

Smiling Inside and Outside, I Am Beatrice Buttons

By Janet B. Koschzeck of Whitehorse, Yukon

My first trip to Whitehorse Correctional Center was to get a photo ID. I pressed the buzzer and entered the daunting doors with a prayer and joy in my heart. A guard asked, "Are you coming in to visit my boys?" "Great! They need to smile." Another person, also "visiting" that day grinned and demanded to know why the clown was allowed "inside" without the usual search. I slipped a note to the control officer behind the grill: I have a date/appointment with the Training Coordinator for Corrections. Beatrice Buttons added in character "He wants my photo!" The officer then arranged for me to be escorted to his office. As I trundled along, inmates knocked on windows and waved to me. What a thrill! Although Beatrice Buttons' character is extremely shy and very prone to tears, she waved back shyly, secretly pleased with their friendliness and warmed by their greeting. The Training Coordinator's comment was, "You sure created a stir in the control room!"

The next Sunday evening I accompanied the chaplain and my pastor down the halls to a room where "chapel" is held. I sure had fun with those huge round security mirrors 'cuz I stopped at every one and checked my long, pink, curly hairdo and my makeup. (Although Beatrice Buttons is very shy, she is constantly primping herself.) The chaplain kept reassuring me I was lovely. This chaplain had never met a caring clown before and I think he was very brave for inviting me along. He knew these people confined behind bars needed a laugh to help lift their spirits.

As the men and women file in, helping themselves to coffee, I introduce myself by showing my "calling card" with my name on it. Then continue shaking hands and curtsying very low to each one. The Pastor explains that I am a silent clown and a "being" or "presence" rather than a "doer." This remark gave me much food for thought later on. I realize that my presence as an ambassador for God's love and humor is far more important than anything else I might do. This is making me really love my clown character. I even like her better than Janet because she offers unconditional love, makes no judgements and sees people through different eyes than Janet does. My keeping silent allows others to "get a word in edgewise" while I listen with an open heart. At Beatrice Buttons' commissioning service (when she was presented to our church), I took a vow of confidentiality promising to "button up my lips," (hence the name Beatrice Buttons as a mime character).

Each of the two very informal worship services are held in a circle, and end with communion. I am "tickled pink" (Beatrice Buttons loves anything pink) when asked to assist my pastor to serve each man and woman in the circle. As each participant takes the bread I offer and dips it in the "wine," I feel it is a holy moment indeed.

Following worship services, my pastor, the chaplain and Beatrice Buttons, are given permission to visit the lockups to offer communion to individuals behind bars. Again, I feel honored and blessed to offer symbols of God's love, and enjoy the resulting beaming faces.



"I even saw guards smiling tonight," was my pastor's remark later on. "It was a good night," he added, "I usually go home saddened after meeting with these broken people." When I pondered that remark later, I happily realized that, as Beatrice Buttons, I did NOT see the inmates as broken people. Looking through her eyes I am blessed with even more than my purple and pink socks, and a red nose. The caring clown connects to the place inside where we are all the same -- the wonder and joy of the innocent child that we all have inside.

I have never felt more "holy" than I did that evening, and I returned home rejuvenated, not exhausted. I usually limit my gigs to an hour because of Janet's health, but those two and a half hours of ministry gave me more than I had given. I'm eagerly anticipating monthly visits, helping the chaplain with his pastoral care. It was a long process to receive permission to visit, but it was well worth it!

Beatrice Buttons Collects Buttons

