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"LAUGHTER ISN'T WHAT WE DO WHEN WE FORGET THE PAIN—IT'S WHAT REMINDS US WE'VE SURVIVED IT."



"Healing doesn't always look heavy—sometimes it sounds like laughter."

Inside

7 THE MEDICINE OF LAUGHTER

Explore how humor boosts brain health, lowers stress, and strengthens emotional resilience.

13 THE PLAYFULNESS OF THE DIVINE

A soulful reflection on how humor reveals the playful nature of the divine —and why joy is sacred.

18 IN GOOD HANDS: KATYNA ROSARIO

A guide written by Dr. Katyna Rosario that helps us revisit the wonder of play

22 POWER UP SPOTLIGHT: HUMOR

Practical, science-backed tools to help you bring more lightness into your daily mental fitness routine.

²⁷ LETTER TO THE SELF

Three honest, moving letters from different voices about the moments laughter made healing possible.

10 LET JOY BE SEEN

An invitation to express joy without shame and reclaim laughter as a vital part of wellness.

16 WHEN THE BODY LAUGHS FIRST

A somatic look at how laughter resets the nervous system and offers a felt sense of safety.

20 IN REAL LIFE: INTERVIEW WITH RAÚL GONZÁLEZ

TV personality and comedian Raúl González on laughter, purpose, and staying grounded on and off screen.

24 HUMOR: BRING IT ON

A date night, a comedy show, and a reminder that laughter isn't just light—it's powerful. May Cook reflects on parenting, stage fright, and the quiet courage of showing up with humor.



From the Editor

THE COCOON



Joy Isn't a Distraction—It's a Healing Tool

This month's issue is about humor—not the loud, obnoxious kind, but the kind that sneaks up on you mid-crisis and says, "You're still here. You're still human."

In psychiatry, we talk a lot about trauma, emotional regulation, and recovery. But we don't always talk about the role of joy. About how the nervous system softens when we laugh. How we begin to feel safe enough to let go. How humor can be a bridge back to ourselves. How humor can help us connect and stay connected with the essential people.

This issue is a tribute to those moments of lightness—awkward, unexpected, and real. They don't erase the hard things, but they do help us carry them; making them much lighter.

So take what you need from these pages. Let them make you smile, breathe deeper, or just feel a little less alone.

Because healing doesn't always have to be so serious.

Sometimes it just starts with a laugh.

"Laughter isn't what we do when we forget the pain —it's what reminds us we've survived it."

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

From our Readers

The Integrity Issue had me in tears—honestly. 'The Integrity of Saying No' helped me release so much guilt I didn't realize I was carrying. For the first time, I felt like someone put words to what it feels like to honor yourself quietly.



— VALERIA M MIAMI Every article in the Integrity issue made me pause and reflect. The Eclectus parrot piece was stunning—and such a creative metaphor for being true to who we are. You've created something really special here. I look forward to every issue now.



