Hello Friends,

Here in northeastern North Carolina the days are beginning to get a little shorter and the nights a little cooler. Students and teachers are now in full swing with more than a month of school tucked neatly under their belts. I hope that each of you is getting settled in and finding your niches in this school year.

While teaching is certainly a demanding profession, and the everyday expectations seem to increase as the year progresses, don’t forget to look for humor in the little things. It is sometimes unsettling as we are reminded about the importance of this year’s test scores and how many days we have to teach how many goals and objectives? But it is important to take time to enjoy your students, your colleagues and the humorous things that can happen in the classroom.

One of the funniest things that happened to me when I was in the classroom still gives me a chuckle when I think about it. I was teaching second grade and since I was the new teacher in the school, I had a most interesting group of children who were “perfectly normal, except they just didn’t learn how to read in first grade.” Well, it didn’t take me long to realize that there were very good reasons why they didn’t learn how to read in first grade and I was going to have my hands full with this little group.

I’ll never forget little George with his huge brown eyes and his slow southern talk. He had a problem keeping a pencil for longer than a few minutes. Day after day I had replaced his pencils and tried all kinds of pencil conservation plans to help him, but day after day he would wait until we were well into an activity before he would drag out, “Ms. Luton, I don’t have a pencil.” One day, exasperated by his constant dilemma, I took him to my desk and knowing that he loved stickers, I said, “George, if you can hold on to this pencil until the end of the day I will give you this whole page of animal stickers.”

George was thrilled and said he thought he could do it. We were practicing writing, and as I finished giving directions and looked toward George I will never forget the sight. He had taken a shoelace from his shoe and lashed the pencil to his wrist! I had not actually said he needed to be able to write with the pencil, I just said he had to keep it. He had come up with the perfect solution! Needless to say, I could not get upset with him and if I knew where he is today, I’d have to tell him how many times I have thought of him since that day.

A little bit of laughter can go a long way and it really does make you feel better. Check out this interesting Web site on Laughter Therapy [http://www.freewebs.com/laughtertherapy/] and bookmark it on your computer for a time when you might need it. I’ll leave you with this: Laughter is an instant vacation. (Milton Berle)

Could you use a little vacation today?

Warm regards,

Cheryl
Benefits of Laughter

Angels fly because they take themselves lightly. (G.K. Chesterton)

Plato's remark that "Even the gods love jokes." must be correct, for the value of laughter is recorded in sacred scripture. For example, the Koran states that "He deserves Paradise who makes his companions laugh." By the fourteenth century, the healing power of humor was recognized by the medical community. An important French surgeon, Henri de Mondeville (1260-1320), wrote, "Let the surgeon take care to regulate the whole regimen of the patient's life for joy and happiness, allowing his relatives and special friends to cheer him, and by having someone tell him jokes."

However, extensive research on 'laughter therapy' did not begin until after the New England Journal of Medicine published an article by Norman Cousins in 1976. Later, in 1979, this article became the first chapter of his book, 'Anatomy of an Illness.' In it he explained how he was diagnosed in 1964 with ankylosing spondylitis (also known as spondylitis, AS, or Bechterew Disease). The disease usually results in acute inflammation of the spine and can affect other areas of the body as well. Norman Cousins' case was so severe that he was given a one in five hundred chance of recovery and a few months to live.

Realizing that negative thoughts and attitudes can result in illness, he reasoned that positive thoughts and attitudes may have the opposite effect. So he left the hospital and checked into a hotel where he took mega doses of vitamin C and watched humorous movies and shows, including 'Candid Camera' and the Marx Brothers. He found that ten minutes of boisterous laughter resulted in at least two hours of pain-free sleep. He continued his routine until he recovered. Thus, he proved that laughter is the best medicine, and pointed the way to mind-body medicine.

William Fry, M.D., professor of psychiatry at Stanford University Medical School and expert on health and laughter, reports the average kindergarten student laughs 300 times a day. Yet, adults average just 17 laughs a day. Why the difference? Are we too uptight, too tense? Do we take life too seriously? Isn't it time we learned how to relax? We don't stop laughing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop laughing. So, if we want to fly like the angels and share in their happiness, we'll have to follow their example and take ourselves lightly.

