

# Rotenberg A Stand-Up Doc

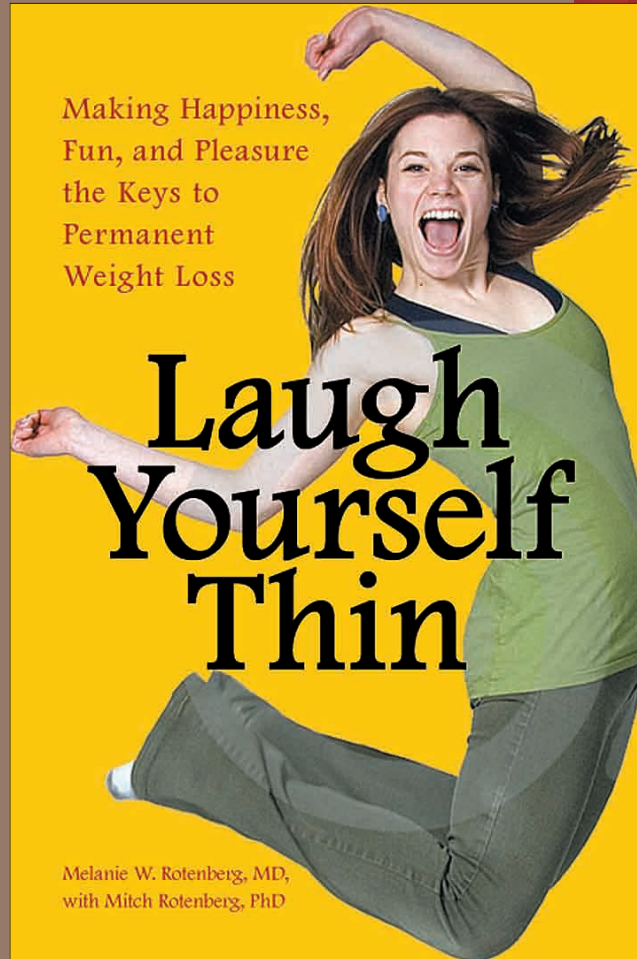
Series of 'Laugh Yourself' Books Planned

STORY & PHOTOS BY MARIA SONNENBERG

**L**aughter is the best medicine for Dr. Melanie Rotenberg, physical medicine and rehabilitation specialist – and stand-up comic. The Satellite Beach physician has done her comic routine at doctors' meetings and for the staff and families of nursing home residents, as well as in a medical talent show at the Henegar Center a couple of years ago.

Rotenberg recently added author to her list of credits. "Laugh Yourself Thin," her tongue-in-cheek diet book, has been picked up by Praeger, a publisher of academic textbooks and general reference works. Although not due out until October, the book has already piqued the interest of "Elle" magazine and other national publications.

LAUGHTER, continued on page 48



"Laugh Yourself Thin" is available online at [www.DoctorRcomedy.com](http://www.DoctorRcomedy.com).

## DOSING OUT HUMOR

In addition to her medical career, stand-up comedy act and writing, Dr. Melanie Rotenberg is now nurturing a speaking career that includes more than 70 presentations to the medical and lay community on subjects as wide-ranging as medical ethics to the longevity secrets of the Caribbean.





**DR. MELANIE ROTENBERG** can frequently be found at Florida Tech. The school is a Rotenberg family affair, as she has lectured there, her husband Mitch is a volunteer research professor, and son Aaron, who started college classes at age 12, is the youngest student ever admitted to the Melbourne university.

**On A Dare**

How did Rotenberg segue from medicine to stand-up? "It was on a dare from my husband," she said.

"We were on an Alaskan cruise for my 40th. birthday and the cruise ship comedian was Kevin Hughes, who mentioned that he used to be a molecular biologist. My husband is also a molecular biologist, but I always said his real talent was in comedy, so I suggested that he should become a stand-up comedian. He didn't want to be one, but he dared me to become one."

Rotenberg took up the gauntlet, jotting down all the one-liners, puns, zingers and other silliness that is part of life with husband Mitch and son Aaron.

"I now have about five or six years of material in my PDA," she said. "I carry my PDA everywhere I go."

She debuted "professionally" in 2004 during a comedy night at Palm Bay Community Center, delivering her jokes on a stage that was no more than a wobbly table.

"It happened right between Hurricane Jeanne and Frances, but still several hundred people showed up on this horrible night to hear these comedians," said Rotenberg.



**DR. ROTENBERG** with Melbourn Terrace patient Ruth Cohen. On staff with Health First and Wuesthoff, she is a consultant for rehabilitation program services at skilled and sub-acute centers, including Melbourn Terrace, where she does out almost as much laughter as medicine.

berg. "I was one of the fools onstage."

That night on the makeshift stage, Rotenberg found her version of heaven on earth.

When she's not practicing medicine, she tells jokes. She even headlined at a friend's wedding that, as it turned out, was not a fortuitous affair.

"I was too cheap to buy a wedding gift," she joked. "I did his wedding, but I didn't do his divorce."

Thus, the diet book was just a logical progression from Rotenberg's comedy act.

**Most Talented Student**

While doing her residency at Moss Rehabilitation Hospital in Philadelphia, Rotenberg took a novel-writing class at Temple University. Her professor, a New York Times book critic, considered her the most talented students in the class and encouraged her to pursue a writing career, but Rotenberg had little time to spare from her medical pursuits. "For 15 years, I put it aside," she said.

