New Book Shares Power of Laughter

By Chana Shapiro

In their new book, "Discover the Power of Laughter," Atlantan Rachael Siegelman and twin sister, Minneapolis resident Sarah Routman, describe how you can improve your life by learning intentional laughter and developing a "laughter habit."

This book, written over a 10-year period, aims to help readers diminish stress, improve their health, and increase joy with this new ability. They share personal stories, offer medical data, and present laughter games — all to illustrate the power of learning to laugh intentionally.

Laughter is natural, the authors explain, "You were born knowing how to laugh. Even deaf and blind babies laugh. Laughter is the universal language — it needs no translation."

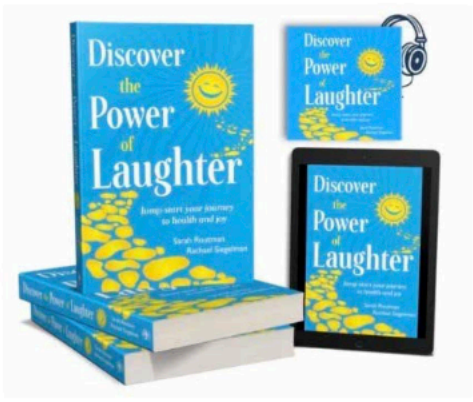
This book focuses on a specific type of laughter that is self-generated, purposeful, spirited, and actually can be learned. Because it is self-generated, laughter is an always-accessible, cheer-inducing self-help tool.

The sisters cite the effect of laughter on famous author and Saturday Review editor Norman Cousins' disease that was medically diagnosed as incurable. They quote Cousins, "Of all the gifts bestowed by nature on human beings, hearty laughter must be close to the top."

In Cousins' seminal work, "Anatomy of an Illness as Perceived by the Patient," the health benefits of laughter are core. Cousins wrote that positive emotions, a fierce will to live, and lots of laughter extended his post-diagnosis life for more than 25 years. His daughter, Sarah Shapiro, explained her father's belief that although laughter alone cannot cure illness, it is "a metaphor for all the positive emotions — love, hope, and faith."

The sisters note that "Cousins exemplified the potential of laughter to distract us from pain and minimize its effects." They write about Dr. Lee Berk at Loma Linda University, a world authority on mirthful laughter and humor, to whom Cousins reached out when he returned to good health and was seeking support for scientific research to prove the validity of his own laughter-influenced experience. Dr. Berk recalled the Biblical Proverb 17:22 that a merry heart is like good medicine. In a 2015 interview, Dr. Berk confirmed the many positive health outcomes of joyful laughter which impacts the nervous and immune systems, and he stated that laughter and exercise have similar positive effects on our bodies: he coined the term "laughercise."

Authors and sisters, **Rachael Siegelman** and **Sarah Routman**.



"Discover the Power of Laughter" can improve your life by learning intentional laughter and developing a "laughter habit."

The sisters demonstrate how to develop a laughing habit and show how a person can benefit from laughing individually, with a partner, or with a group. The ability to laugh, they explain, is part of our DNA, ready to nurture us, no prescription needed, and it's free!

"Discover the Power of Laughter" reveals how to access this nurturing. They affirm that "vigorous laughter raises feel-good endorphins, increases blood flow, and stimulates muscles and organs." Intentional laughter doesn't have to rely on listening to jokes or watching funny shows because it is self-motivated.

The sisters collected personal stories from people who learned to laugh because they wanted to decrease stress and generally become happier. They refer to it as "the power and magic of laughter in action." Through their own stories, Sarah and Siegelman candidly relate how they came to embrace laughter from opposite ends of the laughter spectrum. Siegelman notes, "We have found laughter to be so powerful in our own lives we want to share that message. We represent both people who laugh easily and people with some resistance."

Routman is outgoing and light-hearted. She laughs easily and eventually became a Laughter Yoga teacher and trainer. (Learn about Laughter Yoga in the book.) In her own words, Routman poignantly describes how purposeful laughter helped her through personal tragedy.

Siegelman, thoughtful, serious, and reserved, was at first resistant; however, she wanted to learn to be less inhibited and have more fun. Siegelman's desire to be more relaxed and playful and the 40-Day Laughter Challenge she devised, in which she committed to experiencing daily laughter, illustrates how regular, purposeful laughter increased her joy and improved her health.

It's hard to categorize this book: it's a memoir, a self-care book, and a how-to-laugh toolkit that includes laughter games, stories, and resources. Over the years, the sisters have earned a dedicated laughter-participant following, and in this book, their classes and games are praised in verbatim testimonies from doctors, health professionals and leaders in the self-help community.

The chapters on laughter games and the health benefits of hearty laughter — belly laughs are highly recommended — are interesting and compelling. There are suggested laughter games, and readers learn how to create their own games by which they can develop a habit of laughing purposefully.

Here's a sample stress-reducing laughter game for two:

- Hold hands with a partner;
- Take a deep breath while turning to face each other; synchronize your breathing.
- Look into each other's eyes and start to purposely laugh.

You will begin to laugh together naturally, and your mood will elevate. "Discover the Power of Laughter" is reader-friendly, well-organized, and motivating, presenting scientific data, helpful graphics, useful prompts, and apt quotations. The extensive bibliography, brief footnotes, and a glossary give the reader ready access to further information about how to "jump start your journey to health and joy" (which is the book's subtitle and prevailing message.)

The book's marketing plan is focused and unique. (It is not available through Amazon.) The sisters envision their book in libraries and book clubs, and they promote the book through live events, book signings, and various media. A reader's guide is in the works, and they will join book club Zoom meetings to answer questions and lead a mini-laughter session.

April 23 was World Book Day, and in response for each print book purchased, the sisters donated one to a local library, school, hospital, hospice, or senior center. They continue to collaborate with doctors and health care professionals.

Siegelman says, "We host weekly free laughter calls and Zoom events that build relationships with our readers, and we're planning a Laughter Habit Course to help folks who will benefit from being in a group of like-minded people."

Routman adds, "We both collect stories of how laughter positively impacts peoples' lives. Everyone has challenges, and we want to help them learn to laugh."

Routman, BA, BFA, MED, is a certified Laughter Yoga teacher, trainer, and global Laughter Ambassador. She shares purposeful, playful laughter with thousands of people worldwide as a keynote speaker and conference presenter.

Siegelman, BA, JD, and licensed mediator, is a childbirth educator and has trained thousands of medical professionals in Positive Patient Communication. She is a Certified Laughter Yoga leader, and she helps people design their own laughter games.

The book is available through the website, DiscoverThePowerOfLaughter.com. The website includes information about upcoming live events and new video library laughter games. ✱