

““ Vitamin H ””

(The Best Medicine)

By Mark Matteson

I want to talk to you about a serious subject; Humor. It has been said, “Laughter is the best medicine.” Have you heard that expression? Why? We know it feels good, especially directly after a good guffaw. I have invested the last 15 years studying wellness, longevity, and solid mental management. In that research, (literally hundreds of books, CD’s and articles) some common denominators bubble to the surface. Humor and ability to laugh at ourselves and circumstances is at the top of the list.

Jerry Seinfeld once said in an interview, “I knew I wanted to be a Comedian when I was 8-years old. I made milk come out of my friend’s nose at lunch one day. I was hooked.” Since then, Jerry had a plan. Jerry had the discipline. Jerry approached his comedy dreams very seriously. Few Comedians do.

Three of my favorite comedians besides Mr. Seinfeld (and his pal Larry David) you might know just by their first names alone, “Rodney”, “Bob” and “Louie.” I have always been drawn to the comedians that employed “Self-Effacing” humor (poking fun at themselves) as opposed to the more common “Attacking the Audience” style of Don Rickles or Chris Rock. I recently read biographies of each one of these three funny men. Let’s start with the youngest.

“Louie Anderson” has made a name for himself as the “Fat Guy” of comedy. He has carried the Torch Jackie Gleason lit. He has done Stand-Up for years, HBO Specials, Game Show Hosting and of course Movies. His bittersweet book, “Goodbye Jumbo, Hello Cruel World” was a revelation. There were 11 kids in his family. They were poor. He had an alcoholic, abusive father. He turned to food for solace. He turned to Stand-Up Comedy for survival, and to run away.

In his book, he stops running. He faces his life, his addiction to food (he got up to 360# at 6’-1”), and ultimately



his victim-hood. Louie does several very healthy things to heal himself of his painful past and self-destructive present that no amount of money or fame could assuage. With the passing of his mother, he sells his million dollar home in Malibu, he sells all his junk and clutter from his Minnesota past, he reconciles the strained relations with siblings with a very simple strategy, Forgiveness.

I recently saw him Vegas at his “Larger Than Life” show at the Excalibur (which is an ironic title, given he must now weigh 250#. I spoke with him after his show. I told him that his sincerity, honesty, humility, compassion and gratitude were tangible. It was a visceral experience. His book is one of the most honest and heart-wrenching experiences I have ever had. There is a little of Louie’s past in each of our lives, I believe. I realized I spent the last 37 years searching for the love and affection I never knew as a child. That was my problem. I thought I would find it in the spoils of success. Nothing was ever enough. No laugh was ever big enough to dry the tears. No applause was ever enough to replace the hugs I never got. No amount of money was ever enough to replace wanted or

needed. No meal could fill the pit in my stomach. No food could satisfy my craving. He found what he was looking for in one simple word and action...Forgiveness.

"Bob" is of course, Bob Newhart. The subtle, laid back icon that recently turned 75 years old; has a new book out entitled "I Shouldn't Even Be Doing This." It's hilarious. He changed the face of comedy in 1960 with a live comedy album that sold over a million copies. They called it a "Spoken Word" record. He told stories instead of one-liners. His humor was more cerebral and was not overtly sexual or profane. He was the everyman. His hit TV shows paved the way for guys like Ray Romano. His humor was/is situational. His facial expressions and his use of the pause makes you laugh. He is an anomaly in the world of Comedy because he was an accountant who hated his job. He has been married for 47 years to the same woman!

With Bob, what you see is what you get.

Rodney "Mr. I Get No Respect" Dangerfield (Born Jacob Cohen then he changed it to Jack Roy in his teens). His childhood, life, like Louie's was heartbreaking. An alcoholic, bitter mother, an absentee, philandering father, made for an incredibly sad childhood. They were so poor, when he was 9-years old, he found a job selling ice cream at the beach and made and saved over \$100 in 1932. That was real money. When he went to the bank to take some out, he found that his mother had stolen ALL of it. "We needed it," was all she said. In true Rodney form, he shrugged it off and proceeded to find a different way to earn some dough.

His comedy came from his pain. "I lived in a tough neighborhood growing up. There was an Italian Restaurant near my house, Nunzio's, formerly Vito's, which served 'Broken Leg of Lamb', these guys were tough." His story is unique. He started doing Stand-Up in New York at 16. Then at 28 left the industry to sell Aluminum Siding for 12 years. He had a family. At forty, he jumped back in with both feet. He passed away at 82 last year. He was an icon. He found the respect he never received as a child.

After reading these three books, I concluded that Humor Heals the Receiver but not necessarily the Sender. That is work that is separate from the delivery of it. Why does comedy and humor heal the Receiver? According to William Fry, MD, professor emeritus at Stanford University's School of Medicine, "Each humor event you experience makes you grow a little bit. As the brain has expanded, it takes on new connections." Humor improves memory. Advertisers have known this for years. Otherwise we wouldn't have lizards selling insurance or dog selling beer. "Humor loosens up the mind and fosters creativity and innovation," according to Alice Isen, PhD, a professor of Psychology and Management at Cornell

University. Norm Cousins, in his book, "The Healing Heart" proved on himself as the guinea pig, that humor and laughter bolsters the immune system, he coined the phrase, "Psycho-neuro-immunology" and walked out the hospital six weeks after doctors gave him a few months to live. His remedy? Massive doses of Vitamin C and Vitamin H (Humor). He watched hundreds of comedies, The Marx Bros., The 3-Stooges, ET all.

Next time you are feeling sorry yourself, go to a Comedy Club, watch a DVD like Wedding Crashers or Sleepless in Seattle or pick up a good humor book like Nora Ephron's newest masterpiece, "I Feel Bad About My Neck" and have a good laugh. Better yet, read it to a friend who is feeling blue and make milk come out of their nose. You will feel better, I promise!



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