

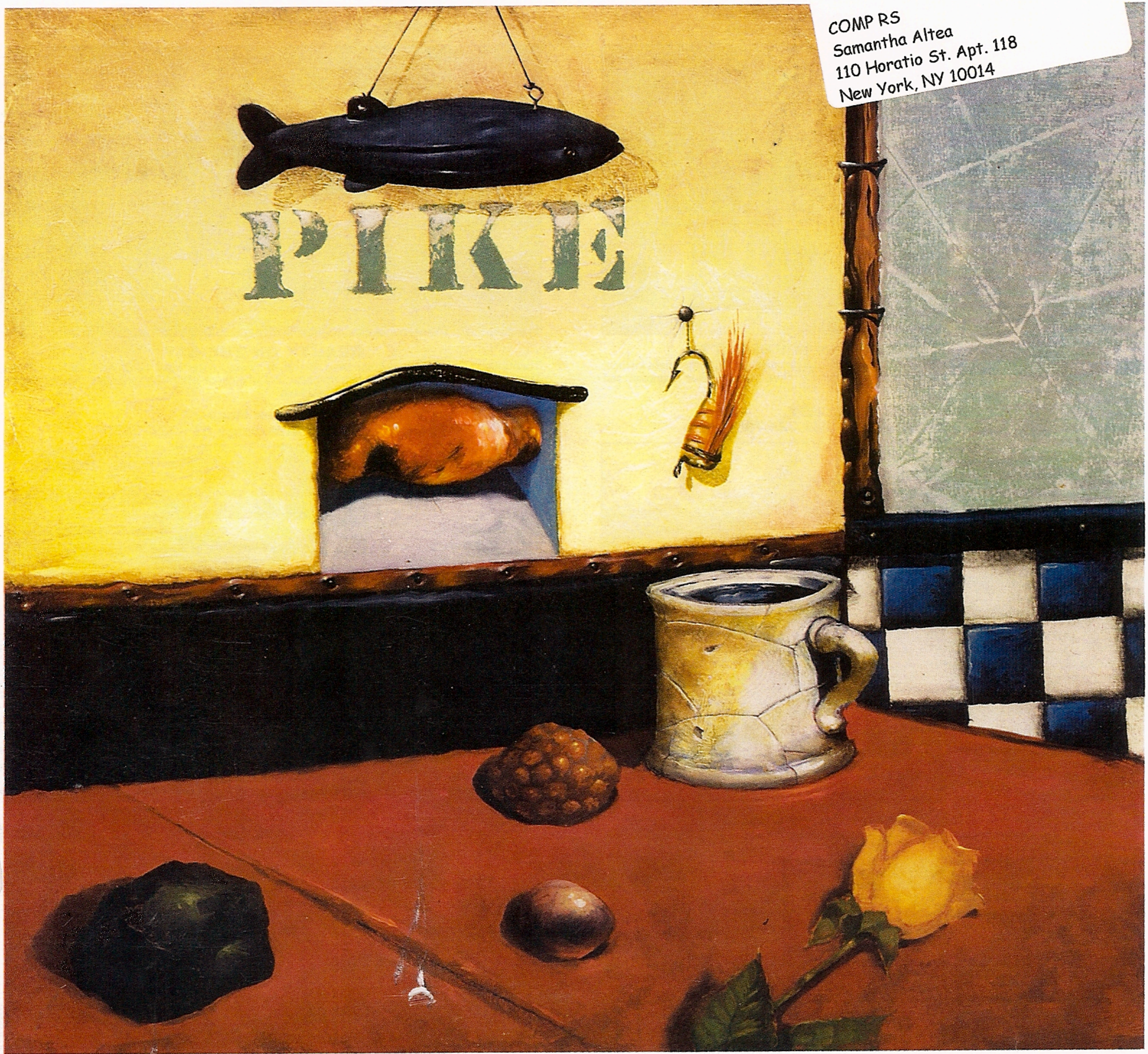
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JANUARY 27, 2006

ART BY ROBERT RASELY

HEALTH, BEAUTY & FITNESS

Skin deep with Samantha Altea

Belly Laughs

Smile, tho' your heart is aching,
Smile, even tho' it's breaking,

When there are clouds in the sky, you'll get by
- "Smile," by Nat King Cole.