Our five senses are not enough for ideal living. We need to use our sixth sense: our sense of humor. Humor isn't about merely telling jokes; it's the way we view the world. We can be sincere about life without taking it so seriously. We can laugh about our mistakes and pain. Louis Kronenberger explains: "Humor simultaneously wounds and heals, indicts and pardons, diminishes and enlarges; it constitutes inner growth at the expense of outer gain, and those who posses and honestly practice it make themselves more through a willingness to make themselves less."

The brilliant American humorist, James Thurber (1894-1961), described humorists as follows: "The wit makes fun of other persons; the satirist makes fun of the world; the humorist makes fun of himself, but in so doing, he identifies himself with people - that is, people everywhere, not for the purpose of taking them apart, but simply revealing their true nature." The wellspring of laughter is not happiness, but pain, stress, and suffering. Socrates pointed this out when he taught, "The comic and the tragic lie inseparably close, like light and shadow." So, we should be thankful for our suffering, for without it there would be nothing to laugh at! When we laugh at our woes, they dissolve, or at least become bearable, so that we arrive at peace and happiness. As the pragmatic philosopher and psychologist, William James (1842-1910), said, "We don't laugh because we're happy, we are happy because we laugh."

What's the reason behind this article? Simply to point out the benefits of laughter are too numerous to ignore. Now is the time to resolve that we will consciously make an effort to laugh frequently throughout the day. Of course, as we do so, we will laugh with people - not at them. We will laugh at what people do, not at what people are. We will laugh not only to lighten our burdens, but those of everyone we meet.

The many benefits of laughter

1. When you make fun of yourself, you disempower those who would make fun of you and disarm possible confrontations.

2. Laughter dissolves tension, stress, anxiety, irritation, anger, grief, and depression. Like crying, laughter lowers inhibitions, allowing the release of pent-up emotions. After a hearty bout of laughter, you will experience a sense of well-being. Simply put, he who laughs, lasts. After all, if you can laugh at it, you can live with it. Remember, a person without a sense of humor is like a car without shock absorbers.
3. Medical researches have found that laughter boosts the immune system. The study of how behavior and the brain affect the immune system is called psychoneuroimmunology. Though still in its infancy, this science is rapidly gaining much attention as mankind strives to understand the mind-body relationship.

4. Laughter reduces pain by releasing endorphins that are more potent than equivalent amounts of morphine.

5. Humor helps integrate both hemispheres of our brain, for the left hemisphere is used to decipher the verbal content of a joke while the right hemisphere interprets whether it is funny or not.

6. Laughter adds spice to life; it is to life what salt is to a hard-boiled egg.

7. Develop your sense of humor and you will find you are more productive, a better communicator, and a superior team player.

8. Everyone loves someone who can make them laugh. The more you share your sense of humor, the more friends you will have.

9. Humor brings the balance we need to get through the turbulence of life comfortably.

10. Laughter is even equivalent to a small amount of exercise. It massages all the organs of the body, according to Dr. James Walsh.

11. A sense of humor can help you accept the inevitable, rise to any challenge, handle the unexpected with ease, and come out of any difficulty smiling.

The most wasted day is that in which we have not laughed. Don't wait until you are sick before you begin practicing laughter therapy. Start today by renting comedy classics from your video store, borrowing humorous books from the library, attending comedy clubs or watching comics on TV, and exchanging jokes with family members, friends, and coworkers. If you are visiting someone in the hospital, why not bring funny greeting cards and humorous books instead of flowers?

I'll end on a personal note. Every time I'm out on a cloudy day with a group of friends, I'm the first person to know when it starts to rain. Do you know why? Because I'm bald!

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Wanting to exhale: A desperate student’s life
By Susan Wildburger
BAES from WGU
July, 2005

Week 1

To Whom It May Concern:

The gods are not on my side. I had a very trying day last Friday, as my daughter came home from college for the weekend and she was pretty banged up; she had a bike accident at Baylor, she is limping, and they took x-rays of her foot, leg, and head as she has raw skin on her forehead. I just told her to take a nap and later I will take her out for coffee. I have an injured foot from all the moving I did (when I moved her to Baylor College a week ago) and she has her right foot swollen and legs scraped, but what concerns me is the head. Baylor took x-rays of her skull before she left school today, so we are waiting for the call to see if anything is unusual.

