



Barbara Grapstein – making things right in the world through laughter and play

By Kay Caskey, CHP

At the 2016 AATH Conference, Barbara Grapstein was given the Esther Hyatt Spirit of AATH award. Only two others have received this coveted award.

Barbara Grapstein has always asked, “What am I supposed to be doing?” “What is my passion anyway?” AATH has always known what she is about: Barbara is a giver, a connector and volunteer extraordinaire. Barbara has been a board member, fundraiser and THE welcoming committee for AATH.

Barb grew up in New York City wanting to be an actor. She started out utilizing her hairbrush as her microphone and then attended weekend programs at the Neighborhood Playhouse. Barb was a theater major in college and acted in an Off-Off Broadway play. Completing college, her parents thought she needed a fall back career and sent her to Catherine Gibbs secretarial school. (If shorthand ever comes back, Barb will rock it.) Typing 60 words per minute, she got her first job at Doubleday working for Madmen style bosses, i.e., “I’d be happy to get you coffee.” Life got a little better when she began working for *The New Yorker* and a whole lot better when she started working for her father, aka Willie Wonka of the nuts, dry foods and sweets Fiesta Company.

Still wondering “what do I want to be when I grow up?” Barb got “the best gig of my life” when she married Steve Grapstein and became mother to Alex and Elyna (23 months apart). Using her improvisational and acting skills, Barb created a fun and nurturing childhood for her kids. When one of the children fell on the stairs, her response to defuse the crisis was to search for a super sized bandage to fit the floor. Marrying Steve was also a gift from the universe: “He has always been so wonderful, supportive and he’s the best father ever.”

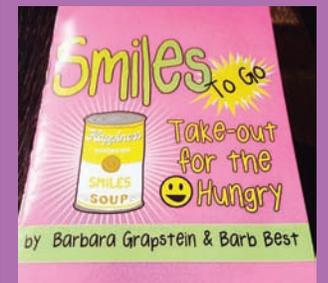
After her children were fledged, Barb experienced a period of sadness. She exercised, took medication and tried to white knuckle her way through this difficult time. Barb has always believed that the right people come along when needed. Steve Wilson appeared along with Laughing Yoga teacher, Linda Tourloukis, and Barb became a Laughter Ambassador, Certified Laughter Leader, Laughter Yoga Instructor and founded *Gold Coast Giggles*.

Trying to find one all-consuming life goal, she found a number of purposes that make a difference. During this time, Barbara Best came into her field of vision “because I really liked her name,” and she contacted her. Her intuition was right on. They shared a vision that smiles could make a life or death difference. Moved by hearing that a suicide could have been prevented if the victim had found “one person who smiled at me” on the way to the Golden Gate Bridge,” the two Barbs authored *Smiles To Go* in 2014. This book fits perfectly into a pocket or purse and when “you need a smile the most, here it is.”

AATH also came into her life in 2009. Barb, *the connector*, linked Beth Usher, Guy Girard and numerous others with AATH. As well as connecting people, Barbara is also a cheerleader for others. Hearing that Erika Ruiz needed red noses for some parent baskets, she flew down to Florida with dozens of clown noses and a supportive presence.

In 2013, Barbara enrolled in The Humor Academy and settled on a purpose that fit her perfectly. She is the founder and CEO of Healing Headbands Project, Inc., (www.healingheadbands.com). See article on *Laughter and Creativity go Hand in Headband* in this issue.

Barb has devoted her life to a number of purposes - all coming out of her passion to make things right in the world through laughter and play. We congratulate Barb and celebrate her Healing Headbands project.



Laughter and creativity go hand in hand

The Healing Headbands Project was conceived in 2014 when Barbara Grapstein was on a trip in Guatemala City. There she saw local residents wearing uniquely designed colorful headbands. So different were the designs, she decided to buy 20 with intentions to give them as gifts. Instead, Barbara kept them, giving much thought to how the headbands could be used to help people with hair loss due to cancer treatments. It wasn't long before friend and neighbor, Joanie Accolla, offered help producing headbands. Both Barbara and Joanie shared a common goal, to help those with illness feel better. Barbara's experience being a laughter leader and Joanie's experience as a designer, brought together the seeds of inspiration leading to the foundation of the project which is LAUGH CREATE HEAL.

These three main components, LAUGH CREATE HEAL are symbiotic in nature and the very backbone of its existence. "We take this very seriously," says Barbara, "Here we are laughing in a very serious environment while also empowering children and families. We work directly with the children, their families and staff. Children and adults are inspired with special laughter exercises for 20 minutes followed by 30-40 minutes of painting. All the artwork is amazing in color and design; every painting is so unique, offering its own special magic. The artwork is sent to a specialized printer in New York and then processed in full color on very soft UV protected fabric. Headbands are made and then delivered with love.

Nearly every child who participates has a serious illness. Cancer is the major illness seen in pediatric medical hospitals, however, many are being treated with other conditions such as appendicitis, broken bones or brain trauma. The project is offered to every child in some capacity. Sometimes a child must remain in bed and the project is brought to them bedside.

There is a second program called "Kids for Kids," where sponsors such as schools, businesses or organizations donate and host a workshop. In these workshops two headbands are made; one for the child/adult who took part in the project and the other is gifted to a child in a hospital that is unable to participate directly. The project is designed for all ages and there are no limitations to where it can go.

Over a thousand headbands have touched the families and children around the United States. Healing Headband Project's goal is to reach as many people as possible around the globe.



Author

Born in Hawaii into a creatively ambitious family Joan sought to become the best at what ever was put in her hands, usually it was a pen, paper and ruler. Joan's background in design is steeped in the fine arts, which includes Interior Design, holistic health and the culmination of the two. After twenty years of experience in brand identity, whether inside a house or inside the body she began "Growing Into Health," her creative business and brand marketing organization that helps build healthy connections between her clients and their environment.

