

Opening Doors and Creating Small Miracles

All caring clowns are touched by the magic of their own presence. Indeed sometimes it bowls you over, until you realize that it is the magic of clowndom that is being projected through you. You just stand there and delight in it.

I'll never forget the little schizophrenic boy who would speak to no one until he met my dog. He would sit for hours with his arms around my dog telling him everything that had ever happened to him (and plenty had happened to this 12-year-old). Of course he didn't mind that I was right next to him listening and sometimes talking for the dog.

Sometimes children, when they are first diagnosed with a serious illness, are quite angry -- understandably so. It can come across as stubbornness and unwillingness to cooperate. I remember one teenager. She was all hooked up to some machine or another and was just staring ahead in space. Her mother was pleading with the young girl to respond. The therapist at her side just shook her head "No." I noticed part of her hair had been shaved off where a long incision indicated an operation. I walked over and held her hand. The monitors started moving. The therapist encouraged me to do more. Before long she was smiling. I asked the teenager if she would like a pretty design painted on her forehead. She spoke softly "yes." I painted her forehead with little red hearts. She saw herself in the mirror and smiled some more. She responded to my puppets and magic like any normal kid. The mother was ecstatic.

This reaction would have probably happened anyway. It just made it less painful for everyone involved.

Below are some wonderful moments from two very experienced caring clowns Robert "B.B." Widdop and *Mr. Bumbles* Eugene Lutrell

--Shobi Dobi

"Seize Yah Later"

"In neurosurgery, the kids are sitting there, they are in bed, they are being monitored, they have all these leads coming out of the top of their heads and they have this muslin turban on and they are just sitting there. You might have a parent sitting in the same room with them. They will be looking at the kid, because they know there is something wrong and the kid will be looking at the parents saying, "I know there is something wrong" and nothing's happening. There are TV cameras and monitors in the room to actually see if the kid is going to do anything.

"Well, we had walked into the room of a teen age boy. The father was looking at the kid, the kid was looking at the father, the father was looking at the mother, the mother was looking at the kid, the kid was looking at the mother. Back and forth. Enter the *Clowns Dolly and B.B.*

"I asked the Dad if he had any money. So, I played a little street shuffle game--Two-Card Monté, between the Dad and the Kid. It's call "Sucker Magic." The person who has the cards is in control of who wins. I always made sure the kid always won. I got the kid up to about 35 cents and no matter what that father thought he could do he was not going to win this game. The kid was always going to win. The kid was like "Yea, I'm winning"

"Well, when we walked out of the room alarms went off, bells went off, the staff came flying past us into the room. We had no idea what was going on. So I say to Dolly "Let's get out of the way and let them do their work." So we stepped into the next patient's room.

"We finished and were walking past the room where all the bells and whistles went off, the mother came out and grabbed me by the arm. 'Thank you so much for giving my kid a seizure!' I was like devastated. My jaw dropped and I just looked at her. I just stared at her eyes and said 'This is a good thing?' She said, 'We have been waiting three days for it.' So I said 'Well, then it was my pleasure.'

"I immediately left her and went down to the charge nurse and I said 'I just gave someone a seizure. Should I call my lawyer -- what do I do?' She goes 'Yes, Great!' I was like 'Oh my God, what is going on here'

"It was explained that the children are being monitored, as they want to see what brings on the seizure. Apparently this particular seizure was brought on when he was elevated to happiness. Because of the seizure, and what they found out, they were able to operate. This got rid of the seizures all together. So every time I go back up into neurosurgery, I want to wear a T-shirt that says "Visit Nurse B.B." and on the back I want a waving hand that says "Seize yeah later!"

-- B.B. Widdop

B.B. Widdop from Massachusetts

"B.B." Widdop who clowns at Boston Children's Hospital shared his experiences with us at the Southwestern COAI Regional Convention in September, 1996 in California. Below pictured on the left is BB in full make-up. B.B. shares that he wears little make-up and no wig to the hospital. That great smile needs little improvement.



