to emotions, went much farther then Serbia to collect evidence for universality of smiling and laughter. In a study conducted on New Guinea, in 1969, he discovered that smiling and laughter not only existed among the indigenous tribes of this remote and isolated island, but also that they were related to similar emotions, social situations and communication patterns as in the Western societies.

But, why is it so that people around the world can convey: ‘it’s OK, it’s safe, I trust you, I don’t want to hurt you, I want to connect with you,’ with a single smile despite cultural differences? Let me answer that question with another: Is it really only people who use smile in this way?

Animals (at least mammals) have an equivalent of human smile and laughter when it comes to facial expression and non-verbal communication. It is often referred to as “play face” and is marked by silent bared-teeth display and relaxed open-mouth (van Hoof, 1972).

One truly extraordinary case of cross-species communication involving the “play face” was documented by a photographer Norbert Rosling and explained in terms of “serious play” by...
Dr. Stuart Brown (2008). In it, a famished male polar bear approached a husky tied to a pole. Instead of ending up being attacked and – presumably – eaten, the dog managed to seduce the predator to play, literally by making a “play face.” Check it out: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nu8WHJHNnoc

This facial expression is, not surprisingly, even more recognizable and similar to human smiling in our closest cousins: primates. Especially chimpanzees have similar “smiling” patterns as humans and even accompany them with a certain panting vocalization – most likely a precursor of human laughter (Gervais & Wilson, 2005). Therefore, some scientists think that laughter is “an ancient mode of prelinguistic communication” (Provine, 2004) and has been universally used to convey a playful state of mind characterized by positive emotions (van Hooft, 1972).

Both, the cross-cultural universality, as well as the presence of forms of smile and laughter in other animals, point to the evolutionary roots of this form of communication. It means that regardless of the country of origin, we are all born with the capacity to communicate with smile and laughter friendly intentions, positive emotions, and invitation to play and connect. And, although various cultures put smiling and laughter into slightly different contexts and may disagree about what is and what is not funny, smiling and laughter themselves are so pervasive and universal, that everybody understands the message they convey: let’s relax, be friends and have fun!

Author

Piotr Pluta is the author and administrator of the Psychology of Humor Blog, www.psychologyofhumor.com. He has an MSc in psychology from the University of Wroclaw, Poland. Piotr is the Managing Director responsible for consultancy at Human Factors AS in Oslo, Norway. He is currently involved in a research project investigating the strategic role humor plays in one of the popular HR training tools.
I was asked several months ago to share my thoughts about laughter and humor as they relate to peace. I never imagined at the time, that this year the world would be experiencing such instability, violence, fear, and extreme sorrow. Given these current headlines, it’s difficult to imagine a message the world needs more than for us to soften our hearts, open our minds, and use humor as a tool in peacemaking within ourselves, our families, our communities, and the world.

I understand the fear we sometimes have of people who are different than ourselves, people who don’t share our culture, religion, and values. Several months after the horrific attack on the World Trade Center buildings in New York, my 22 year old daughter, Stephanie, received her assignment with the PEACE CORPS. She would be living in Niger, West Africa in a small village in the bush (see AATH Voice Issue #1). Niger is a predominantly Muslim country where, at that time, Osama Bin Laden t-shirts were as plentiful in the marketplace as Steeler t-shirts were in Pittsburgh. She was a young adult idealist wanting to make a difference in the world and I was a concerned frightened mother fearing for her daughter’s safety.

I’ve always felt that it’s important to “observe creatures in their habitats,” so at the end of the first year of her two-year commitment I found myself on a plane heading for Niger with Stephanie, who had been home for the first time. During that year, internet use was fairly impossible and phone contact was scarce. Mail was slow (think camel-mail as opposed to snail-mail). Stephanie wrote regularly and I prayed a lot.

Niger was, and I believe still is, the poorest country in the world. Most basic needs for survival were scarce. We arrived safely and I immediately felt like I had travelled centuries back in time. Goats, chickens, bush taxis, bicycles, a few cars, and of course people, all shared the mostly unpaved paths. Garbage bags floated through the air like dandelion seeds and landed in piles of garbage where goats often grazed and children often played. Everything seemed to be beige or brown, everything but the beautiful colorful clothing that everyone wore.

I have long recognized the power of humor and laughter as it creates trust, forms bonds, and helps resolve conflicts. I used humor often in my life and in my work but it was in a small village in the Niger bush where, what I knew to be true in my mind, made the connection to my heart.

