

# Sometimes you just have to laugh

Comedian Heather Witherden knows the power of staying on the funny side of life



## ACTIVE LIVING

Janine LeGal

It's that time of year again when we start looking at long lists of things to do, going here, going there, starting this and that, back to school for young and old, longer work days for others. Holidays are over and people are back in 'get things done' mode. For many, stress increases in the fall, and everyday life becomes more challenging.

That's why I've always really admired people who could make others laugh. Laughter is such a beautiful thing. It lessens the weight of the world, makes us happy and brings people together.

There are volumes of scientific research demonstrating the link between humour and health, including how laughter can lead to muscle relaxation, pain reduction, and provide a boost to our immune system. Everyone has heard that laughter is the best medicine, that it's good for relationships, well-being and quality of life, yet we forget sometimes to take a moment and smile about something, allow ourselves to giggle or, better yet, let out a few big belly laughs.

Heather Witherden knows a lot about laughter, humour and comedy. The 42-year-old is a stand-up comic, burlesque performer and Winnipeg's favourite wisecracking mom, raising three boys, a 14-year-old and 11-year-old twins. When she's not performing stand-up comedy, she likes to spend time with her family because, as she says, she wouldn't have any material without them.

She started as a volunteer with the Winnipeg Comedy Festival, and entered a radio-station-sponsored contest for Winnipeg's Funniest Female. "I'd never done stand-up before. I was always writing," she says. Even her letters written to friends became popular for their conversational style. And it's that warmth and openness that has made Witherden a popular choice as an emcee or featured comedian at community events. This past summer she took her stand-up comedy into the context of theatre performance, winning rave reviews in two Fringe plays.

"I don't take things too seriously. The inappropriate gene, it runs in my family. I have a hard time resisting making comments but I do know to behave myself in public. Sort of. I've given my inner toddler full reign," she jokes.

"My comedy is based on the philosophy that things are more beautiful when they're broken; learn to live with the imperfect and you'll be happier.

"I use the stage as a confessional; getting it off my chest is a huge stress reliever. The majority of my material is probably about relationships, quirky little things that happen. There's always a seed of truth," she says.

Witherden is an avid Facebooker, frequently



Heather Witherden brings home the turkey.

posting amusing observations about life and other zany anecdotes. "I feel so driven to share stuff with people. We connect over common experiences. It relieves a lot of my stress and I end up meeting a lot of people. My kids call it the 100-hour chat," she laughs.

So Witherden has found a way to work with the everyday stressors.

"I've become the cheesy comedian with the message at the end of the show. Life's a roller coaster. You can get on it with a death grip or throw your hands up and enjoy the ride, go with it. We have less control over life than we think. Kids get older; you get over things, grief, depres-

sion... There's nothing you're going to do that's not going to be judged — you will be. We're all doing it, we're all traveling," Witherden says.

For now, I'll pass along the only joke I could ever remember and tell without messing it up:

"What did the Buddhist say to the hotdog vendor?"

"Make me one with everything."

Visit Witherden's site at [www.heatherwitherden.com](http://www.heatherwitherden.com).

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