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A FUNNY VALENTINE COULD BE SERIOUS

By Steve Wilson

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"Love may make the world go around but it's laughter
that keeps us from getting dizzy." --Donald Zochert

"I kissed my first girl and smoked my first cigarette on the same day.
I haven't had time for tobacco since." --Arturo Toscanini

"Acting is not very hard. The most important things are to be able to laugh and cry. If I have to cry,
I think of my sex life. And if I have to laugh, well,
I think of my sex life." --Glenda Jackson

"The most difficult years of marriage are those following the wedding."
--Unknown

"A relationship without humor is like shaking hands with gloves on."
--Sherry Suib Cohen

Over the years I have worked with thousands of singles and couples who are searching for answers to an eternally contemporary question, "When the weight of daily responsibilities drags us down to grim seriousness, how can we recapture the color and exuberance we once enjoyed?" Even in relationships that are comfortable, when you know everything is okay, you can get to feeling bored by the predictability of the same old thing. The answer may be easier and more fun than you might expect.

The great abundance of books, articles, and TV investigations by Geraldo, Sally, Phil, Oprah, Jerry, Tom, Dick & Harry have tried to find the answer which may be as plain as the nose on your face. It

isn't really news that a successful relation requires effort. You cannot take it for granted; you have to nurture and care for it. But this is what I find fascinating: one of the most important ingredients for keeping the spice, spark and sizzle in your love life is a good sense of humor and taking time for fun.

What Do You Want In A Mate?

Here are some interesting facts. Glamour magazine reports a survey of 350 brides-to-be who were asked what they admired most in their man. The quality most often mentioned as attractive: sense of humor (outranking romantic nature, intelligence, and good looks). Speaking for the sponsor of the study, Alice Kolator said, "These women take the decision to marry seriously. But the courtship has also got to be lighthearted."

A Newsweek article reports that, in a study of 351 couples married 15 years or more, researchers Robert and Jeanette Lauer found that the most admired qualities in a spouse were integrity, caring, sensitivity, and a sense of humor. A report in Men's Health shows us what a publishing company found when they tallied the attributes most frequently mentioned in its newsletter's personal ads. Humor topped the list for men and women alike. The results, Published in East West Journal, looked like this:

QUALITIES MOST OFTEN SOUGHT BY WOMEN IN MEN

1. Sense of humor
2. Intelligence
3. Nonsmoker
4. Sensitivity
5. Being committed
6. Being caring
7. Being compassionate
8. Attractiveness
9. Warmth
10. Maturity

QUALITIES MOST FREQUENTLY SOUGHT BY MEN IN WOMEN

1. Sense of humor
2. Intelligence
3. Warmth
4. Attractiveness
5. Nonsmoker
6. Being slender
7. Being sensitive
8. Being caring
9. Independence
10. Honesty

Clearly, the report concludes, Sylvester Stallone is no match for Woody Allen in the rugged world of romance.

Because true mirthful laughter always discharges emotional tension, it helps you feel relaxed and is part of the "ice-breaker" you need when you first meet someone. As your relationship progresses, the two of you will develop "in" jokes, pet names, and code words which help you feel special, draw you closer together, and reinforce your bonding. When the tough times come (and they will), your sense of humor will help, again, by relieving tension, and giving you a perspective from which you are less likely to be overwhelmed.

When Are You Too Old for Fooling Around?

Many octogenarians maintain that you don't stop playing when you grow old, you grow old when you stop playing. And it has been said that "you can't be truly sexy if you are afraid of looking foolish in bed." Sex therapist, Dr. Ruth Westheimer says, "In a relationship, if there is laughter from making fun of your partner, that's not always good. But if a joke is used to break the tension,

it can be very effective in defusing an explosive situation. For example, if a man gets mad because his girlfriend squeezes the toothpaste from the middle instead of the end, he shouldn't make a big scene. A little joke will help much more." Westheimer adds, "A sense of humor in bed can be very nice if used the right way. But it can also be very dangerous. Some tickling or telling funny stories in bed can make sex more interesting." (I wonder if this could be the origin of the saying that "timing is everything!")

Writer Peter Mehlman says, "Without a sense of humor, life is the kind of thing that can leave a bad taste in your mouth." And, as Sherry Suib Cohen points out, "If you can count on a laugh, sometimes once a day, sometimes more, from your nearest and dearest, consider yourself blessed. I suspect that when we are old and gray we will remember the times we had each other in stitches far more vividly than the times we just had each other.

One of the most common blocks to having fun is the mistaken belief that "I must act my age." Those who suffer from this attitude refuse to take part in fun activities because they feel they are too old for "foolishness." Author Doris Jasinek encourages us to overcome this idea by remembering that roller skates, bicycles, slides, and swings come in all sizes. George Burns tell us, "You can't help growing older, but you can help growing up -- that is a state of mind." After all, you can be 30 years old or seventy years young, it's up to you.

A Funny Valentine Could Be Serious

Pet names, private jokes, whimsical gifts, and shared fantasies are the games of love. In an extensive study, William Betcher, M.D., discovered much about how and why lighthearted play and humor can kindly, renew, and reaffirm romance, ease stressful situations, help solve problems, circumvent crises, and add excitement to our relationships. He maintains that humor is important not only for the pure pleasure it offers, but for the loving way it allows you to deal with trouble spots.

Jim Pelley, a humorist in Sacramento, California, suggests several specific ways a man can humorize his love life. There is absolutely no reason why a woman couldn't use these ideas, too.

- * Waltz her around the room while you hum her favorite song.
- * Ask her what's the matter in your best Pee Wee Herman voice.
- * Leave little surprise notes around the house for her, such as, in the freezer: "Honey, the meatloaf was great!" or, about 100 pages ahead of the bookmark in her bedside mystery: "I don't know whodunit, but I'd like to do it with you."
- * Slip a new tape into her car stereo if she's been complaining about traffic jams on the way home.
- * Carve a heart encircling your initials in the bar of soap she takes to the gym.
- * Put a candy bar in her briefcase if you know she loves chocolate.
- * Underneath the bread in the sandwich she takes for lunch: "I love you!"

From the first meeting to courtship, marriage, and beyond, it is apparent that a sense of humor and an element of playfulness is vital. However, if your sense of humor isn't enough to get you successfully all the way through the marriage phase, you can always employ it at time of divorce. Not too long ago Dear Abby offered these examples of authentic divorce announcements:

SPLIT

After Six Years
Lester and Betty
Have seen the light
Married November 8, 1966
Divorced November 6, 1972
Both are happily back in circulation.
Call Lester: 555-6500 (after 9 p.m.)
Betty: 555-1115 (anytime)

WITH HAPPY HEARTS

Lionel and Jane announce with pleasure
the severance of all legal
and/or other bonds that may have
existed between their daughter
Janet and That Boy.
With the new month of August
Janet enters into a new and
Beautiful single life.
As for That Boy -- May the Great
Honcho in the sky love him and
Keep him -- someplace else.

Clearly, improving your laugh life will improve -- or save -- your love life, make you more attractive, and bring satisfaction to your intimate relationships. Here is my best tip for marriage: Pam and I try to maintain a sense of humor about our marriage. I don't try to run her life, and I don't try to run mine, either. That works out real well! (And Henny Youngman is our favorite marriage counselor.)

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