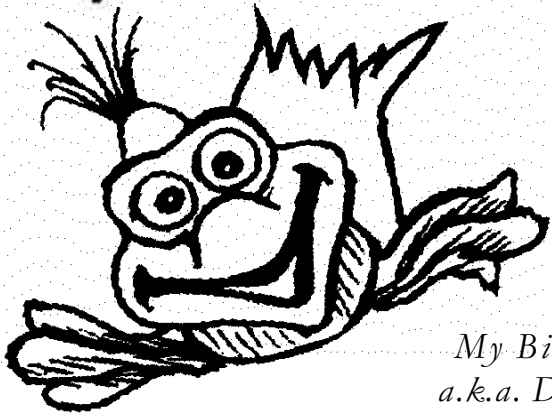


Tips from a Wise Old Duck



*My Birdie Bird
a.k.a. Dirty Bird*

“Pokey Dot” from Athens, Tennessee writes, “I am always wondering about what to say to the patients. You don’t want to ask ‘How are you?’”

One of the hardest habits I had to break was walking into a hospital room with “Hi! How are you?” A silly face can be more to the point. Now I say “Hi! I’m Shobi Dobi, the Kaiser Clown.” I raise my hat and “freeze” in a funny gesture. The few seconds of a “freeze” not only allows the patients to adjust to the surprise of a silly clown in their room, but also allows me to collect my instincts. In those few seconds, I can survey their room for relatives, hospital staff and to be aware of physical apparatus in the room, (i.e., so I don’t step on their IV - I’ve done that, so you don’t have to!). Then, I ask or my puppet asks if I can come in for a visit.

My approach is not to get into conversation right away. I will do some funny little “procedure” discussed in this newsletter, or do a little magic. I never expect the patient to answer or participate. The Big Apple Clown Care Unit in New York works in pairs just for this reason.

I also do not work alone. My puppets give the answers. “Birdie Bird” my wise old duck puppet (or is he a vulture) has trouble saying his “b’s.” He does magic and the kids love to talk to him. Older patients love his riddles and sight gags. And by the way, the only time I am an expert ventriloquist is with a hospital mask on. Patients in isolation love that gag. I paint a “smile” and a big red nose on the mask before entering their room, and announce myself as an expert ventriloquist (of course they can’t see my lips move under the mask). It is my experience that children and adults will overlook your lack of ventriloquist skills if you have an engaging puppet character.

When and if a patient feels up to speaking with you, they will very naturally. Shobi Dobi must be very easy to speak to because patients will talk to her about all sort of things from death to worrying about where they put their check book. One little girl whispered to “Birdie Bird” that she was sorry she was so mean to her mother. Birdie just tipped his head a little closer and she said she was angry at her mother. In the end it was

“Birdie” who got her to talk to her mother.

My puppet family includes: Dr. Scrubs, Ding Dong, Silly Willy, Birdie Bird and Poohky Do. Ding Dong can never remember the words to anything (and neither can I) so she often reads from this fabulous book: *The Biggest Riddle Book in the World*, by Joseph Rosenbloom \⁵ Here are some of Birdie Bird’s and Ding Dong’s favorites:

What means of transportation gives people colds?
A Choo-choo train

What kind of mistake does a ghost make?
A Boo-boo

A cabbage, a faucet and a tomato had a race. How did it go?
The cabbage was a head, the faucet was running and the tomato tried to Ketchup.

What is the difference between a hill and a pill?
A hill is hard to get up; a pill is hard to get down.

What is round and has a bad temper
A vicious circle

How do you keep from getting a sharp pain in your eye when you drink chocolate milk?
Take the spoon out of the glass.

Did you hear the story about the germ?
Never mind. I don't want it spread all over.

Rubber Chicken Corner - Rubber Chicken Corn

Sight Gags work great in hospitals and nursing homes. This corner is dedicated to, but not limited by, the rubber chicken. Now available in a key chain size, it is just right to carry in a pocket or bag. These gags are from "Dee Dee" Dena Piraino of Under the Big Top.\10

Chicken Cordon Bleu - A rubber chicken on a blue cord
A Fryer - A rubber chicken dressed in a monk's outfit
Chicken A La King - Chicken with a crown
Baseball Bat - A baseball with bat wings
Butterfly - Butter cube with a fly on it"
Diamond Necklace - A necklace made from a diamond suite of cards
Apple Computer - An abacus made from apple ornaments
Baby Rattler - Coax this baby rattle out of a basket with a small flute