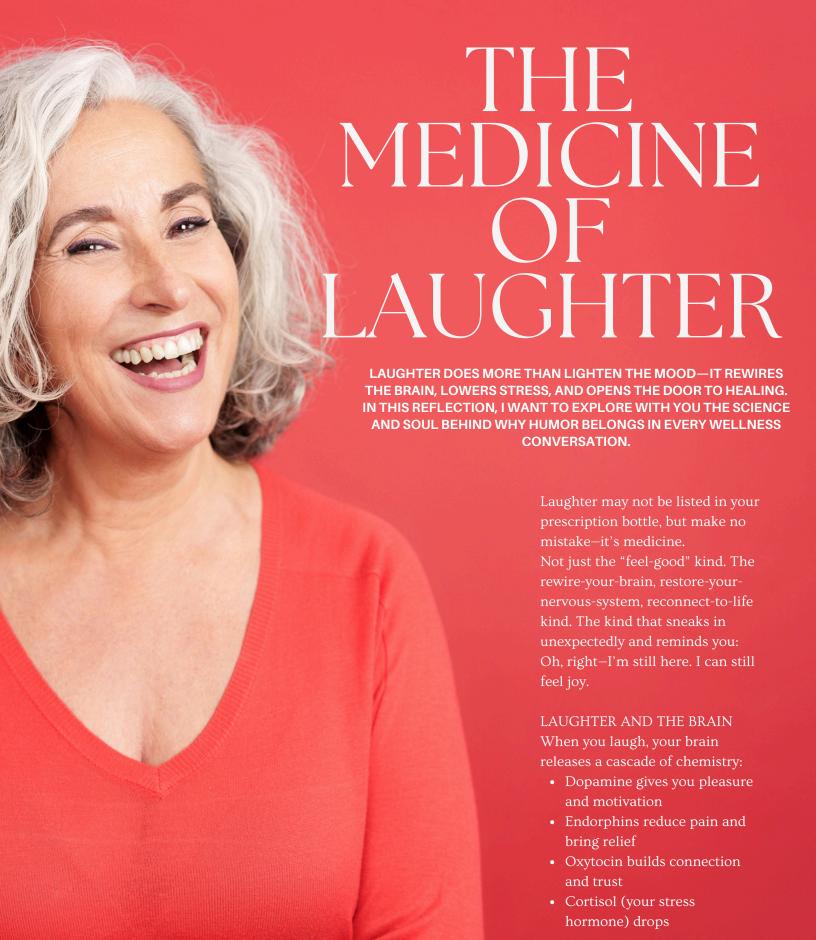
— THOMAS C., LOS ANGELES

Valeria, thank you so much for your message. That piece was deeply personal to write, and I'm honored it resonated with you. Learning to say "no" with compassion—especially as caregivers, professionals, or helpers—is one of the most powerful forms of healing. I'm glad these words gave you space to release the guilt and stand more firmly in your truth. Keep honoring your pace.

DR. HECTOR

Thomas, I really appreciate you taking the time to share your reflections. The Eclectus parrot piece was one of my favorite metaphors to explore—so I'm thrilled it landed with you. Integrity has many faces, and sometimes it shows up in bold color and quiet strength. Thank you for being part of this journey with us.

DR. HECTOR



THIS ISN'T FLUFF. IT'S BIOLOGY. Laughter moves your brain—and body—into a parasympathetic state, the place where healing actually begins. It softens the grip of anxiety, tension, and burnout. It breaks up mental rigidity. It helps us feel safe again.

SACRED, NOT SILLY

RESILIENCE WEARS A SMILE (SOMETIMES)

Resilience doesn't always look serious.

Sometimes it looks like crying-laughing at something dumb at 2am. Sometimes it looks like choosing to find humor in the hard parts—not to avoid the pain, but to breathe through it.

In fact, laughter often enters exactly where it's least expected. Right after a hard conversation. Right in the middle of grief. Right when we're about to give up.

And in that moment, it doesn't erase the pain—but it shifts our posture.

It brings the nervous system just enough relief to keep going.

HUMOR AS EMOTIONAL INTEGRATION

Laughter helps us process what words can't always carry.
It allows us to look at life's contradictions—its absurdity, its mess—and still choose to engage with it. In therapeutic settings, we often see people make their biggest breakthroughs after they've laughed. Why Because humor signals emotional safety. And when the body feels safe, the heart starts to open.

SOMEONE laughter is sacred. CAN LAUGH It's seen as a gift of the soul. A reminder not to take ourselves so AGAIN IS THE **MOMENT** THEY BEGIN TO HEAL. it tries to visit. Let it in. Let it shake you. too long. Because healing doesn't have to Sometimes, it sounds like a laugh that surprises even you.

THE MOMENT

SUPPLEMENT SPOTLIGHT

VITAMIND3





VITAMIN D

Often called the "sunshine vitamin," Vitamin D plays a crucial role in serotonin production and mood regulation. Deficiency is common and has been linked to increased rates of depression and low mood-especially in those who spend lots of time indoors or live in less sunny climates. Supporting healthy levels can enhance mood stability and help the brain better experience pleasure and joy.