Oh no! My father in law passed away in Austria today, sad. I have taken two weeks off school to rest after a test I’m sure I did not pass as I got sidetracked and pretty much ran out of time to answer the last 13 or so questions (whoever said lack of sleep will catch up with you at the most inopportune moment should please tattoo that to my forehead). This old lady—yours truly—of 46 still does not retain the tricks of study skills, too old to learn or too many kids to entertain and help with homework but not too old to teach them tricks, do as I say uh, say that again? I’d rather have a Broadway hat and be gone for a while just to Bora Bora and see what Marlon Brando found so fascinating in paradise isolation all those years preceding his death and weight gain too.

No more please!!

When it rains it pours, my God, this has been an incredible day, and to make you laugh up there in the stormy heavens just above my head, before I leave and drink a super sized bottle of wine, my neighbor’s daughter’s nanny comes and rings my doorbell in a panic about 45 minutes ago to please come and kill a snake curled up on the kitchen counter because she can’t stand it and her stomach is curling.

The kicker: she asks my 12- and 13-year-old daughters to do this chore without any considerations for their safety, just her fear rules and the fact that I’m not the one paying her to take care of my child. At this point I do not know if it really is a garden snake, I’m not the outdoor type or smell the lavender type, I could not tell the difference anyway.

Like a good neighbor and an amazing multitasker, I said, "Wait a second, I’m issuing my husband’s ticket to Austria for his father’s funeral, I’m looking over my daughter since she looks pretty banged up from a bike accident, and I just got home from the dentist with my other two daughters but I will be there." I go next door ten minutes later, get gloves, and a garbage bag, grab the snake and strangle it with the bag’s string while it hisses at me showing me some sort of fangs; the child is curled up on the sofa and the nanny has left the scene leaving the child alone, so...

I’m calming a kid and killing a snake, a great afternoon aphrodisiac. Five minutes into the killing fields, the dad (my attorney neighbor) of this little girl comes to my door in a fury telling me that that was his garden snake and it took him 3 days to catch it for his daughter’s class project. Can I ever win?

I told him to go blame his nanny that bothered her with his panic and never told me it was a caught snake. You would imagine a forty-one-year-old nanny and even an eleven-year-old ADD child could express him- or herself more accurately and convey to me that they do not need the snake killed, just removed to the patio. You think? Seriously, have we lost the ability to verbalize? She said kill, kill!!

This only happens to me all in one day. So now I really deserve the bottle of wine and time alone with my firstborn, my college girl.

But I don’t deserve time alone and silence to open my new course. Oh no, it is volleyball practice time, back to back for each child and here we go again, smack that pinky toe into the foot of the chair and break it, why? Because I ran to the door to open it, it is once again the Orkin man, having already explained to him every time he comes to my house and tries to open the gate that he has to jiggle it again; no go, it is repetition time. I had already imagined to think that a 350-pound man much bigger than I could dart jiggle the iron gate to open, and I guess the rite learning here did not work, where is school education going? Where did the problem-solving skills go, skipped too many generations?

Toe is black and blue and dangling, no time to suffer, take two Advil, need something to keep toes together until I can go to the doctor in the morning (no, I’m not paying to go to the emergency room, no cash, bad insurance and too much pride to explain the Sicilian war I just came from). I only have scotch tape, can’t find duck tape or bandage tape, what do I do? I got a good rubber band—thank God for those newspaper rubber bands—and rubber banded my little toe together with my good one. My daughter says I’m embarrassing her with that thing on my toe while my toe is visible in my flip flops. Oh well “honey” I’m just making a fashion statement and the rubber band is this deep violet blue kind of color anyway, trust me these moms here at volleyball practice will be wearing one soon, you’ll see.” Yes, I’m a trend setter, please I have to be and have something today.

No, too needy.

-6:30 pm, I’ve just come back from having coffee with my firstborn, me limping to the left and she limping to the right as her foot looks like a watermelon from the bike accident, and I’m getting funny looks from the PTO moms on coffee break at Starbucks in between their book club meetings and their late night soiree martini hour with themselves when the house is quiet and everyone is asleep. Boy oh boy, we mothers do crave for time alone, and then the other kind of super moms call me selfish, meaning I really need to be a martyr and give it my all, all the time to my kids, “what is she thinking going to graduate school at her age?”

