

IS ANYONE

BY RUSSELL WILCOX

*Putting someone down is
no way to build a friendship.*

Not long ago
I attended
a dance at a

stake that was not my own. The friend who invited me began introducing me to a group of girls standing near the door as we entered. Since I didn't know anyone, I was anxious to make some points with the ladies, so I said, "Wow. There sure are a lot of beautiful girls in your stake." My friend looked around the group and, trying to be funny, said loudly, "Where? Where? I don't see any." Needless to say, we were not the most popular guys at the dance that night.

If the above experience had been a scene on a TV show, my friend's "clever" comment would have been followed by laughter. In real life, the girls were offended and avoided us the rest of the evening. What many don't realize is that those producing TV shows use a laugh track—prerecorded laughter that can be turned on and off at the touch of a button. That's why laughter always follows sarcastic put-downs or mean jokes. It sounds like everyone enjoys the negative humor. In real life, there is no

LAUGHING?

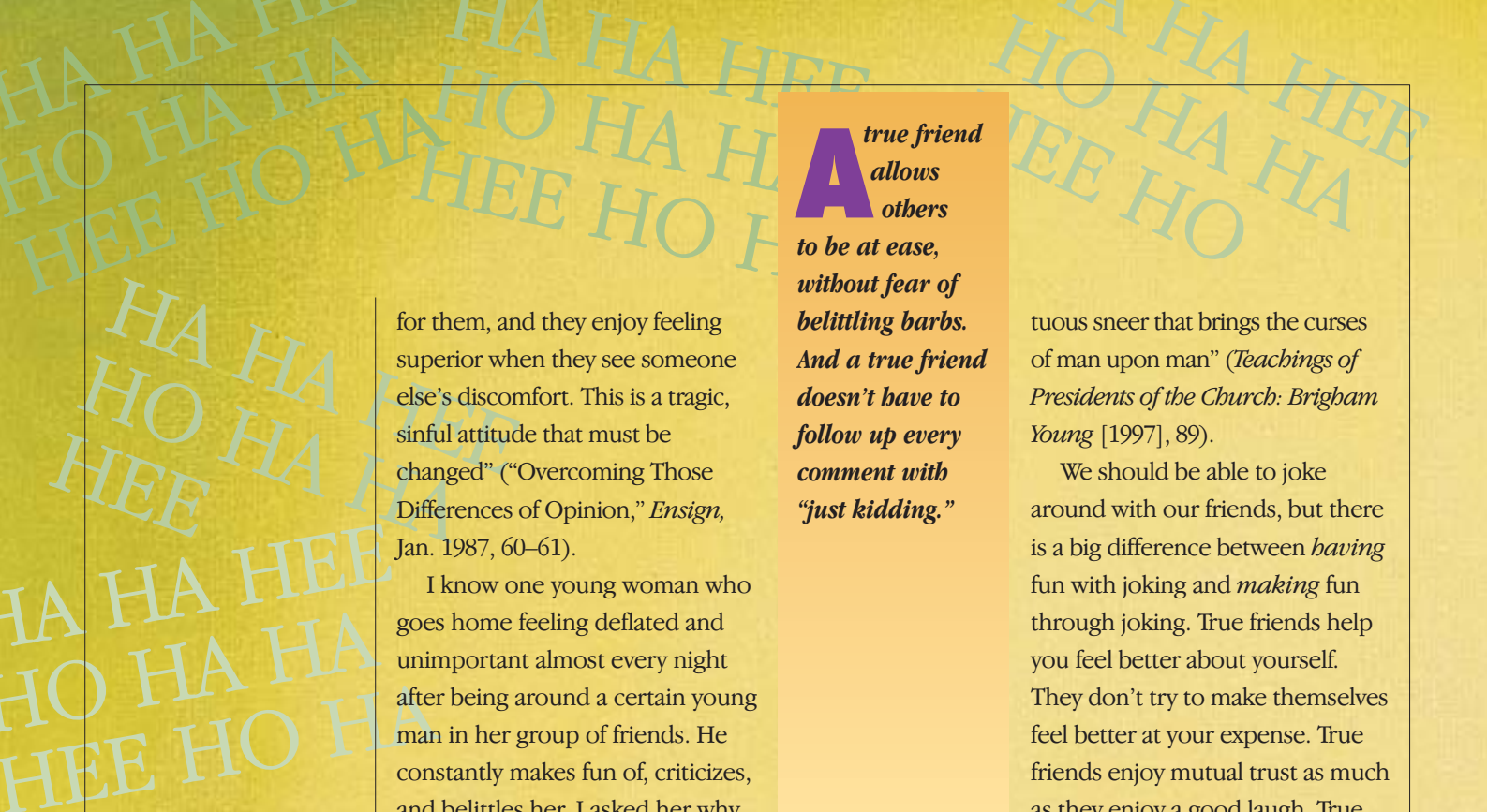
People might put up with put-downs, but underneath the mask, they may be hurting.

laugh track. People might put up with put-downs and manage a chuckle for the sake of saving face, but deep down, negative humor hurts. No matter how perfect the timing or how smoothly executed the joke, usually the only ones laughing are those who are afraid they may be your next targets.

Keeping a sense of humor helps us endure the trials of life. It is truly medicine to the soul (see Proverbs 17:22). However, not all humor is good humor. Elder Robert E. Wells of the First Quorum of the Seventy wrote: "For some people, sharp questions or quick rejoinders are habits. Criticism is a form of humor



ILLUSTRATIONS BY DILLEN MARSH



A true friend allows others to be at ease, without fear of belittling barbs. And a true friend doesn't have to follow up every comment with "just kidding."

for them, and they enjoy feeling superior when they see someone else's discomfort. This is a tragic, sinful attitude that must be changed" ("Overcoming Those Differences of Opinion," *Ensign*, Jan. 1987, 60–61).

I know one young woman who goes home feeling deflated and unimportant almost every night after being around a certain young man in her group of friends. He constantly makes fun of, criticizes, and belittles her. I asked her why she continues to spend time with him, and she responded, "He says I have to learn how to take a joke. I figure it's not worth losing friends over." I'm concerned

about her decision to continue to be around this guy, and I wonder why he thinks he's so funny in the first place. How sad that she tries to cope with him rather than genuinely enjoying his company.

Brigham Young said that sarcastic and negative people "have little sense, and know not the difference between a happy smile of satisfaction to cheer the countenance of a friend, or a contemp-

tuous sneer that brings the curses of man upon man" (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* [1997], 89).

We should be able to joke around with our friends, but there is a big difference between *having* fun with joking and *making* fun through joking. True friends help you feel better about yourself. They don't try to make themselves feel better at your expense. True friends enjoy mutual trust as much as they enjoy a good laugh. True friends allow you to let your guard down instead of always requiring

you to keep your defenses up.

How do you know if your comments are building or hurting, just plain fun or crossing the line? Here is a test: How many times do you have to follow your comments up with the words *just kidding*? People think they can say whatever they want and then excuse their insensitivity with a quick, "Just kidding." It's a cop-out.

God did not send us here to degrade each other, but to bless each other. The scriptures instruct us to strengthen one another in all our conversations (see D&C 108:7).

Most people realize that what they see on many TV programs is not real. They are able to recognize fake backdrops, fake snowflakes, and fake characters. So why is it so hard to recognize fake laughter? Negative humor hurts, and the resulting wounds go deep. In real life no one is laughing. Not really. Many remember careless comments for years.

It's time to use humor in positive ways to build those around us, and I'm not just kidding. **NE**