Sometimes, joy starts with the basics. Vitamin D3 supports a brighter mood and a healthier emotional baseline-because a good laugh needs good chemistry.

Please consult with your doctor before starting any supplement.

Let Joy Be Seen

Joy doesn't always arrive with fanfare.

Sometimes, it tiptoes in quietly—through a shared smile, a breath of lightness, a moment of ease between heavier ones.

And when it does show up, it deserves to be seen.

Not filtered. Not hidden. Not polished into perfection.

Just honest, human joy—raw and radiant.

We live in a world that can make it feel safer to share our struggles than our joy.

Suffering feels validated. Sadness feels serious.

But joy? That's vulnerable.

To say, "I felt light today."

To say, "I laughed until I cried."

To say, "This part of life feels good right now."

, 1

-takes courage.





Because joy asks us to soften.
To drop our guard.
To trust that not everything needs to be explained or earned.
When we let joy be seen, we remind others that levity is allowed here too.
That we are not defined by what we've endured, but also by what we've opened up to—what we've danced through,

laughed through, come back to

life through.

Let joy be messy.
Let it be loud or quiet.
Let it be short-lived or long-burning.
But please, let it be seen.
Because in a world heavy with worry, joy is a form of resistance.
A form of remembrance.
A form of medicine.

"WE ARE NOT DEFINED ONLY BY WHAT WE'VE ENDURED—BUT ALSO BY WHAT WE'VE LAUGHED THROUGH."



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The Playfulness of the Divine

Laughter is not separate from the sacred—it is part of it. In this reflection, we explore how joy, play, and humor reconnect us to the divine, and why laughter might be one of the holiest sounds we make.

By Hector Rodriguez

If God is love, then surely laughter must be part of the language.

Not the dismissive kind of laughter. Not the sarcasm or avoidance.
But the kind that bubbles up from the belly, that brings tears to your eyes, that says, "Even here—even in this—there is still joy."

That kind of laughter is sacred. That kind of laughter is holy.

Throughout history, we've imagined divinity in robes, rules, and reverence—but what if God is also found in the giggle that escapes during a



serious moment?

What if heaven sounds more like a child's laugh than a choir? Laughter isn't just an emotional response—it's a release. It reminds us we're not just here to strive and survive.

We're here to feel. To connect. To live.

THE PLAYFULNESS OF THE DIVINE

The spiritual life isn't meant to be void of joy.

In fact, many mystics and philosophers across cultures believed playfulness was a sign of spiritual maturity.

It takes faith to laugh.

To find delight in the middle of difficulty. To remember that life is not just sacred—it is strange. complex, and sometimes ridiculous. And that's part of the design.

The divine is not always solemn. Sometimes the divine shows up in a joke that breaks the tension. In a smile exchanged in silence. In the awkward, beautiful, ordinary mess of being human.

Laughter as Resistance In a world that often feels heavy, fast, and afraid—joy becomes an act of rebellion.

To laugh in the face of fear is to say: You don't get to have the final word here.

To make space for levity in the middle of loss is not denial—it's spiritual resilience.

It's the soul's way of remembering itself. This is not about bypassing pain.It's about allowing joy to sit beside it.The heart is big enough for both.

FINDING GOD IN THE SMILE What if prayer didn't always have to be solemn?

What if connection to spirit could look like lightness, silliness, or play? Some of the most healing conversations we have don't begin with advice—they begin with shared laughter.

That laugh breaks the armor. And when the armor breaks, so does the illusion that we are alone.

The next time laughter surprises you—don't push it away. Let it rise.

Let it ripple through your chest. Let it remind you that you are alive, you are still soft, and there is beauty in the absurdity.