I would like to share one special day in the village. Stephanie lived in a thatch-roofed mud hut with gourds growing on it like wildflowers. Mud termites were abundant and actually ate around her thatched door to the extreme that, while I was visiting, the door fell off. She pulled water from a primitively dug well, carried it to the hut on her head in a jug, and filtered it in a small bottle.

Several days after we arrived, the Magari, chief and religious leader of the village, wanted to honor me by having a baptism, a naming ceremony, for me where I would be given a Muslim name and a village party would ensue. The Peace Corps provided Stephanie with her name, Salamatou. This helped the villagers to better relate to Peace Corps volunteers.

As the guest of honor, I was the one to purchase a goat for the ceremony. Much to my dismay, I was asked to take pictures of the poor unsuspecting goat with the village goat-slayer. I’ll spare you the description.
Drumming began early in the day and signaled the beginning of the celebration. Sticks were gathered for firewood, millet was pounded, beans were cooked, and we sat with a group of villagers on mats eating from a common pot using our two fingers as our utensils. There was an abundance of chatter and laughter. I found myself laughing along with everyone even though I didn't understand a word that was spoken. YES, laughter truly is contagious and a universal language. My heart was opening and so was theirs.

Drumming began again in the evening. The men started their version of breakdancing, laughing and singing. The women danced in a circle, usually with one person at a time in the center, laughing and dancing to the beat of the drums. They laughed, clapped, and cheered as they coaxed me into the circle to perform my version of the “butt” dance. No visual! It was an evening of joy, laughter, and bonding. Sharing humor transcended all diversity. The name given to me by the Magari is Hajara. William Butler Yeats stated, “There are no strangers, only friends we haven't met yet.” I found this to be true.

When it was time to return home, I left with a lump in my throat and a softer heart. I was touched by the kindness and generosity that was shown to me by these good-hearted people who had so little yet gave so much. What I knew to be true, became authentic in my heart. I understood the commonality of us all and the word humble took on a new meaning. Sharing humor, laughter, and play enabled us to bond and trust each other and I’m sure during her time of service, helped enable Stephanie to fulfill her Peace Corp commitment.

Humor and laughter alone won't create a world of PEACE but we certainly will not be able to create a world of PEACE without humor and laughter! ONE SMILE, ONE LAUGH at a time!

Afterward: Sadly, a few years ago, following the senseless random murder of two French tourists, and terrorist activity nearby, the Peace Corps was removed from Niger, the first country that the Peace Corps served.

We have been in touch with several people in Niger and this winter we were told that Boko Haram has actively entered this peaceful country, killing men, and kidnapping and raping women and children. My heart is aching for these people who had so little and yet changed my view of the world with their smiles and laughter.
Laughing around the world  By Linda Scharf

When Norman Cousins wrote “Anatomy of an Illness” in 1979, he probably never thought that years later the story of his healing journey would lead to the creation of a world-wide laughter movement. The same was probably true of Dr. Madan Kataria on March 13, 1995, when he and his wife Madhuri managed to convince three gentlemen in a Bombay public park to join them in laughter. Perhaps there was a clue in 1999, when Dr. Kataria joined American psychologist and joyologist Steve Wilson on their “World Laughter Tour” of the US.

What started small – a 175-page book, 5 people in India, and a 14-city American lecture tour – has grown into an amazing international phenomenon. Today there are over 8,000 laughter clubs with more than 300,000 members in over 60 countries around the globe. In July, Steve Wilson’s organization celebrated the 16th anniversary of the first training for WLT Certified Laughter Leaders, who now number 7,000.

Social media has been a big factor in spreading laughter. Through Facebook, one can search and connect with laughter clubs around the world. A quick search of “laughter yoga” or “laughter club” results in several hundred hits. Another way of finding laughter clubs is searching the directories on worldlaughtertour.com and laughteryoga.org.

In the US, laughter clubs from Maine to Florida, Washington to California, and everywhere in-between share laughter videos, meeting information and positive thoughts on Facebook. Canadian groups laugh from Ontario to Alberta, while south-of-the-border laughers can be found from Mexico and Argentina to Venezuela.

Of course, there are many laughter yoga groups in India, the birthplace of the movement. But Facebook connections can also be made with groups in Thailand, Japan, Korea, Viet Nam, Hong Kong, and Singapore, along with Australia and New Zealand. Laughter groups abound in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the Czech Republic, Serbia, Turkey and Cyprus are among the European countries represented in the laughter world. Further south, people in Bahrain, Lebanon, Israel, and South Africa join together to laugh.