It's a beautiful song and so poignant, and Cole had exactly the right idea, the power of smiling and, even more so, laughing, can have a profound effect on all of us. There's a well-known saying that "laughter is the best medicine." It's a nice idea, perhaps a bit cliché, but we do all feel better when we laugh.

Smiling is not just a laughing matter. There are also many studies and much scientific proof that laughter can heal. We all want a healthy body as well as a beautiful one and beauty comes from having health within. From a purely beauty stand point, however, it might also interest you to know that it actually requires almost 5 times fewer facial muscles to smile than to frown. Hello, fewer wrinkles. Turn up the corners of your mouth for beauty as well as well being.

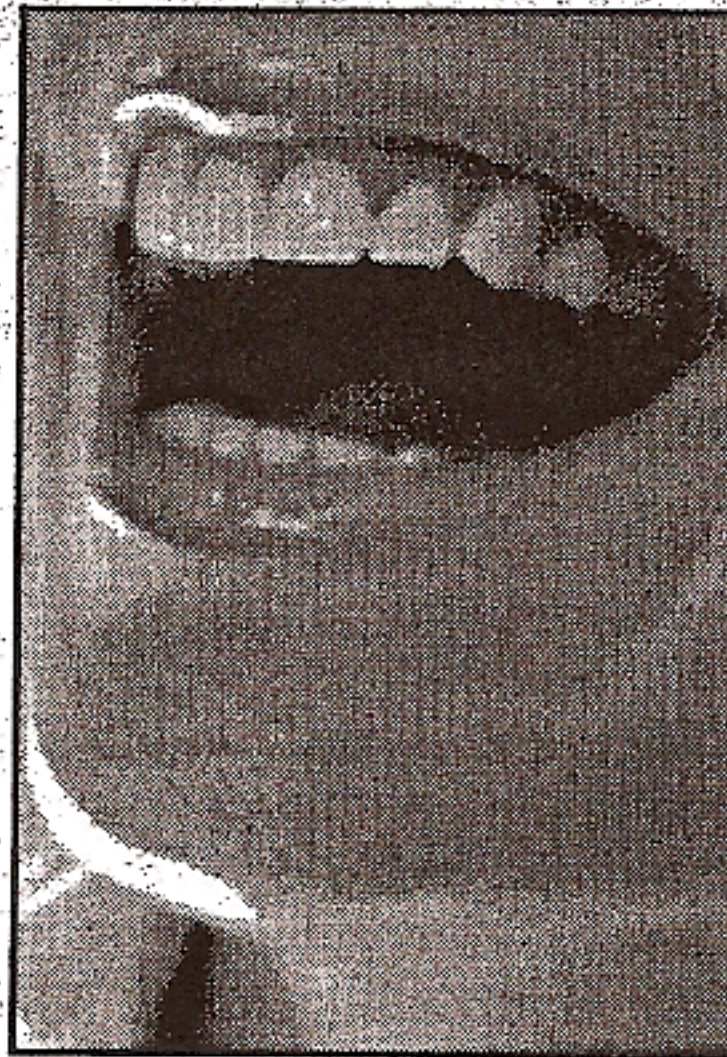
Research is currently being carried out to investigate the scientific benefits of laughter and how it can affect the immune system. It's believed that joy, laughter, and smiling can change the function of white blood cells. In fact, it's actually been proven that anger, fear, anxiety and sadness reduce the productivity of white blood cells. So when we feel stressed, a hormone known as cortisol is released. This hormone has been connected with high blood pressure, among other things. However, when one laughs, feel-good chemicals called "endorphins" are released into the body, which also help to kill pain and make us feel good. So you don't just have to pump iron in order to get your fair

share of feel-good endorphins.

Dr. Lee Berk at Loma Linda University School of Medicine, CA, has conducted many laughter studies, finding that happiness and joy enable the immune system to create white "T" cells, also known as "happy cells," which help to prevent infection.

