

Developing Your Character in Your Bathroom Mirror and Other Ordinary Places !

From Shobi

In hospital clowning being able to improvise is most important, after all the hospital is one big walk about. How do we develop this if we don't have an improvisation group? From many of your letters, I realize that not everyone lives in a town with a clown school. And many of you may never be able to go to a convention or to Clown Camp. So this is for you!

Learning to Belly Laugh

Many of us were brought up to check our emotions (including laughing heartily out loud - belly laughing) For me this is one of the blessings of being a clown. Now, I laugh out loud all the time. Guess what, I'm having fun. Laughter is even contagious in your own home and in your spirit. The physical energy involved in a belly laugh has been scientifically proven to relax and relieve stress.

*Children Laugh 400 Times a Day
An Average Adult Laughs 5 Times a Day
Somewhere Adults Have Lost 385 Laughs a Day*

from the 1997 AATH Convention

You don't have to find a joke or a funny moment - just look in the mirror. If you aren't the funniest person you know, maybe you need to work on this. I read somewhere of a monk giving advice on this subject. He said to stand naked every morning alone in front of a mirror until you laugh hard and deep at yourself. If we can see the funny side of our "spilt milk," and belly laugh, we get instant release from negative emotion. The bonus is a renewed perspective on our life and a healthier body!

Become a Rubber Face for Your Tooth Brush

"May you never pass a mirror without making a silly face," i.e., don't take yourself so seriously. AND it will help develop your "rubber" face. In the mirror, see how many faces you can make between happy and sad, angry and surprised, frightened and awe struck. Opposites are great tools for the clown. Next, start making exaggerated faces with exactly how you are feeling at the moment! Being in touch with your feelings at any given moment is the key to improvisation.

Become Your Own Best Audience

I made a little stage for Shobi with three \$10 mirrors from Rite Aid. When buying these inexpensive mirrors, line them up in the store and make sure they will go next to each other without distortion - all mirrors are not alike. Do this preferably "in face," so you'll attract a crowd -- who will wonder just what you are doing -- "Finding a skinny mirror of course."

I put the mirrors on a wall that has enough space in front for me to move or dance and make large gestures. Practice, practice, practice. Every time you go by the mirrors make a gesture -- an expression of the way you feel at the moment.

Where else will sticking out your tongue be appropriate. Now, take the feelings further -- make them ridiculous even outrageous, but keep them honest. If you're angry for example, stretch a gesture until you laugh - belly laugh at yourself. Are you getting silly yet? The negative emotions sometimes make the best gestures. We can all relate to them.

Practice your "ta tah's." In show biz it is called it a "take." Come onto your stage and introduce yourself. Make a gesture and freeze. It's sort of like posing for a camera. Try different gestures. In your "freeze gesture" make it bigger and even bigger, expand your energy -- express how you're feeling. Try repeating the gesture over and over again. Three times is the magic number. It gives your audience time to see it, understand it, and appreciate it.

In the beginning Shobi could not do a performance at The Clown School without coming out on stage, standing there with her knees shaking, biting her finger nails, miming "Can't do this. Too scared," leaving and coming back. By the time I started my routine, I "had" the audience by letting them in my private world, which is all too human.

Speaking to Your Favorite Chair

Put your character in different situations. In the safety of your house walk as your character would walk, go over to any object, say your favorite chair and treat it or act to it as if it were a dog, or a flower. Pick up a broom and make something else out of it - a boat paddle, a toothbrush, a comb. Do this without thinking, be spontaneous. Bring your clown in front of your mirrors and introduce the object to your audience (the mirror). Don't forget to laugh at yourself! If you don't get sillier more outrageous, push yourself to extremes. Then show a friend! Take them by surprise. They won't think you're crazy. You're a clown!

Watch and the Whole World Will Watch with You

I hope you have all seen Emmett Kelly very slowly and methodically sweep a spotlight under a rug. He would have a huge stadium watching his concentration. Try seeing an imaginary object on the floor. Look at it as if it were really there. Pick it up, miming what it is like. Maybe it's sticky, "Yuk." Then do something silly with it -- like put it in your ear. Or transform it into something alive and precious that you have just found -- like a small bird. Go with the improvisation and show a friend.

Take Your Clown for a Stroll Around the Neighborhood

Take your character "in face" to the super market, the mall or for a walk around the block. What would your character do when pumping gas? Shobi dusts off the other cars with a pink feather duster! Being able to wear this silly clown persona and play in the world is such grace.

*Few things are more awesome than
a clown let loose in the streets.*

– Ken Feit