Maybe joy really is divine. And maybe God laughs with usnot at us—when we finally stop taking ourselves so seriously. SUPPLEMENT SPOTLIGHT

RHODIOLA ROSEA

Rhodiola is an adaptogenic herb known to boost mood, reduce mental fatigue, and support a sense of emotional balance—all key for making space for lightness and laughter. It helps modulate cortisol levels, allowing the body to better respond to stress while maintaining mental clarity and energy.

Feel lighter, think clearer. Rhodiola supports emotional resilience and helps keep your spark intact—even on the tough days.

Please consult with your doctor before starting any supplement.

WHEN THE BODY LAUGHS FIRST

Laughter is more than emotional—it's physical. This somatic reflection explores how laughter resets the nervous system, softens the body, and reminds us that healing can begin with something as simple as an exhale.

Before your mind gets the joke, your body is already laughing. Your lungs expand. Your muscles release. Your heart opens-just a little.

And in that split second, something shifts:

You're no longer holding everything so tightly.

Laughter is often thought of as emotional or social, but it's also deeply somatic.

It's a full-body release—a rhythm, a sound, a breath pattern your nervous system recognizes as safety.

You don't laugh when you're bracing for danger.

You laugh when your body says: You're okay now.

You're allowed to relax. To feel joy. To stop gripping.

THE SCIENCE OF SOMATIC LAUGHTER

When we laugh, even briefly, we stimulate the vagus nerve—a key player in our parasympathetic nervous system.

hormone)

good chemicals)

Improves oxygen flow

Softens muscle tension

· Releases endorphins (feel-

This sends a signal to the brain and body that says: You're safe. You can exhale now.



often sigh, stretch, or cry after a

And in that letting go, healing

deep, real laugh.

The body lets go.

begins.

16



Somatic Invitation

LET THE BODY EXHALE

- 1. Pause. Place one hand on your belly, one on your chest.
- 2. Take a deep breath in through your nose.
- 3. Hold for 3 seconds.
- 4. Exhale audibly through your mouth—like a sigh or gentle laugh.
- 5. Repeat 3 times.
- 6. Then smile—just a little. Let your face soften.

Notice what shifts. Your body is listening. Let it lead you back to lightness.

THE BODY KNOWS BEFORE THE MIND CATCHES UP

There are moments—often in the middle of stress, sadness, or even grief—when a laugh escapes before your brain can "approve" it.

It's spontaneous. Involuntary. That's not accidental.

That's your body reaching for relief.

For levity. For life.

Sometimes, laughter is your body's way of returning you to the present.

Of breaking the spell of overthinking.
Of softening the edge of

overwhelm.

LAUGHTER AND TRAUMA RECOVERY

For those healing from trauma, laughter can be both vulnerable and vital.

It rebuilds connection.
It invites joy back into places where only survival lived.
It reminds the body: You're more than what happened to you.
You are still alive. Still capable of delight. Still worthy of ease.

PERMISSION TO LAUGH In healing work, we often say: The body keeps the score (great book

btw).

But it also holds the capacity for pleasure, connection, and play.

Laughter isn't a distraction from the work. Sometimes, it is the work—the nervous system learning what it feels like to be safe again.

So let yourself laugh. Even in the middle of it. Especially in the middle of it. Let your body lead the way.

"LAUGHTER IS YOUR BODY SAYING: YOU'RE SAFE NOW."



IN GOOD HANDS

with Katyna Rosario M.D.

The Healing Power of Play

As both a child psychiatrist and a professional clown, I inhabit two worlds that, at first glance, seem to have little in common. One is rooted in science, structure, and careful observation: the other thrives on whimsy, improvisation, and laughter. Yet, as I've discovered over years of practice, these two worlds are not only compatible-they are deeply interconnected. Clowning, and more broadly, play, can be powerful tools for supporting mental health and healing in children.

THE UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE OF PLAY

Children are natural experts at play. Long before they can articulate complex emotions or understand the nuances of therapy, they communicate through games, stories, and laughter. Play is their language-a way to process feelings, experiment with roles, and make sense of a sometimes confusing world. As a clown, I step into this language with them. My red nose, oversized shoes, and playful antics are more than just entertainment; they are invitations to connect, to let go of fear, and to find joy even in difficult moments.