Anyhow, it is nice to actually meet and talk to myself once in a while.

-7:30 pm, forgot to check the mail-box, I cannot take more bad news to add to my colorful day, so I will wait to open the scores envelope tomorrow. Instead I check e-mail and send some links and tips for interpreting those Bible-long study guides to some of my student friends, yeez the one link I open is 52 pages long. Well if I can get rid of the jinx bestowed upon yours truly, must be something I did when I was very young, but what?

Oh, yes, the confessionary incident, and the bees for my teacher, “oh God I thought I got punished for that already and it was a long time ago; I was only 10.” (Stories for another time).

As I lay in bed finally at 10:30 pm, my head resting on the feather pillow, I hear so many familiar voices embedded in the distant noises that rock me back and forth with the comfort that my family is safe and sound, the girls are watching a movie since it’s the weekend, they are laughing along with my husband, and my firstborn is checking her college e-mail, I say my final prayer and hope for a better day tomorrow. I do feel blessed after all. “Close your eyes Susan and don’t let the bed bugs bite you!”

Not a chance, this time I will bite them back!

Closure- I have deep regrets now thinking of how bad of a day that snake had compared to mine. It is all relative; everything is not as it seems, good night sweet prince of shadows, good night.

-PS- The snake is alive, just has a crooked, very fashionable neck. -Mental note: have not heard from my mentor, stop thinking girl.

Signing offffffffff, zzzzzz, exhale
--Susan.
Links for Educators

As educators we often find ourselves looking for new tricks for our repertoire or just something to help us in general. The following is a listing of several helpful websites for lesson plans, and free downloads for the classroom. Enjoy!

Web sites:

No Educator Left Behind: Uniform Student Proficiency is interesting, read for yourself at: http://www.educationworld.com/a_issues/NELB/NELB076.shtml.

Need a laugh? Check out these humorous stories: http://www.educationworld.com/a_issues/columnists/barreca/barreca.shtml.

Good News Announcements

I just wanted to share with everyone, that today I was hired as a first grade teacher. The district that I had been working for the past five years did not have any opening, but a neighboring school district had such a high registration for first grade that they had to hire two more teachers and I was one of them. I had wanted to stay in my district; however it just did not work out. I had accumulated state and local days and I did not want to lose my local days. Needless to say I lost my local days but gained an extra three thousand more in pay a year. God truly blessed me. I am so grateful!

Glenis Augustine
1st grade teacher
Monaham Elementary
Activities to Share

I wanted to pass on a great "getting to know you" activity that I tried this year. It is called "Brown Bag It!" My daughters, who are in 2nd grade did this and I just adapted it to my earth science class. I did it myself also and it helped all of us feel more comfortable. Anyone can change the categories to fit their class but should also include some items to get to know the students better.

I am including it below:

Brown-Bag It!

Read the following list of categories. After you get home today, find one item to represent each category. (The item must be small enough to fit into the lunch bag your teacher will give you.) Try to find items that are 3-D and unique. Bring your bag to school tomorrow. Be prepared to share the contents of your bag with your classmates.

Categories
- A hobby or free-time activity that you enjoy.
- One of your favorites (food, color, music, book, etc.).
- A talent or special ability that you have.
- Your favorite part of science.
- Something having to do with rocks.
- A thing that reminds you of the stars.
- Future plans or goals.
- Something that can help or hurt the environment.

Hope some of the other teachers try this.

Thanks,

Penny Squires

Spotlight on Alumni
By Cheryl Luton
TC Alumni Mentor

Larry Manch

Another WGU grad gets a chance to lead a class of children to success

I had the extreme pleasure of meeting Larry Manch and his family at the July 14 and 15 mixer and commencement. Larry and his family traveled all the way from his home in Killeen, TX to attend the WGU graduation.

Larry will be teaching second grade at Montague Village Elementary School in Ft. Hood, Texas, just outside of Killeen. He met his second-grade team on Monday, September 25th, and was thrilled to get the keys to his classroom. He was to begin teaching on September 27th and said he could not wait to meet the kids.

Larry will truly be an asset to his team at Montague and his students will benefit from his life experiences and his love of teaching.