

Little Lolli's Big Heart

JACKIE GARNER'S *Little LolliBelle* is a wee tot of a clown with a big imagination and an even bigger heart. Presently Jackie lives in Durham, North Carolina, but she started her clown career in Texas 12 years ago. She lectures and give workshops nationwide and is one of the Artists chosen for COAI's Clowns in Residence Program for 1997-98.

Jackie shared the following with a group of caring clowns that met informally at the Clowns of American International Convention in Massachusetts in April of this year.

Fantasy is my specialty - making the kids disappear from where they are, by assuming they and you are some place else. I learned this the very first time I went as *Little Lolli* to Children Hospital in Dallas, Texas.

Little Lolli is only five. She's just a baby, so that's why she doesn't have a full size nose yet. She's got just this little heart nose. You've got to start with heart. For some reason on that first day I decided to wear a red jewel heart glued to the tip of my nose. It turned out that the jewel picks up fluorescent light and it looks like a light.

That first day *Little Lolli* did a magic show for the kids who were strong enough to leave their rooms. The children that I saw looked a little tired. It was the first time that I saw a child with no hair from the Chemo, and just so weak and tired. After the show I went down the hall accompanied by the Child Life Worker. She goes into this room and I can hear the child moaning and crying "No, I want down, no, I want down." I can't see him yet, so I have no clue as to what is going on. I hear, "Do you want to see a clown?" A little boy's voice answers tearfully "O.K." And then he said again "I want down."

What happened next, I realized later, I couldn't do as Jackie Garner, but only as *Little Lolli*, the clown. I learned what it means to be in that character and stay in that character totally.

If you are called to go to the hospital, your clown can take over and your clown can do it.

Coming around that corner into the room, I see a four-year-old boy in what looks like a giant high chair. It has steel rods on the side and at the top there is a band around his head. His head is bolted to this chair [the boy was in traction]. He cannot move. I didn't know what it was, all I see is this child trapped in this thing. His knuckles were white with trying to get out. The doctors were trying to hold him in this thing. As I said I let go of Jackie and I let *Lolli* handle it (which is letting go and letting God). I'm not trying to push my beliefs on people, but I believe in that with all my heart. I truly believe that is the only way you can do this work without "losing it."



So *Lolli* in character [I wish you could hear *Lolli's* character voice] makes direct eye contact with Daniel. "Oh, my goodness it's a Prince," she exclaims! The boy looked to *Lolli* like he was sitting on a throne with a crown on. "Your highness the Prince," *Lolli* said as elegantly as *Lolli* could. She knelt in front of him, took his hand and kissed it. Holding his hand she continued "Oh, you've got a great castle here, I've never seen so many rooms." The nurse comes in, "Is this your slave. Does she have to do everything you tell her?" At that time we could still make balloons in the hospital, so I made him a sword. "I'm making you this sword because you are a prince. This is for dragon slaying. And if someone says 'What are you doing,' you say, 'I'm keeping all the dragons away.' If they say 'I don't see any dragons,' you say 'Well, then I'm doing a great job!'" *Lolli* bowed before him and handed him the sword over her arm.

Everything was done kneeling and bowing 'cause the clown plays the total fool who does not know the child's medical situation. This child is hearing the clown's imagination and what she thinks the situation is. *Lolli* went on "Is this your mother? Oh, your highness the Queen" and she kneels down "Is this your dad? Oh, King!" But *Lolli* starts calling King the dog! "Here king! Here king! (whistle) Come here boy! Eh? Ah, Oh, excuse me Dad," and with a long bow "Your highness the King." By this time the child is laughing and getting very caught up in this little fantasy world that the clown believes is the truth.

I Love You "Wollie"

From Jackie Garner's book on Clown Ministry

Warning! There will be times you will want to cry. I always wait and do this once the visit is over. Often this will be in my car on my way home. They aren't always tears of sorrow for all of the pain I've seen. They are usually tears of joy, for all of the smiles I've helped to give that day. Like the Clowns' Prayer says "If you can stop the paint and suffering for just a little while . . ." These are the true tears of a Clown. May God Bless you and give you courage to try this form of clowning.