In my psychiatric practice, I often meet children who are weighed down by anxiety, trauma, or depression. For these children, traditional talk therapy can feel intimidating or even impossible. But when I introduce elements of play-silly voices, puppets, or a simple game of catch-their defenses begin to lower. Suddenly, therapy is less about "fixing" and

more about exploring together. Laughter becomes a bridge, allowing us to build trust and open doors to deeper healing.

THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE SILLINESS

The benefits of play and humor in mental health are welldocumented. Play therapy, for example, has been shown to help children express emotions, develop coping skills, and build resilience. Laughter, too, is a powerful medicine. It releases endorphins, reduces stress hormones, and even boosts the immune system. In hospital settings, studies have found that professional clowning can reduce anxiety and pain in pediatric patients, transforming sterile environments into spaces of comfort and hope.



As a clown, I model vulnerability and self-acceptance. I trip over my own feet, make silly mistakes, and laugh at myself-all in full view of my young audience. For children who feel pressure to be perfect or "normal," this is a revelation. They see that it's okay to be imperfect, to make mistakes, and to find joy in the unexpected. In this way, clowning becomes more than entertainment; it's a lesson in self-compassion.

PLAY AS A PRESCRIPTION
I encourage families to make
room for play in their daily livesnot just for children, but for
adults as well. Play is not
frivolous; it is essential. It fosters
creativity, strengthens
relationships, and helps us cope
with life's challenges. Whether

it's a game of tag, a spontaneous dance party, or simply making silly faces at each other, these moments of shared joy can be deeply healing. In therapy, play can also be a powerful diagnostic and therapeutic tool. A child who struggles to talk about their fears might act them out with toys or express them through art. As a therapist-and as a clown-I follow their lead, using play to create a safe space for exploration and growth. Sometimes, the most profound breakthroughs happen not during serious conversations, but in moments of laughter and playfulness.

EMBRACING THE INNER CLOWN You don't need a red nose or a rainbow wig to bring the healing power of play into your life or your work. All it takes is a willingness to be present, to be a little silly, and to see the world through a child's eyes. Whether you're a parent, teacher, or mental health professional, I invite you to embrace your inner clown. Laugh with your children. Make mistakes together. Find joy in the ridiculous.

FINAL WORDS

In a world that can often feel heavy, play reminds us that healing doesn't always have to be serious. Sometimes, the best medicine is a little bit of laughterand the courage to clown around.

IN REAL LIFE with Raul González



You bring so much light and laughter to millions every morning on Despierta América. What role has humor played in your personal journey—not just on screen, but in your private life?

Humor has been my lifeline. It's helped me see life with more lightness, even in tough moments. It's my "pulse to scape"

I had the chance to see your stage performance in TOC TOC here in Miami, and it was amazing to watch you connect with the audience through humor about serious topics. How different is it for you to use humor live on stage versus on television?

Thank you. On stage, humor feels more intimate. You feel the audience's reaction in real time. On TV, it's faster but you don't always see their faces. The only reaction that I have is the one from my coworkers.

Sometimes humor is born from resilience. Have there been moments in your life where laughter became your way of healing through something difficult?

Definitely, Dr Hector. Many times. Especially during personal losses or failures. Laughing was my way of not giving up. In shows like TOC TOC, humor allows the audience to talk about real struggles—mental health, anxiety, and connection. How do you personally balance humor with compassion when dealing with deeper topics?

To be honest, I always start with empathy. I never make jokes at the expense of pain. Humor, for me, is a way to open hearts, not to hurt them.

Has there ever been a moment, either live on air or on stage, where humor carried you through an emotional moment you weren't expecting?

Oh yes. During a live show, right after hearing some difficult personal news. Humor gave me the strength to keep going.

