

GOOD HEALTH

Get serious about fun

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Staff Writer

of humor is as omnipresent as her startlingly bright smile.

Rahla Kahn wants you to get in touch with your silly side.

Forget those other things most consultants yammer about — maximizing quality time, upselling yourself, positive learning experiences ...

Kahn wants you to unlearn the accoutrements of adulthood: self-consciousness, being hyper-judgmental, and the other pretensions adults use to build emotional barriers.

Gained in the process, says Kahn, are positive traits our society often considers childish: hopefulness, trust, willingness to take risks, wonder and vitality.

"We create a safe space for people to rediscover those parts of themselves that are lost to the responsibilities of adulthood," she says. "We get in touch with our spontaneous, non-judgmental, curious side. It's still there — it's just buried."

Kahn, husband Richard Rossner, a TV and film writer, and five-year-old son Chase relocated to Scottsdale last year after one too many earthquakes rattled their household.

She's brought to the Phoenix area her "Power of Play" workshops, which she held all over the greater Los Angeles area during the last 12 years.

A professional actor and comedian whose career included a stint in L.A.'s famous "Groundlings" comedy troupe, Kahn's "playshops" (as she likes to call them) incorporate acting and improvisational techniques to foster community within workshop groups and help participants lose their inhibitions and self-consciousness.

"You can expect to have fun while learning more about who you are," says Kahn.

Participants engage in "sharing" and find themselves playing children's games like various forms of patty-cake, as well as singing and taking part in formalized goofiness like the game "Oh Great One," in which one person is asked a series of random questions and must answer in one word.

"And whatever they say is absolutely right," Kahn says. "It always turns out really funny, but it's revealing too."

The Power of Play came out of Kahn's own experiences using humor to cope with what life has thrown her way, including the sudden death of her father when she was 15.

"There are lots of unusual issues in my life that border on embarrassing," she says good-naturedly. "If I hadn't had a sense of humor, they could have caused pain."

Sitting in a room with her, Kahn's sense

Everything about her expresses a willingness to be taken lightly. On a recent day, she was wearing black sunglasses festooned with ceramic flowers, a sweater vest dotted with Crayola-colored buttons and bright red vinyl hiker-sneakers with a mesh inset that showed off her goofy socks.

She grew up in posh Bel Air, Calif., the daughter of a doctor. But she quickly hastens to clarify: She was no daughter of obscene wealth.

"I lived in this cozy little house in the middle of all this opulence," she says. "We called it 'the log cabin that proctology built.'"

Her sense of humor may have had its genesis in her father's occupation.



RAHLA KAHN

'People are empowered by being asked to be outrageous'

"My dad was a butt doctor," she says, laughing. "Everybody else had these

names like Susan and Joan and Lisa ... and here I come: Rah-la. I had all these unusual things about me."

In the aftermath of her father's death, Kahn tried to cope with her grief by searching for answers she couldn't find: Why would a man who was never sick suddenly die?

Finally, she happened upon an article by Dr. Carl Simonton exploring the link between laughter and healing in cancer patients. Simonton's work influenced her own grieving process.

After meeting Simonton and author Norman Cousins, who also wrote about the healing power of humor, Kahn conducted her first seminar using laughter as a healing tool in 1982.

A staff member at Santa Monica, Calif.'s mental health association from 1984-1993, she worked with populations as diverse as mentally ill and homeless adults to corporate lawyers, teaching them to get back in touch with the "lighter" parts of themselves.

Kahn offers Power of Play workshops for all ages and groups — be it an office or a family.

"People are empowered by being asked to be outrageous," Kahn says. "Be illogical, use your imagination. But get past your adulthood, and all your pretensions and barriers so that you can really step out and live your life to the fullest. What's the point if it's no fun?"

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