

# What's so funny about being married?

By Joe Michael Feist  
NC News Service

When my wife, Frances, and I were newly married in the mid-1970s, we were the proverbial "poor as church mice" college students struggling to attain our degrees and simultaneously set up a household.

Our first home was in a married-student housing complex, which was actually a cluster of dilapidated World War II Army barracks that had been converted into tiny apartments.

We were lucky to live in sunny Texas, because the wind whistled through unpainted paper-thin walls and warped windows that didn't quite match their frames. One side of the barracks had settled with age, to the point that the entire apartment leaned ominously. It was a steep uphill walk from the kitchen to the front door. The place looked like a carnival fun house.

But I remember laughing many times at our predicament; both while we lived in the barracks and especially after we moved.

Being able to see the humor in a less-than-ideal situation is "a survival skill" for individuals and couples, said David Thomas, a theologian, author and editor of the magazine *Marriage and Family Living*.

"The function of humor in life is that it often puts things in perspective" — especially at times when people are overly serious, said Thomas during a recent interview.

Humor, Thomas said, "is an affirmation of our earthiness, of being part of the earth. We have our strengths and we also have our weaknesses. And our glory is admitting to both."

While a thin line sometimes separates the two, Thomas said that valuing humor and being frivolous or flighty are not the same thing.

"Life has its serious moments and its humorous moments," he added. "A life that is situated on either extreme" is out of kilter.

Thomas said that while married couples should seek a humor-filled relationship, "humor is not something you can create." Humor "is a byproduct of an underlying condition of a balanced life."

That balance will allow a couple "to laugh when the dinner is burned or the kids don't make the team or somehow live up to your expectations," Thomas said.

Even the marriage itself should be looked at with some humor, Thomas believes. Humorous people "value their marriage, but they don't value it to the point that they think the marriage itself is the most absolutely perfect thing in the world. It's part of life."

Likewise, Thomas added, "when a couple can look at their sexual life together with a degree of humor and laughter and play, they're usually much healthier."

While humor can't be created, Thomas said that the ability to maintain the kind of balance that leads to humor can be nurtured.

For example, he said, "money has always been the number one point of argument, disagreement and tension within marriages. It's very difficult for couples to laugh at economic matters."

So what's a couple to do?

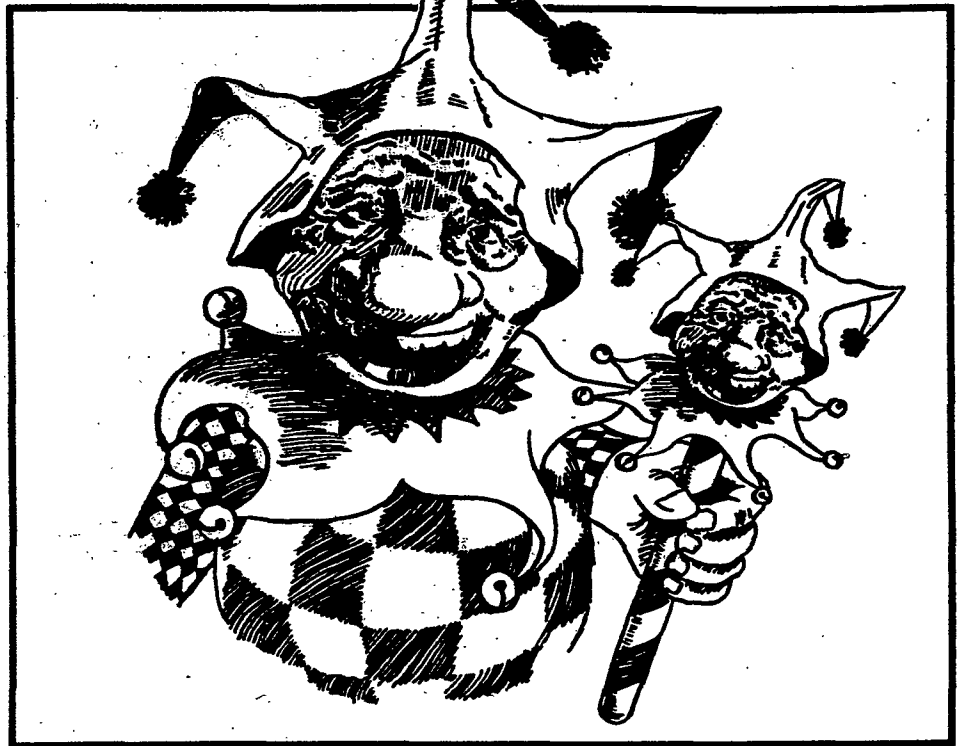
"One suggestion would be to really look at your values," Thomas continued. "Why is money so important to you? Is it an insecurity about the future? Is it a desire for certain possessions or a certain power?"

"I think it's very important for couples who have a humorless relationship to look at their basic values," he added.

Thomas said that one sign of a humorless relationship is that "when any kind of conflict arises, at any level, it becomes deadly serious."

What follows, he added, "is almost total avoidance of any conflict," because the couple thinks that "any conflict potentially could destroy their relationship." Then "everything is important," Thomas said. "Nothing is unimportant. The couple lives a very insecure life. They're afraid of everything. They can't laugh."

Humor, Thomas concluded, has a spiritual or religious dimension as well.



"People who are really saints are not deadly serious people," he said. "They're often fun-loving, happy, humorous people."

There is something very human, very holy and very important about humor — not just in marriage but in life."

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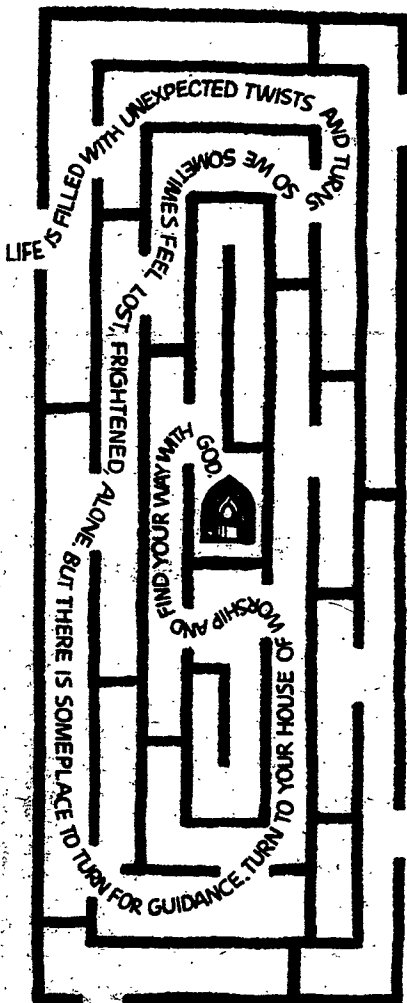
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