



## **The Humor Of Recovery: Pointed, Poignant, Powerful**

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*"What soap is to the body, laughter is to the soul." --Jewish proverb*

*"The art of medicine consists of amusing the patient while nature cures the disease". --Voltaire*

*"Laughter oft is but an art  
To drown the outcry of the heart." --C.G. Jung*

*"Life does not cease to be funny when people die  
any more than it ceases to be serious when people laughs." --G.B. Shaw*

These grim statistics are reported in Barbara Yoder's *Recovery Resource Book*: in the USA about 88 million people are chemically dependent or in a relationship with someone who is. At this writing, there are an estimated 30 million children of alcoholics; 50 million of us smoke and 12 million chew tobacco; up to 37 million are "food addicts"; 4 million are compulsive gamblers. I would add that there are untold millions recovering from the loss of a loved-one, too. *What's so funny about any of that?*

In the last few years there has been an explosion in the popularity of self-help books and support groups based on a rapidly developing psychological technology which, it turns, has a seriously humorous aspect. The jargon of this new psychology includes terms such as "family dysfunction", "adult child", "codependence", and "it's never too late to have a happy childhood". This so-called recovery movement provides education, support, and new ways of understanding how life experiences, especially in our early years, leave emotional injury and

damage self-esteem, keeping us mired in unhappy and unsuccessful careers and personal relationship decisions.

The psychology of recovery is about how to heal these injuries and break the ties that bind us to chronic poor decision-making, compulsions (like workaholism) and addictions, and how to manage emotions that accompany deep losses. Examining these dilemmas from all sides, many experts eventually come to side that is ludicrous, absurd, or laughable. It turns out that humor and laughter are among the most important hallmarks of this recovery. Laughter is part of the prescription for this therapy. Here are some examples.

*Ed F.* (in keeping with a key tradition of Alcoholics Anonymous, he does not give his last name) has written a wonderful book of aphorisms, observations, and original cartoons called, "*God Grant Me The Laughter: A Treasury Of Twelve Step Humor*" (CompCare Publishers, Minneapolis). "If alcoholics have things in common (and I think they do)", says Ed, "one of those things is a wonderful sense of humor".

Performance coach and humor guide, Lee Glickstein, has conducted *Humor in Recovery* classes in San Francisco that he describes as "support for those in recovery (whether 12 Step, therapy, spiritual or personal paths) who are drawn to the stage". He also presents "a revolving cast of serious standup humorists" in a marvelous support/entertainment called "The Comedy of Recovery" where the laughs are neither mundane nor cheap shots. One reviewer said, "Most comics took the time to gently evoke the audience's memory and empathy, building their stories to ecstatic crescendos. The resulting release felt clean. It would be hard to find a better time free from the risk of emotional hangover".

But you don't have to be a recovering alcoholic to appreciate the wisdom of the humor in Lee's workshops or Ed's book. In the recovery movement, there are support groups for just about everyone from male transvestites to mothers whose daughters won't speak to them. Some humorists have even dreamed up groups such as "Adult Children of Engineers" and "The Church of 80% Sincerity". (I guess *recovery chic* is a great target for recovery tongue-in-cheek).

Here is a sampling of the pointed-but-loving humor from Ed's book:

"When we talk about denial, we don't mean a river in Egypt"

"We have to like ourselves to be able to laugh at ourselves"

"Recovery is a stairway, not a landing".

"Alcoholics don't have relationships, they take hostages".

"The strength of our recovery is in direct proportion to our ability to laugh at ourselves".

From other recovery publications come these ideas:

"Our spiritual lives grow with good-natured fun".

"This (recovery) program liberates us from heaviness by facing it".

"Recovery teaches us to enjoy life". "Our Creator has concocted a world of many pleasures and delights to play in".

"Some of us adult children need to grow up before we can be the children we never were".

"What are the skills of a child: Openness, lightheartedness, trust, the ability to expect wonderful surprises. Those of us who didn't learn these attitudes effortlessly and naturally will have to practice. But if we choose to, we can learn".

"When I grow up, I want to be a child".

### **Therapeutic Laughter Is Universal**

It has been my experience that, in the right atmosphere, positive humor and laughter can help almost anyone overcome fears and gain confidence. True mirthful laughter is warm and inviting. Dr. Raymond Moody makes an important distinction in this regard. He says that all healing take place in an environment of love, support, and understanding. To the extent that we get through life's problems at all well, is due in part to the extent of our network. *Laughing with*

others connects us to them and draws us into the network of love and support and understanding, which is vital to healing; laughing at pushes people out of the network.

Playfulness is a human being's most natural way to learn about the world. Laughter has a healthful effect on virtually every part of the human body. The meeting rooms of the most effective support groups ring with laughter because they are safe havens for honesty: there is humor in truth and, just as often, there is truth in humor.

"Whether we're in recovery for alcoholism, codependency, gambling, or eating addictions, we all share the same experience: recovery is hard work". These are the wise words of Anne Wilson Schaef, author of "Laugh! I Thought I'd Die (If I didn't)". She continues, "And it's often when we're pushing our programs the hardest that recovery seems more elusive than ever. At these times, letting go, even laughing at ourselves, can be the most healing gift of all".

### **Laughter Is One Of Your Birthrights**

Did you know: The average pre-school child in the USA laughs 400 times a day but the average adult laughs less than 15 times a day. Why not make it a point to take the measure of your serum laugh level every day? When your head hits the pillow at night and you review the day gone by, ask yourself if you met the goal of 15 good laughs. If the answer is "No", make a plan to get your full quota of laughs tomorrow and drift off to sleep with those pleasant visions in your brain.

And, here is one more of Ed F.'s thoughts which I will joyfully add to my collection of sage advice urging us to enjoy life today: "Don't wait to laugh until you're entirely happy". And another from Anne Wilson Schaef, "I realize that humor isn't for everyone. It's only for people who want to **have fun, enjoy life, and feel alive**".

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