B.B. THE CLOWN

Mr. Bumbles of Sacramento, California



"Mr. Bumbles" (aka Eugene V. Luttrell) has been the volunteer clown at Kaiser-Permanente Medical Center-North in Sacramento, California, since 1991. He has also clowned at Camp ReCreation since 1985, working with developmentally disabled and physically challenged children of all ages.

He is retired from a career in corrections, parole and teaching and holds both a Bachelor and Masters degrees in The Behavioral Sciences. [The world lost this wonderful clown in January, 2008]

"Playing the Unresponsive"

A patient usually looks up, smiles or otherwise responds to the stimuli of a silly non-medical staff who squeaks, smiles, and seeks to share cheer. But what of the unresponsive patient?

I never considered myself ignored by a patient. Often behind a vacant stare may be consciousness, but an inability to communicate, and in some cases an unwillingness to speak.

I, therefore, speak as if a two-way conversation was occurring and complete my routine (unless asked to leave). Then I smile and say: "Have a good day."

Let me give three significant examples:

At a Special Olympics on a hot May Saturday in Sacramento, as a "first of May" Clown, *Mr. Bumbles* was still quite nervous. A group of residential facility patients was sitting under a tree while others competed. I picked a boy, about thirteen years old, who appeared to be blind and was rocking back and forth. I got down on my knees and introduced myself; the attendant said "He's James. He don't talk and he can't see." *Mr. Bumbles* kept talking and started to describe his costume and makeup.

When I said "I have a RED NOSE," The miracle happened, James said "Like Rudolph?" I answered "Do you know Rudolph?" James replied "The Red Nose Reindeer!" I asked "Can you sing it?"

Then James started to sing, accompanied by *Mr. Bumbles* on his kazoo and in voice. In the sun on my knees with a person "Who don't talk," we sang "Rudolph, Jingle Bells," and "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town," much to the amazement of the attendant who responded "Nobody ever heard him talk before!"

This first incident was a sign that clowning for me was a way to open some door and communicate with some special people and never to prejudice "the blind who don't speak."

The second incident is with a young mother, aged 42, who had undergone surgery for back and spinal ailments due to complications of Lupus. She was a teacher who did some clowning with her students and was amazed there could be a clown right there in her hospital room! Over the next several months we visited weekly and planned to clown together when she returned home.

Unfortunately her condition deteriorated gradually, ultimately placing her in Intensive Care Unit (ICU). One morning on arrival at the Medical Center, I was given a request from her husband to visit her with medical staff approval.

On arrival at ICU, her husband and her doctor were outside the room. The doctor said she hadn't recognized anyone in several days; the husband asked that I go in and hold her hand anyway. (He believed!) When I did her eyes opened and she whispered "*Mr. Bumbles* . . . Hello!" The doctor's response was disbelief. The Clown in her reacted to the Clown at her bedside. We all had to wipe our eyes.

The following week another visit was made, the hand was held, a squeeze was felt, but no words. In a few days she was released from her bed of pain, but we know she is in God's Clown Kingdom performing for the young angels. I feel her presence at the center from time to time, and her family maintains contact at holiday and anniversary times with the Clown who helped Mom.

The third story revolves around the oldest person this clown has seen. On my rounds I saw a large assembly of people around a bed which was occupied by an elderly gentleman. I was informed: "Grampa is 109 years old and he hasn't spoken in years." Present were daughter, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

When the clown entered the room, the man sat straight up in his bed and hollered: "Look, my clown is here!", grabbed my hand and shook it. I even got a hug!

His granddaughter (in her thirties) reacted with a gasp, "I've never heard Grampa's voice before." Someone said "Maybe he didn't have anything to say." It was a shock, pleasant in nature, to the family, and shows the opening of a door possible via the clown character. They all heard their grandpa speak -- some for the first and some for the last time!

The following week I returned. Grampa was still there, alone but awake. When I took his hand, he said "Clown's back." I returned the next week, the room and bed were empty. He lives in this clown's memory.

These vignettes point to how, with the help of God, a higher being or whatever your belief, the clown character can open doors and create small miracles. This is a great by-product of being a Hospital Caring Clown who simply holds hands and smiles a lot.

-- *Mr. Bumbles*, Eugene Luttrell