A couple of years ago, however, the writing bug resurfaced and Rotenberg joined the Space Coast Writers' Guild. At a Guild conference, she pitched her idea for a diet book to a McGraw Hill publisher, who liked what he heard and pointed her to an agent. "Within a month, I had a deal with Praeger," said Rotenberg.

"Laugh Yourself Thin" is aimed at a nontraditional market segment for the diet book genre.

"I want it to be read by people who wouldn't otherwise think of reading a diet book," she said. "A lot of diet books are extremely uninteresting."

While Rotenberg's book brings with it solid medical information, it leavens the facts with one-liners and humorous anecdotes. "I'm sneaking knowledge in," she explained.

The subject of a good diet is dear to Rotenberg's heart,

for in her medical practice she daily faces the ravages of obesity. "I deal with severely disabled patients suffering from major strokes, severe heart disease and diabetes, and I realized that people need good behavioral education to help prevent them from becoming disabled," she said. "Younger and younger people are becoming disabled because of obesity."

"Laugh Yourself Thin" is only the beginning of Rotenberg's writing career. "I'm planning on a whole series of "Laugh Yourself" books," she explained.

Next on Rotenberg's agenda is a book about another mind-grasping subject: sex. "It will be directed at women, with real medical information presented in a funny manner," said Rotenberg.

**Staying Sane**

Humor has been Rotenberg's life preserver while riding the rough seas of nursing home and hospice work. She started in the field as a 15-year-old CNA, earning \$2.65 an hour. "It helped pay for college," she said.

"I always loved working with this population because I feel I'm making such a difference, but the only way to stay sane is to have good coping mechanisms."

On staff with Health First and Wuesthoff, she is a consultant for rehabilitation program services at skilled and sub-acute centers, including Melbourn Terrace, where she doeses out almost as much laughter as medicine. "I use humor all the time to make my patients relax," she said.

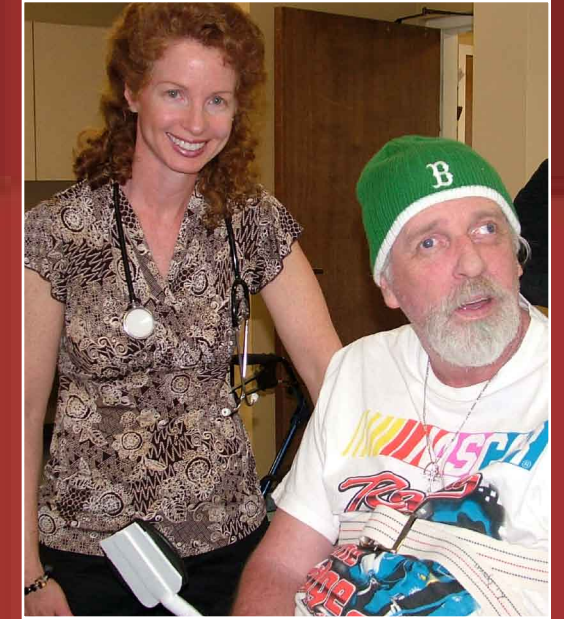
Humor is not the only unique aspect of her practice. "My office is my briefcase," she said.

Early in her career, Rotenberg decided to eschew a free-standing practice and all its costs and worries. "The average physician has an overhead close to 58 percent," she said.

"I have no building, no employees. My overhead is my medical malpractice insurance and my cell phone."

Her eclectic approach allows her time to volunteer as assistant professor in the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at the University of Central Florida College of Medicine, as well as to do medical charity work in South America.

She can sometimes be found at Florida Tech, for the school is a Rotenberg family affair, since she has lectured there and her husband is a volunteer research professor, while son Aaron, who started college classes at age 12, is the youngest student ever admitted to the



**MELBOURNE TERRACE** patient John Anderson, Jr. with Dr. Melanie Rotenberg, who also volunteers as assistant professor in the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at the University of Central Florida College of Medicine – and does medical charity work in South America.

Melbourn university.

**Speaking Career**

In addition to her medicine, stand-up and writing, Rotenberg is now nurturing a speaking career that includes more than 70 presentations to the medical and lay community on subjects as wide-ranging as medical ethics to the longevity secrets of the Caribbean.

The happiness she derives from humor anchors her to the positive energy she believes all physicians need.

In her conversations with Dr. Hunter Campbell "Patch" Adams of movie fame, the American physician and professional clown heartily agrees with her attitude.

"He told me that doctors will do themselves and their patients a favor if they took themselves less seriously," said Rotenberg. ■

**NATHAN M. BISK COLLEGE OF BUSINESS**  
Undergraduate and Master's Degree Programs

**Master of Business Administration** with a specialization in **Healthcare Management**

**The healthcare track for MBAs has never been a hot one—until now.**

*Healthcare companies can't find enough MBAs to fill open positions in this \$2.26 trillion industry.*

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, healthcare was one of just three industries to expand its workforce in 2008.  
(The Healthcare MBA: Our First Step in a New Journey. Michael W. Byrnes, Esq.)

For application and registration information contact (321) 674-7167 <http://cob.fit.edu> | [bus-info@fit.edu](mailto:bus-info@fit.edu)