But who are the other funny guys making all the hoopla about the benefits of a good giggle? There are several ambassadors of this type of thinking, one of the most famous being Norman Cousins, who is also known as the "modern father of laughter therapy." Cousins wrote a famous story for the *New England Journal of Medicine* and in the piece, he talks about his own serious illness and how he helped to heal himself through the power of laughter. He claims to have prescribed himself ten minutes of belly laughing a day, which he believes had an anesthetic effect, allowing him some relief from pain. It was after this journal piece that research verified that laughter does in fact produce pain-killing endorphine chemicals. Cousins became a well-known and respected lecturer on the healing topic of laughter. Another doctor who believes in the power of healing and laughter is Patch Adams. (Robin Williams played him in the movie of the same name.) Adams devoted his life's work to combining traditional medicine and laughter as a mode of healing. Rent the movie, it's well worth checking out.

Laughter is no joke these days. Many well-respected institutes are even offering laughing classes and



seminars as therapy. The Chopra Center, for one, has a "laugh away your pain class." Dunay Hilber and RX Laughter at UCLA is another institute that believes in the healing power of laughter, concentrating on children and adolescents. Once a year they host a Comedy Central Benefit for RX Laughter at UCLA. Stars such as Ray Romano ("Everybody Loves Raymond") and Kevin James ("King of Queens"), support the RX program, which uses tools such as funny videos and film in a medical environment to help heal. It seems that children benefit from comedy. When feeling fear, stress and pain and when undergoing painful treatments, they respond

much better if laughing at a funny movie. This is so serious a notion that Comedy Central is a big funder of the RX organization. To learn more about the organization, please visit www.rxlabelaughter.com or call 310-206-3932.

Though laughter and its direct connection to health is a little illusive, there's no arguing that no matter what, the very act of laughing makes us all feel better. Laughter is infectious and so, hopefully, if you do enough of it, it'll be the only infection you get.

As Skin Deep Beauty Doc Samantha Jane, I now prescribe you one viewing of *Patch Adams*. *Wedding Crashers* was the hit of 2005 and so mix it lightly with half an hour or so a week of silly sitcom. Throw in a giggle or two at least twice a day or as often as needed and stay happy and healthy all winter long.

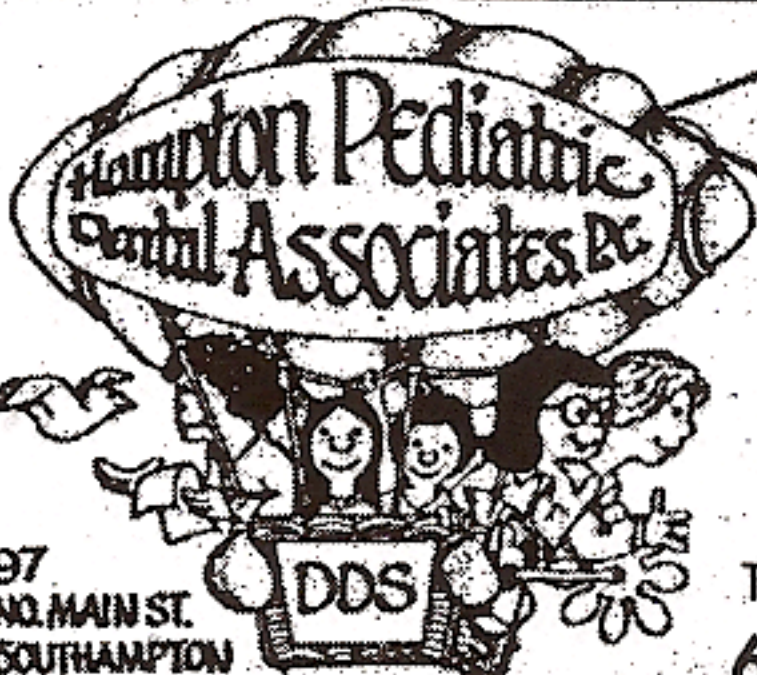
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