I was packing to go to a convention when I got a call from a hospital I'd never been to. I don't know how they found out about *Lolli*. They said "We have a little boy in ICU could you come as fast as you can." I had already packed my costume, but when I heard ICU, I had *Lolli* clowned up and at that hospital in 30 minutes. I had never and never since put on my makeup that fast. I could never makeup again that fast or that well except that it was something that I was called to do.

I get up to Pediatric ICU and as soon as the elevator doors open you can hear crying and moaning cause these kids don't like being there and they're hurting. Now ICU is normally glassed rooms, because they have to be able to see everything. You can see all the children in their beds. You haven't been called to see them, but all those children are watching you. So I go into a little boy's room - his name was Vincent. He is four and a half years old. And again you could hear moaning. I come around the corner and again in character voice "Hello" The doctor says, "You must be *Lolli*!" "Yes, and who is this handsome boy" The doctor introduces "This is Vincent." *Lolli* continues "Are you married? Are you engaged to anyone?" He doesn't say anything, he is just looking at me, but his eyes are smiling. He's not scared of me after all he's four and one-half.

The doctor says "*Lolli*, do you mind if we bring in a rocking chair - would you like to sit in a rocking chair and hold Vincent?" *Lolli* answered "Sure would" So, they brought in this beautiful white rocking chair. And again I can be seen by all the other children all around me from their beds. They lay a pad across my lap and they lay Vincent in my arms, and he is so close. His eyes immediately go to my jeweled heart nose. He's checking out my hair, my face and all the bright colors. And Mama is looking right over my left shoulder and Daddy's looking right over my right shoulder, so we are all close. "*Lolli* loves you, Vincent."

I can tell he wants to touch my nose. The secret to nose touching is this: take their hand, and hold one finger (so you are in control of their hand) and you bring their hand to touch your nose. I don't care what kind of nose it is they are going to want to touch it and you don't want them to pull off your clown nose. "This is little *Lolli*'s laugh button." And I take his finger and push my nose and laugh. "Tee hee, Little *Lolli* loves you, Vincent." Mama's over the

left shoulder saying "I love you, baby" and Daddy says "It's O.K. son, Daddy's here."

About 30 minutes goes by - just quiet time of giggles and nose pushing. In that time I knew this child like my own. We made a connection that no one could ever separate. Yet, he had not said one word to me. All of a sudden, Vincent pushes my nose again and he giggles all the way to his toes. Just giggles. Not one tear. There was no pain. This is what happens, something magical happens when a clown is there with a child in a one-on-one.

He just had the sweetest smile in his eyes and face. And each time I would say "Little *Lolli* loves you, Vincent," and Mama and Daddy would say "I'm here, I love you." This time I pushed my nose and giggled and said "I love you." He took a breath and spoke, "I love you, Wollie." I wanted to change my name to Wollie, right there. Then he said "I love you, Mommy. I love you, Daddy." And with this, his eyes went up to my eyes and my nose. "You want to push my nose again." So I took his little finger and pushed my nose. As I said "Little *Lolli* loves you, Vincent," he takes in the deepest breath, his smile broadens and his eyes are glistening. Then he breathes out his last breath. He dies in *Lolli*'s arms.

. . . the mother I am, is screaming.

The doctor comes over and takes Vincent from my arms and the mother and father go with him and I'm thinking, I've got to get out of here, I've got to run. But I look up at all those kids around me. They don't know what just happened. They are watching my every move. I am the clown. I am not Jackie Garner dressed as *LolliBelle* - I am *Lolli* to them. I am the only clown they may ever see. So I wave "Hello" in *Lolli*'s character voice, but I'm thinking I've got to get out of here, I go out the door and there is a child right there. "Hello, *Lolli* loves you." I'm thinking if I can just get to the elevator, I can let this out. I'm half way down the hall and I can see the elevator button. "Hello, Hi" waving to the other children. Inside me, the mother I am, is screaming. But these kids don't see this. It does not show on my face, because I am Little *Lolli* the clown.

Jacker Garner can not do this. God has a part in this, something greater has control of this for you when you do this with all your heart and you want to help the kids. He's going to help you do it. That's the only way you are going to get through it. I'm not a great person. I'm not superwoman. I just have to let go and let Him help me handle it.

