

# Family Living Focus

By  
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## THE MAGIC OF LAUGHTER

I enjoy telling funny stories and playing tricks on others. There's nothing better than a good laugh. But sometimes, the laugh is on me!

Let me tell you a little story. In July 1992, Russell and I went on a horse back camping trip into the wilderness in southern Montana. We didn't know any of the other 15 people on the trip.

After a day on the trail, we reached our base camp and supper time finally came. The camp cook enjoyed telling us about the old sheep herders who used to use this spot as a camp years ago. Legend has it that the herders always had a pot of stew going on the stove. Each day they would add a little more water and meat. During the months they were in the mountains, one of them lost his false teeth in the stew pot and they never realized it until they emptied the kettle when snowfall came. Now, years later, the old choppers are like a ghost in camp, they appear and disappear. I never gave the story another thought after it was told.

The second morning in camp, it seemed that everyone was coming to breakfast at the same time.

When I thought about it later, this was highly unusual because the day before, they really struggled in. When Russell and I arrived at the makeshift dining tent, the cook and his helpers informed me that I was very special and that they wanted to actually serve me breakfast.

So I sat down and everyone else quickly took their places, all of us sitting on these skinny boxes in which the food had been transported on horseback. I was quite impressed when they set three pieces of delicious looking french toast down before me. Everyone started to eat. I'm particular when I eat french toast. I don't like it piled on top of one another. With my fork, I carefully began to lay out the pieces. Suddenly when I picked up the last piece I saw that horrible set of dirt-looking legendary false teeth pressed into my toast. As I screamed and fell backwards off my seat, the camp dogs came running and barking to the scene.

Everyone in camp had a great laugh at my expense. It turned out that the entire camp knew what was going to happen — even Russell. After spending two days with me, it seemed those strangers who quickly became friends, knew I

enjoyed playing tricks on others and appreciated a good laugh on me instead.

## LAUGH FOR HEALTH

How many times have you laughed so far today? Researchers suggest that the average American needs to laugh 15 or more times a day to be healthy. When we think of mental wellness, we usually think of stress management, holding ourselves together, coping with and enjoying life, exercise, and nutrition. Rarely do we think of laughter and humor as possible ways to deal with stress and change.

Dr. William Fry, a researcher in the psychology of laughter at Stanford University, says that 20 seconds of intense laughter can quickly double the heart rate of three to five minutes. This same accomplishment would take three minutes of strenuous rowing exercise! Studies show that muscles in the chest, neck, abdomen, shoulders, face and scalp get a beneficial workout and that other parts of the body are more relaxed during a laughing session.

Laughter exercises the lungs and breathing muscles and stimulates the circulatory system. While we are laughing, the chest, abdomen, and face get a workout. The entire cardiovascular system is benefited by increased oxygen in the blood. Some have called this internal jogging. It stimulates the endocrine system and causes secretion of hormones which stimulate your heart and breathing. Endorphins, our natural pain killers, are released. After laughter is over (if your have laughed extra hard) there is the feeling of turning to rubber.

Laughter is a stress reducer. When a person laughs, he or she briefly loses muscles tone. All the

tense muscles of the body are relaxed.

We all experience stress, anxiety, and frustration. Many times we look at things negatively. However, we can be free from these negatives. We can take a bad situation and turn it into a positive one. That is, we can change our beliefs or perspectives about a situation.

If you believe that the world has been good, you would see it as good. If you believe that the world

is a negative place to live, then it will be negative. A sense of humor is a sense of perspective. It keeps you from getting brittle in the face of change.

Lighten your attitudes about yourself and your anxieties will become lighter, too! Remember, laughter is contagious, as I found out with that old set of choppers. Don't worry or analyze why people laugh — just participate.

## Herbs Can Bring Sweet Smell Of Success

HUNTINGDON (Huntingdon Co.) — Herbs — once used for everything from stomach ache remedies to air fresheners — have made a comeback. "Interest in herbs has increased rapidly in the past few years," said Keppy Arnoldsen, horticulture graduate student in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences.

Last year, Arnoldsen and Aime Voisin, a senior majoring in horticulture, completed an independent study project growing 67 herbs in an ornamental plot at Penn State's Trial Gardens. Their demonstration garden provided information used to compile a Penn State publication entitled "Herbs for the Home Gardener." This 68-page publication has 58 colored illustrations and information on 32 herbs, including common and scientific names, plant characteristics, hardiness, size, soil preference, propagation, pests and disease, bloom time, and color and uses for the herbs.

"Many commercial growers are finding it lucrative to sell herbs wholesale to garden centers and stores. There's also a large market

in dried herbs for decorations, teas, cooking and other uses. You can make a career out of herbs," said Arnoldsen.

Voisin plans to do just that. "Herbs have such unusual textures, colors and scents. I got interested in them when I worked in a greenhouse after graduating from high school," she said. "I started buying books about herbs, and now I've decided to become a wholesaler and sell dried herb products.

It's one thing to read about herbs in a book, and it's another to grow them," said Voisin. "We had some surprises in our independent study. Some plants turned out to be incredibly bushy and took up three times the space we thought they would. And I never realized that cilantro and coriander are really the same plant — one is the leaf and one is the seed."

"Herbs for the Home Gardener" is available for \$8 from county cooperative extension offices or from the Publication Distribution Center, 112 Agricultural Administration Building, University Park, PA 16802.

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