The best part of connecting on Facebook is watching videos of people laughing around the world. Many more international laughter videos can be found on YouTube. One can learn proper gibberish from AATH’s Jeffrey Briar or enjoy interviews with laughter leaders thanks to Dave Berman’s Daily Laughers.

Joining others in laughter from home is also a possibility with telephone and Skype laughter clubs, which are becoming more and more popular. Any internet search engine can lead to a number of such international groups.

In the end, whether on Facebook, YouTube or Google, one search will lead to another, and soon you will discover a world of laughter at your fingertips. It is truly international!

Author
Linda Scharf is a Certified Laughter Leader, Certified Laughter Yoga Leader, Certified Laughter Meditation Coach, World Laughter Tour Trailblazer, and is currently enjoying Level 1 of AATH’s Humor Academy. She has led a monthly Laughter Club at the Southwest Institute of Healing Arts in Tempe, Arizona, for the past seven years and she loves to laugh.
Combatting human trafficking with humor

By Heidi Hanna

As part of the AATH family, I am constantly seeking opportunities to learn about and share ways that humor can be both applied and therapeutic. Perhaps it’s my hard-wired nature to push boundaries a bit that led me to feel joy in hearing how humor is being used to provide a bright light to one of the darkest issues of our time.

I met Sheva Carr during an intensive training program at HeartMath in Boulder Creek, California. While there, she shared with me one of the most interesting stories of applied humor I had ever heard. It was this story, of her work with Operation Big Sister, that I knew needed to be shared with our AATH community, and I’m so grateful that the conference planning committee from 2016 in Mesa felt the same.

Operation Big Sister is a true story inspired by 85 Icelandic women from all walks of life who came together anonymously through their nation’s rape and sexual violence crisis center to stop human trafficking and the child sex trade — and do it with a lot of fun, cheeky humor, and a little champagne along the way. Frustrated that their ten-year struggle to pass legislation to stop prostitution and human trafficking had yielded only police apathy and no results, women decide to take the law into their own hands by posing as child prostitutes on backpages.com and in the newspaper. When calling to buy sex from a stranger (and often a child), men don’t know if they will instead get their mother, their sister, their wife, or their girlfriend on the phone saying, “This is your Big Sister watching you. Didn’t you know it is illegal to buy sex in Iceland?” Their antics begin to destabilize the illicit sex trade in Iceland and an entire society begins to heal.

Sheva is currently at work on a feature film that tells the story of Operation Big Sister, including documenting how healthy humor can be used strategically to open up deeper conversations around this issue, one that Jimmy Carter has called the “greatest human rights violation in the history of humanity,” including a platform for action targeting 10 specific audiences about what they can do to stop human trafficking.

The upcoming film will be a fast paced and funny, yet poignantly tender and vulnerable — a feel-good film about one of the world’s worst feel-bad subjects. It will touch the hearts of all those who want to make a difference in the world but are losing steam or just don’t know how to get it done. As we know in AATH, humor like this is not intended to make light of the situation, but rather to decrease our stress response just enough that we can think more rationally and creatively, and collaborate more effectively in order to move towards serious progress.

To learn more about Sheva check out: http://heartmastery.com/about-us/sheva-carr.
EDs: For those of you who were unable to attend the conference or Sheva’s keynote, you can find a link to a 15 minute webinar she recently did as a follow up to share with her own HeartMastery community here: https://goo.gl/6QbBjd. In this webinar, she tells us that the FBI told her this isn’t something happening somewhere else.

They said, “If you have a motel in your neighborhood, you have human trafficking.”

You can sign up for their newsletter and learn more about the film at: www.operationbigsister.com.

Author
As an experienced speaker, Heidi Hanna has been featured at many national and global conferences, including the Fortune Magazine Most Powerful Women in Business Summit and the ESPN Women’s Leadership Summit. Heidi is the New York Times Best Selling author of The SHARP Solution: A Brain-Based Approach for Optimal Performance (Wiley, 2013) and the follow-up publication, Stressaholic: 5 Steps to Transform Your Relationship With Stress (Wiley, 2014). Heidi has a master’s degree in mental health counseling and a Ph.D. in holistic nutrition. In 2011, Heidi was named a Fellow of the American Institute of Stress, and she currently serves as Editor of their publication, Contentment.
Book Review by Kelly Epperson

Proverbial Laughter of the World
From Afghanistan to Zimbabwe — by Nicholas Hoesl

This 2015 collection by Nicholas Hoesl is needed more than ever to show the world that in these turbulent times, laughter is the universal language. Every person in every country has something that they think is funny. As the author states in his introduction, “Laughter is one of the most beautiful things; it lends color to our daily life, it helps us recover from even the most tragic situations and it has the capacity to unite people from all over the world.”

