

HEALTH & FITNESS

Playtime is mandatory

Humor rules in workshop for healing

By Kate Nolan
Scottsdale Republic

SCOTTSDALE — Rahla Kahn and Richard Rossner are Los Angeles showbiz refugees at play in the desert. After the Northridge earthquake of 1994, the two became squeamish and headed east. Ever since, they've been reworking the rules of comedy to help Scottsdale feel better.

The Scottsdale-based husband-wife team offers a six-week workshop called "The Power of Play" that aims to open people up to fun and, in the process, benefit their health.

In conversation, Kahn and Rossner finish each other's sentences and laugh noisily at each other's jokes. For the workshop they expand the schtickfest to six or more participants.

Rossner, a screenwriter (the TV show *Full House* is his best known work), claims he's merely a facilitator. "I'm in awe, this is so Rahla," he said.

Kahn, a founding member of LA's well-known Groundlings comedy troupe, first started thinking about healing and humor after her father, a doctor, died of cancer.

Eventually, the actress read an article about the health benefits of humor, especially for cancer patients, in one of her dad's old medical journals. Later she met Norman Cousins, who'd explored the humor-illness connection in his breakthrough book, *Anatomy of an Illness*. He liked her ideas and put her in touch with someone who let her try them out at a center for the homeless and mentally ill in Santa Monica in



"The Power of Play" seminar teacher Rahla Kahn (left) works with student Cindy Mann as Georae Provost looks on during an improvisational exercise.

She became a hit as "the pretty girl with the big mouth" among homeless Vietnam vets who initially "showed up for the free cot," Kahn said. Soon she had them participating in improvisational theater games.

Around that time, Kahn bumped into Rossner, whom

she'd known earlier as a fellow Groundling. He liked what she was doing and stuck around. One day a vet gave such a moving performance about a shoe that the duo now uses shoes and their infinite variety as a goofy symbol for their work. Rossner said improv is

pretty much like real life.

"When you wake up, there's no script. You improvise all day long anyway," he said.

The first of the six workshop sessions focuses on building a sense of safety to let participants lose their jitters. The final session is graduation, and in the weekly sessions in between, the group encounters the rules of improvisation.



Kahn laughs with former student Jovan Van Drielle of Scottsdale while performing an improvisational exercise.

Kahn and Rossner lay out eight rules that are meant to keep a comedy bit alive, but on the broader stage are meant to keep one's life going in a spirited way. It gives nothing away

'The Power of Play' workshop

WHAT: Six-week "playshop" on the healing art of fun.

Workshops and one-time sessions are also available to individuals and corporate and social groups.

WHEN: 7 p.m., Tuesday, Nov. 5.

WHERE: Scottsdale. Number of enrollees will determine exact location.

DETAILS: www.thepowerofplay.com or (480) 596-9191.

Eight rules of life

- Be present.
- Participate.
- Find the truth of the moment (roughly: don't go for the wisecrack).
- Be open to your intuition.
- Don't deny the information (If your sketchmate calls you "Mom," go with it).
- Find agreement — be open to change.
- Life is in the details.
- Support your fellow players.

Source: Rahla Kahn and Richard Rossner offer this advice in "The Power of Play" workshops.

Photos by Pat Shannahan/Scottsdale Republic

to share the rules:

Be Present. Participate. Find the truth of the moment (roughly: don't go for the wisecrack). Be open to your intuition. Don't deny the information (If your sketchmate calls you "Mom," go with it). Find agreement — be open to change. Life is in the details. And support your fellow players.

If participants learn nothing else, Rossner said, they'll at least gather the meaning of "Power of Play" slogan: Playtime is mandatory — it is not elective."

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