If humor were a color, a flavor, or a feeling—how would you describe it for yourself?

For me, humor is like the color yellow: warm, powerful, and full of life.

When you're under pressure or feeling stressed, how do you reconnect to your sense of humor and lightness?

I take a deep breath, remind myself that nothing is as bad as it seems, and I find something funny or absurd in the situation. It's a good strategy. No doubt at all.

Through Despierta América, your live theater work, and your overall career, how have you seen humor become a bridge not just between individuals—but between entire communities.

Universal humor breaks barriers. I've seen it connect people across cultures, languages, and ways of thinking. It's a universal language just like music.



What's one simple way you bring humor into your daily life, even when things feel heavy or overwhelming?

You are making me think too much. 1 laugh at myself. I don't take myself too seriously. I also share jokes with the people around me.

If you could leave our readers with one message about why laughter is essential to healing and resilience, what would it be?

First of all, laughter is the best remedy against bad mood.
Laughter doesn't solve problems, but it gives you the strength to face them with a lighter heart.

"HUMOR, FOR ME, IS A WAY TO OPEN HEARTS"



Power Up Spottight: Humor

LET'S BE HONEST: LIFE CAN FEEL HEAVY.

THERE ARE BILLS TO PAY, DEADLINES TO MEET, AND EMOTIONS THAT DON'T ALWAYS COME WITH WARNING LABELS. BUT HUMOR? HUMOR IS THE PRESSURE VALVE. THE UNEXPECTED LIGHT. THE MENTAL RESET YOUR BRAIN DIDN'T KNOW IT NEEDED.

AND HERE'S THE BEST PART: LAUGHING ISN'T JUST A REACTION—IT'S A SKILL. ONE YOU CAN BUILD, NOURISH, AND PRACTICE.





Want to go deeper? Visit www.doctorhector.com to download your free Guide and explore more tools to strengthen your mind, body, and soul—one step at a time

PRACTICES TO BUILD YOUR HUMOR MUSCLE:

1. Create a "Laugh Bank" Make a playlist of shows, podcasts, reels, or movies that reliably make you laugh. Think of it as emotional first-aid for hard days.

2. Laugh with Your People Laughter is contagious. Share funny stories, voice notes, memes, or childhood memories. Let someone else's joy activate yours.

3. Practice Playfulness Do something silly on purpose—sing badly, dance weirdly, wear mismatched socks. It's not about being funny, it's about breaking the script.

4. Reframe with Lightness When something frustrating happens, ask: "How will I tell this story later?" That moment of curiosity might open the door to a smile.

5. Let Yourself Smile Without a Reason Seriously. Your nervous system doesn't need a punchline—it needs permission.

JOURNAL PROMPT:

"What's something that made me laugh recently? What does that say about what I needed?"

DAILY REMINDER:

Laughter is not avoidance—it's resilience. It doesn't mean you're not taking life seriously. It means you're letting your nervous system breathe.

If you've been holding your breath, let humor be your exhale.

If you've forgotten what joy feels like, let humor remind you.

Because the truth is—your brain heals better when it's allowed to laugh.



The other night on date night (yes, we still do those—romance isn't dead, it's just tired after putting a toddler to bed), we went to see comedian Pete Lee. Funny and genuine guy, highly recommend. Somewhere between the punchlines and the panic attacks, he opened up about his stage anxiety. Yes, even professional funny people have to do box breathing from time to time.

He shared some advice from a 1998 speech class (ah, the '90s — making me now a millennial mom) that his dad gave him, "When you're on stage and feeling the nerves, just bend your knees and show your palms." Apparently, open palms make you look vulnerable and trustworthy, which is great if you're doing your best Spirit Fingers.

