

**Wallace Baine**

City Life

The Here & Now



Carla H. Brown, showing her world-championship laughing form. (Kevin Painchaud / Lookout Santa Cruz)

WALLACE BAINE

# LOL: Santa Cruzan is crowned world's official greatest laughter



BY WALLACE BAINE

Source: [Lookout Santa Cruz](#)



Carla H. Brown, a self-professed "recovering serious person," is the planet's best at conjuring laughter when there's nothing specific to laugh at. She leads an online Santa Cruz group of 1,000 aiming to tap into laughter's documented health benefits, and says winning the global

competition gives her "a way to bolster the importance of joy and levity and laughter as a tool for healing and well-being."

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In a world that contains organized competitions for [wife-carrying](#), [toe-wrestling](#), [cow-chip throwing](#) and [air guitar](#), is anyone really surprised that the World Laughing Championship is a thing?

It's true. Not only is laughing a competitive sport, but Santa Cruz now has bragging rights — shouldn't someone alert the mayor?

Yep, the city of the "Screaming Hand" can now boast it has the world's greatest laugher. Her name is Carla H. Brown, a Santa Cruzan who not only won the National Laughing Championship two years running, but recently finished first against competitors from Asia, Europe and the Americas in the World Laughing Championship, an event held online May 23.

OK, so what exactly is a laughing competition? Is it about the loudest laugh, the longest laugh, the creepiest laugh? And why doesn't Ricky Gervais win every time?

Reached at her home in Santa Cruz, Brown said that the WLC is not a comedy festival, or a joke-a-thon. It's really about conjuring laughter when there's nothing specific to laugh at. "They give you laughter exercises," she said. "So, for instance, there's the roll-on-the-floor laugh. There is the crying laugh, the diabolical laugh, the sexy laugh. There are laughter duels. There are a lot of different things, and it really has to do with your capacity for creativity."

Brown, 55, knows a thing or two about laughter. She is a leader of what's known as "laughter yoga," the practice of deliberately calling forth laughter not as an impulsive response to humor or joy (or, for some folks, contempt or cruelty), but as a means for self-therapy. She's been certified as a teacher in the practice for more than a dozen years, and she leads three classes a week online.

The idea is that the very act of laughing — even if, maybe especially if, you don't feel like it — can regulate your mood, break patterns of negative thoughts, relieve stress and tension, and lead to lasting joy and contentment. Those who promote laughter yoga point to the science that says it can boost the immune system and can release the brain's "happy chemicals," dopamine and serotonin.

Carla Brown is a true believer in the potency of laughter. "I'm a recovering serious person," she said. "I didn't have a lot of joy in my childhood. In fact, it was very stressful. And as I became an adult, I was anxious all the time. I kept my anxiety at bay by overeating and staying very busy, until I had a breakdown."

Somewhere around 2009, in an effort to turn around her mental health, she tried conscious laughing. "My mind hated it," she said. "But my body started having relief. And there was this joy that started to come out that I had never experienced as a child. I had lots of sadness and depression and grief and all kinds of things as a child. And when I started laughing as a practice for therapeutic and wellness benefits, I just started feeling better for absolutely no reason."

Santa Cruz's Carla Brown is crowned world's official greatest laugher - Lookout Local Santa Cruz



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(Kevin Painchaud / Lookout Local Santa Cruz)

Since then she has been not only cultivating her own skills at summoning big belly laughs without the benefit of a [funny baby video](#). "If you're in a fit of contagious laughter with other people," she said, "you're breathing a whole lot. So it clears your mind and increases your oxygen capacity. It helps regulate your blood pressure. It releases the happy endorphins. The benefits are just infinite.

## Carla Bro

The World Laughing Championship began in 2021, amid the pandemic, when laughter, especially in the public realm, was a precious commodity. In this year's competition, Brown said, she scored particularly well in an expression that was probably more common during the pandemic, the "crying laugh."

"In 2017, my mom had a stroke and subsequently passed," she said. "But I couldn't actually cry after my mother passed. I was only able to do it as a crying laugh. I'd be crying and then my body would start laughing because I've been training it to do that for so many years."

Brown leads a Meetup group around conscious laughing in Santa Cruz that has more than 1,000 members. She is not leading in-person laughing exercises, but some are, each Sunday at Ocean View Park.



(Kevin Painchaud / Lookout Santa Cruz)

At the competition in May, Brown aced the crying laugh and she also scored well, she said, on the "[ROFL](#)." "I just started laughing, and then let the laughter take me over. Then pretty soon I was laughing so hard that I fell off the chair onto the floor."

Brown got a trophy for her victory — she was the first American to win the WLC in its three-year history. "What I am going to use this for is a way to bolster the importance of joy and levity and laughter as a tool for healing and well-being," she said. "Because I intend on doing some traveling, and just spreading this message around, not only in the U.S., but abroad as well."

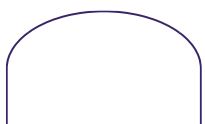
Because laughter is not only the best medicine, it's the most [contagious virus](#) as well.



Wallace Baine is Lookout's City Life Correspondent, covering arts, music and culture, as well as the people who make Santa Cruz and neighboring communities tick. He also writes "The Here & Now," a periodic column that offers his take on the news of the day – and the news you'd otherwise miss.

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