What Hoesl has done is take proverbs from all around the world and add a quip after to snag a laugh or a smile. Simply reading the proverbs from various countries is interesting and enlightening. We are all seekers of wisdom, and of wit.

Who would guess what country this one is from: If you have a joke, tell it. Otherwise, goodbye. That one is from Afghanistan. That country also shares: If there is only bread and onions, have a happy face.

The wisdom from Albania: A tailless dog cannot express his joy. Makes you want to hug that dog so he can lick your face. There is always a way to express joy. And always time for a snack. Here is one from Austria: First bake the strudel, then sit down and ponder.

I for one love quotes and proverbs so this is a fun easy read as Hoesl simply lists by country. I agree with this one from Morocco: Reading books removes sorrow from the heart. And from Ireland: What butter and whiskey will not cure, there is no cure for. (It reminds me of a Julia Child quote: If you’re afraid of butter, use cream.)

Some examples to show you what Nick has done by adding a comment after the proverb:
From Japan: One kind word can warm three winter months. (And that word is “Tahiti.”)
From Afghanistan: If you deal in camels, make the door high. (A camel looks like a horse that was planned by a committee.)
From Israel: When you’re hungry, sing; when you’re hurt, laugh.
Notice in Tel Aviv hotel: If you wish for room service breakfast, Lift our telephone and waitress will arrive. This will be enough to bring your food up.

Author Nicholas Hoesl is a pharmacist, keynote speaker, columnist, broadcaster, world traveler and global volunteer. Reach out to the author at nhoesl@yahoo.com or www.laughterdoc.com

Reviewer

Kelly Epperson is a world traveler too, off to spend the month of September in the south of France with her husband Prince Charming Jim Simmons. They plan on laughing a lot. Visit Kelly at www.kellyepperson.com, and sign up for her weekly joy e-newsletter. Most importantly, Kelly writes the AATH Humor Voice book reviews.
Remembering Sister Sue Tracy
By Don Baird, PsyD

The more you learn about Sister Sue Tracy, the more astonishing and inspiring she seems. Having survived six bouts with cancer, Sister Sue brought encouragement, hope and humor to all around her.

“A primary mission of my life is to have survived cancer and be a source of hope,” she told one reporter. Having worked as teacher, parish sister, director of religious education and oncology chaplain, her wonderful sense of humor indeed brought inspiration and hope to those around her. She served as chair for National Cancer Survivors Day at Gilda’s House.

Ed Dunkelblau has wonderfully captured the playful humor that she brought to the world in this remembrance:

About 20 years ago, I was giving a presentation on Humor and Health to the attendees of the National Institute for Clinical and Behavioral Medicine in North Carolina. Any of you who have heard me present know that I like to have audience members share their experiences of using humor in difficult situations. During my presentation this rather pale, slender, serious looking woman stepped up to the microphone and introduced herself as Sister Sue Tracy, an oncology worker in a hospital setting. She spoke about how stressful her work can be for herself, the patients and her co-workers. She then shared that she and some other of her fellow nuns had banded together to use humor to combat the stress. All of them, being slight of build, they called themselves, and this is true, “The Itty Bitty Titty Committee.” She then broke into this huge smile as the whole audience dissolved in laughter. To have a nun talk about this at my talk, well, I lost it and took quite a while to recover.

Sue and I spoke after the presentation and I talked with her about the Humor Organization, AATH, which she immediately joined. Sue was a six-time cancer survivor herself and never stopped being a caring, playful and loving person.

My favorite memory of her was at an AATH conference. The keynote speaker was the guy who the movie “HITCH” was made about. He is a dating expert who coaches people how to find a mate. He was presenting to the whole group and randomly picked a person from the audience on whom he would then demonstrate his ability to assist. As fate would have it, he serendipitously chose Sue. He asked her name, “Sue,” she replied. He then proceeded to explain to her the “ins and outs” of getting a man to hook up with. Sue never let on about her being a nun but she answered each of his questions honestly and dutifully. The audience, knowing full well who she was and what she was, went crazy. Every question was funnier than the last.

The speaker thought that he was just brilliant at entertaining the crowd never suspecting that the joke was actually on him. The longer this “example” went on, the more the audience got excited about the ultimate reveal of Sue’s real marital status. He finally asked her, “So what do you do?” and when she replied, “I’m a Nun,” the crowd went wild. Sue was a master at bringing joy and rendering the presenters speechless.