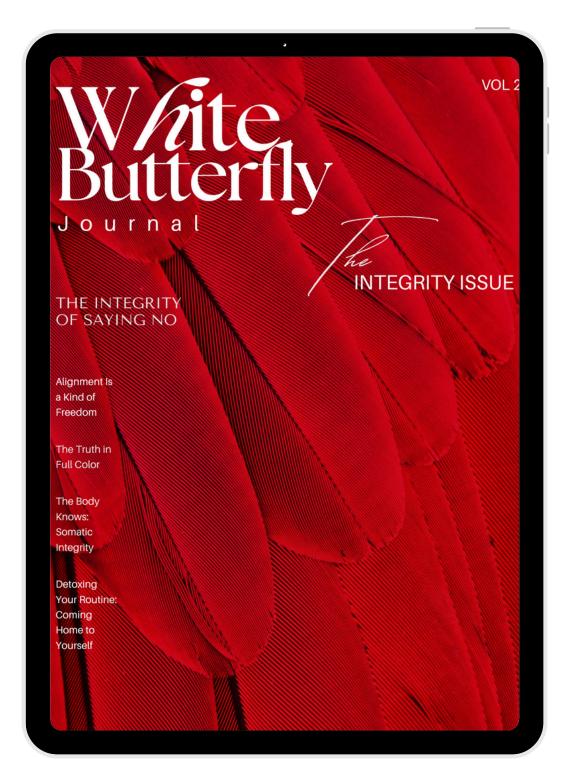
Next, think of a compelling feature for your cover story. This will be what draws your audience in. Make sure that you have accompanying visual content that immediately catches the eye. Include photos, illustrations and other graphics to match. Appeal to your audience, choose the right fonts and images, and you'll have a magazine that people will remember for years to come.

Of course, if curing anxiety were as easy as a knee bend and a jazz-hands gesture, therapists would be out of business. But still, it's a nice reminder: sometimes humor is our best armor—and sometimes it's just how we connect, cope, and build stronger relationships (and abs, if you laugh hard enough).

So here's to all of us who lead with laughter—it's good for the brain, the heart, and possibly your posture. Go see Pete Lee and support your local comedy club. And don't forget: bend those knees, flash those palms, and embrace the awkward glory of being human.

"SOMETIMES
HUMOR ISN'T
A DEFENSE—
IT'S A
DOORWAY."





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Dear Me.

You were so tired.

Up before dawn, helping your father remember what day it was, feeding him soft foods, reminding him—again—why the nurse was coming.

That morning, he called you the wrong name and then laughed so hard he cried.

And so did you.

Not because it was funny. But because it cracked the tension.

Because it let you breathe.

That moment—where the absurdity of it all washed over you

wasn't weakness.

It was grace.

Don't forget:

Even in the hardest seasons, joy can sneak in.

Let it.

Love. Your future self

Hey, You.

Remember when you bombed that presentation in history class and wanted to melt into the floor? Remember how your best friend whispered, "At least you didn't puke," and you both started wheezing with laughter?

Yeah. That.

That saved you.

You didn't know it then, but that laugh rewired something.

It said: "You're not alone."

It said: "This won't define you."

It gave you enough strength to go

to school the next day.

Laughing didn't erase the embarrassment—it just made it survivable.

Keep laughing.

It's how you survive.

 You, 10 years later (still awkward, still laughing)



Dear Me,

You were sitting in that boardroom, heart pounding, trying to pitch an idea no one seemed to care about.

You felt invisible.

And then—someone's phone rang... with a Beyoncé ringtone.

It broke the silence.

Everyone laughed.

Even you.

You cracked open in that moment—not just with laughter, but with perspective. You realized the world doesn't end when things go sideways.

You remembered you're human.
That laugh didn't fix the meeting.
But it reminded you of your power.
Of your presence.
Of your permission to be real.

Keep your humor sharp and your shoulders soft.

- The you who finally breathes at meetings

Have a story to share? We'd love to hear it. Send your own Letter to the Self about a moment when humor, lightness, or resilience carried you through. Your words might just be the encouragement someone else needs.

Submit to:

hector@doctorhector.com or tag us on Instagram @doctor_hector with #LetterToTheSelf



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CURATED BY





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