

What do you get if you cross the new exercise fad with a good old giggle?

# Yo hoho ga hahaha!

by Bill Gibb

bgibb@sundaypost.com

**I'M in a room alone with two women who are looking at me and laughing hysterically.**

But Sharon Miller and Michelle Galloway claim it's all for my own good.

They're positively beaming exponents of laughter yoga, which is making people all over the world grin and bear it better by boosting health and wellbeing.

Laughter is increasingly being hailed as the best medicine.

Big companies, universities, health boards and care firms are queuing up to get Sharon's Joyworks to train staff in grins and guffaws.

And they're in good company.

John Cleese has used laughter yoga to ward off his depressive demons and Julia Roberts and Oprah Winfrey are cackling converts.

Usually Sharon, who has spent the past year practising in India and learned personally from founder Dr Madan Kataria, will have 20 or more at an hour-long class.

For our taster session, though, it's just the three of us and I soon wish I had the comfort of a group to lose myself in.

But I'm certainly cheered by Sharon's revelations about how sessions have helped reduce participants' pain, lift the blues and make life altogether happier.

"Laughter releases endorphins which have so many positive effects on the body and the brain," explains Michelle.

"And the beauty is that the body doesn't know the difference between real and fake laughter. So, as long as you're laughing, it's doing you good."

I think I'm quite a cheery person but feeling forced into it isn't initially coming easy.

It's a bit unnerving as the

duo run me through a series of scenarios while laughing hysterically all the time.

They're getting me to play act mixing non-existent cocktails, taking a funny phone call and ridiculing massive credit card bills.

Eye contact is key, although their efforts to handshake me

back to a "state of childlike playfulness" aren't initially successful.

"In every group there's always someone who's reluctant but I've never had a session fail yet," insists 44-year-old Glasgow-based Sharon, who incorporates her yoga breathing and stretching techniques as we go.

"People can't believe they're happily hugging at the end."

"We had a great session with shipyard workers who really got into it. It was just a bit bluer than most sessions!"

Exhaling for longer than you inhale is critical in getting our bodies working better.

And you naturally exhale longer when you laugh with Sharon counting in for four and out for eight.

"It releases

so much stress," adds Sharon. "I'm not a great driver and the laughter memories I can call up instantly make me relax."

"Everyone leaves knowing how to do that."

"Kids laugh hundreds of times a day, adults only 15 times."

"We need to do more."

And, finally, Sharon's twinkly-eyed laugh has won me over. The duo's good-natured, positive exuberance — and the sheer silliness of chortling at nothing — has got me guffawing, too.

Go on, you know you want to laugh!

■ Joyworks' next session is in Glasgow next Sunday, with others to follow in Dundee and Inverness.



## Are you ready for the Bighearted Scotland awards?

THE countdown is on. It's just four months until the 2013 Bighearted Scotland Awards.

And we're delighted to announce the votes are in, they've been counted and verified — and the heroes are shortlisted.

Nominations opened in May. We asked our readers to tell us about those ordinary men, women and children who do extraordinary things. Since then, entries have flooded in.

It's been a tough job, but from scores of entries, we whittled down the nominations in the eight categories to those we feel most deserve recognition.

By Tracey Bryce

trbryce@sundaypost.com

Over the next few months we'll reveal the inspirational people who've made the shortlists for each award, including Child of the Year, Carer of the Year; Fundraiser of the Year, Sports Person of the Year, Entertainer of the Year, Business Person of the Year, Bighearted Hero of the year and the coveted Bighearted Scot of the Year.

They'll attend a glittering ceremony at the Glasgow Marriott Hotel on Saturday

November 9, where the winners will be revealed.

And this year there will be an extra special accolade on the night — the Sunday Post Award for someone we believe really has gone the extra mile for others.

Lucy Wilson, chair of Bighearted Scotland, said: "We've been overwhelmed by the response and the calibre of the nominations put forward."

"There are so many people out there doing good things for others that it was a difficult task selecting the shortlists."

"But we had to make a choice and those

who have made the shortlists certainly deserve recognition for their efforts."

Bighearted Scotland, has so far raised more than £1.2 million to support six charities, including CLIC Sargent, Epilepsy Scotland, Erskine, Momentum, Penumbra and the Scottish Spina Bifida Association.

Money raised helps tackle a wide range of issues affecting adults and children including epilepsy, disability, childhood cancer and mental health.

The charity also promotes reducing the harm caused by alcohol abuse and assistance for veterans throughout Scotland.