

Hospice Birthday Parties

From "Dots" ak.a. MaryAnn Green

Dots is a white face clown and a member of the Christian Clown Ministry, The Merry Ministers of Plattsburgh, New York. She writes:

"My 'Plunge' into the world of clowning occurred 2 1/2 years ago after I completed a clown workshop instructed by Sister Mary Curran that focused on Community clowning. The Merry Ministers' mission statement is as follows: "Through God's love we share new life and infinite possibilities. As we serve the Family of God, we affirm the wonder-ful child within." Through volunteer work we are encouraged to return to our Community the gifts that we have been given by using our clown character to communicate our mission statement.

"It was then that I approached Sister Mary Ann Gour, Bereavement Coordinator at Hospice of the North Country, Inc. with my idea . . . to be the "clown" on-call for Hospice. My mother-in-law had been a Hospice patient and I wanted to do something special in her memory. The idea was unusual. However, Sister Mary Ann was eager to learn more.

"My training and experience as a Licensed Practical Nurse taught me long ago the benefit of laughter during illness. So I began explaining my idea using the cliché, "laughter is the best medicine." And along with conventional medical technology and progressive therapy, laughter has been known to have a healing effect. I wanted to bring my therapeutic dose of laughter directly into the home of the terminally ill patient and their family.

And what better way . . . Celebrate the patient's life by celebrating their birthday. My idea blossomed into an old-fashioned birthday party! Sister May Ann welcomed my idea with enthusiasm and DOTS and Sr. Mary Ann become Co-conspirators.

"The patient's family and primary nurse often become involved in planning the celebration. Once the date is confirmed and the guest list refined, the stage is set to surprise the patient. However, before I make an appearance, I try to learn something unique about each patient. This gives me the opportunity to personalize my visit.

"Sr. Mary Ann arrives at the home first, complete with music and announces that a special visitor is scheduled to arrive at any minute. The calliope music begins and DOTS marches in. Magically the patient and family members are transported into a festive atmosphere with wide-eyes and smiling faces adorned with hats, horns, balloons and party favors dispensed by DOTS. No party would be complete without cake, candles and a chorus of "Happy Birthday to You." The patient has become the celebrant and the family members are party "goers." Each visit is truly a success --. for a few moments I have made a difference in the life of a terminally ill person though laughter and comedy."

"To my knowledge clowning in this situation is limited. It is my goal to continue to grow as DOTS . . . dispensing humor to the terminally ill in my Community through our local Hospice agency and perhaps one day introduce this idea to other Hospice organizations.