She had a great saying. “You only live once but if you do it right, once is enough.”  I will dearly miss her.

Author
Don Baird is a speaker, writer, and adjunct professor in Clinical Psychology. He is a former AATH Board Member from Chicago, and has spoken on matters of humor and psychology locally, nationally and internationally (and even sometimes sensibly).
Join us for

Humor: The Power & Purpose of Play

at the Annual Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor Conference in Orlando-Disney Springs, Florida on

April 27-30, 2017 at the Holiday Inn Orlando-Disney Springs
1805 Hotel Plaza Blvd., Lake Buena Vista, Orlando FL 32830

Watch for details at aath.org
Baby Caption Contest:

We have a winner to our baby caption contest! Fabulous prizes have been awarded. Congratulations Mr. Finn, Banker.

Message to Members:

Welcome to our 5th AATH Humor Voice, a newsletter for, about, and by our members. We hope you enjoyed it!

We’d like to hear from you about things you would like to see included. We are always looking for Member Spotlights. Please send your ideas to: Laurie Young—Laurie@LaughWays.com.

Next Issue

• Will focus on the topic of PLAY.
• Have articles to contribute? — send them to us!
• Your funny story, images, or research you would like to share.
• Our March special topic will be HEALTH and HUMOR.

Think about including AATH on your donation list!

We are a 501c corporation, which means you can deduct your donation on your taxes. We are changing but volunteers can’t do all that needs to be done and everything has a cost. Please keep AATH in mind.

Most importantly, thanks to all the authors who have helped make this newsletter a reality.

Our editorial staff:

Laurie Young, Hunter Gatherer. If you haven’t been gathered yet, you will. Send her your ideas! Laurie@Laughways.com.

Kay Caskey, It might not look like it, but this woman is smarter than you. Ask her what she has to do with Sputnik. Fabulous prize for the first person to ask!

Sporty King, Expert on ALL things, not just grammar and speling! He can rattle off the military ranks in every branch of the service in under one minute and has caught more wild Pokemons that anyone in else in North Carolina!
America’s got some talent, alright

By Deb Gauldin

I stepped off the stage to the sound of laughter and cheers. Instead of a conference room full of nurses, the setting was a club in West Hollywood and the man following me was a talent agent. Had I just agreed to audition for America’s Got Talent (AGT)? Was my mind playing tricks or had I lost my mind altogether? Isn’t a guitar-playing, singing nurse humorist a little odd? Clearly I’d never seen the popular television show.

As I stood among hundreds of fellow AGT hopefuls snaking for blocks around the Richmond Virginia Convention Center, "odd" was re-defined. Line-mates included a flamenco dancer, an intense cowboy pacing back and forth in pointy, purple, lizard-looking boots, and a man who could best be described as an accident waiting to happen.

I am not kidding. Less than a block behind was an elderly black man. He was slightly bent at the waist and wore a broad smile. Tossed over his shoulder, were a pair of well-worn roller skates. At his side was a young man carrying his grandfather’s inhaler in one hand and a 7-foot ladder in the other.

Just as I began morphing into my public-health-and-safety nurse persona (think Bruce Banner), my number was called. I considered trying to blend in with an inner city step dance team or running to my car. Instead, a small group of us were ushered before a “Pre-Heidi/Howie” judge whose personality and sense of humor appeared to be tightly coiled into the bun atop her Gen-X head. No affect. No eye contact. No problem. I’d worked with plenty of physicians.

We were told to stand on the “X” taped to the floor and to cut whatever material we had prepared from 90 seconds to a mere 45. I estimated that it would take most of that time to stop my knees from knocking. It turns out the audition was really fun. The judge actually laughed.

This would have been an excellent sign had I been in the right room! I thought I was auditioning as a nurse comedian — a strolling “menstrual-singer” with a killer bladder-control song. But alas, I was billed as a singer, singer. You know, Whitney Houston, Carrie Underwood, P. Diddy.

After a several month wait, I learned I had not been selected. With a mix of disappointment and relief, I cancelled my Botox appointments and returned the Gina Lollabrigida head scarves and tinted glasses. The talent agent would like me to give it another go. We’ll see. I’m too old (and other things) to sleep my way to the top and I don’t roller skate, but I will work on a new ditty about pee and keep you posted!

Author

Deb has been an AATH board member and conference planner, an in-demand speaker and is a very funny, entertaining person.