So, I'm almost to the elevator, and here come Vincent's Dad. "Clown, wait!" Tears are running down his face and he is reaching into his pocket. "What do I owe you?" I answer softly "Nothing, what do I owe you!" And I leaned over and whispered into his ear. "There are children watching and I have to stay in clown character." And as I go

to the elevator I wave. "I love you, Daddy. Bye! Bye!" I push the button and I see the down light flashing, but here comes the mother crying. "Lolli, please I need to see you." I answer in character "O.K. Mom." And I think that was the longest walk I ever made in my life - back down the hall towards the mother. When I get there, Mom just falls into my arms - and she is sobbing into my costume - and I can feel her tears go past my hair and down my neck. "Lolli, he never got to go to Disney World, my baby never even got to see the circus and all of that. Oh, did you notice the way he went, there was no pain. He was smiling, he was giggling." And Lolli whispered in her ear, "I know, Mom. He's going to be fine. You're going to see him someday and you're going to take up just where you left off. But other children are watching Lolli. I love you and from one mommy to another I do understand. Thank you for letting me be a part of this." She looked up, "We will never forget you, Lolli." Daddy comes out and they walk back down the hall. And there I am trying to get back to the elevator, again, in character waving to the children "Hello, Hi Little Lolli love you." The children for all they knew, the child fell asleep in my arms.

The elevator door opens and sure enough there was a mom with two kids. "Hello" And I'm thinking soon I'll be outside and I can let go. And the lobby was full of kids, and the parking lot looked like Disney World. "Hello How ya doing" I get on the freeway and everyone is driving by waving at the clown - "Oh look there is a clown. Hello, Clown" I'm thinking, God find me a dirt road please! And I found one right after I asked for it. I drove down that road and there wasn't a soul on the road and I was able to let go and cry. These to me are the true tears of a clown. When you are touched by something and you realize that you are being used to touch and offer healing. Be it death or whatever, you never know what you are going to be asked to do.

Don't be afraid. Trust me, if you are asked to go do that you will have all the strength in the world, because not everyone is asked to go do that.

Special Moments and Memories

Jackie "LolliBelle" Garner Continues

You never what affect you will have on people. One time when I was visiting a nursing home they told me that there was this 103 year old woman that was so excited to see me. Apparently when she was three - that's 100 years ago - she remembers seeing a clown. Her Daddy, who back in those days worked his farm everyday, stopped working on this particular day because a one tent circus came to town. That circus had one elephant, one horse and stunt rider and one clown. She said the clown made his way around the tent making tricks and shaking hands. When he got to her he said

"You're so pretty" and he kissed her hand. The older women commented "you know I never got to tell him he was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen. So here I am again 100 years later with a clown!"

Years ago as a child, clown told me, "Jackie Garner, Don't ever forget you're special!" Many times in lonely times when I was

growing up I would remember what the clown told me. Once at an Clown Advanced Studies I was thinking about all the great clowns. How I'd never be like them. Then the clowns at this course were saying they'd never be as great as the great clowns that inspired them. I realized what a living tradition clowning is. It is being passed down from one clown to another through the generations. That's how this poem came about.

I Want to Be a Memory by Jackie "LolliBelle" Garner

As I put on my makeup, red nose and bright hair
My costume, my clown shoes, then suddenly I'm there
Right where this clown wants to be
Ready to become a part of someone's memory.

I'll never be a Lou Jacobs or Mark Anthony,
A Buttons, a Frosty, or a Mr. C.
I'll never be famous or in Clown History,
But there is one thing this little clown just has to be.
I, too, want to be a part of someone's memory.

When I do a party, a school, or a fair,
A church or a hospital, and while I'm there
Let me turn the laughter loose,
And set their little hearts free.
Then after I'm gone,
Please let them remember me

And when my life is over and I am called home
Hopefully I'll find myself kneeling at His throne
And on that day I want to hear Him say,
"You did your best Little Clown"
"You past the test, Little Clown"
"Now go and take your place of honor"
"With the rest, Little Clown."

"No you never were a Lou Jacobs or a Mark Anthony"
"A buttons, a Frosty, or a Mr. C"
"You never were famous or made Clown History"
"But what you did, you did for me."

"And by the way, a special thank you"
"From all of my children
"Ages one to a hundred and three
"Because for them, Little Clown
"You have become a Special Memory."