

# “Mischief “ in Bosnia

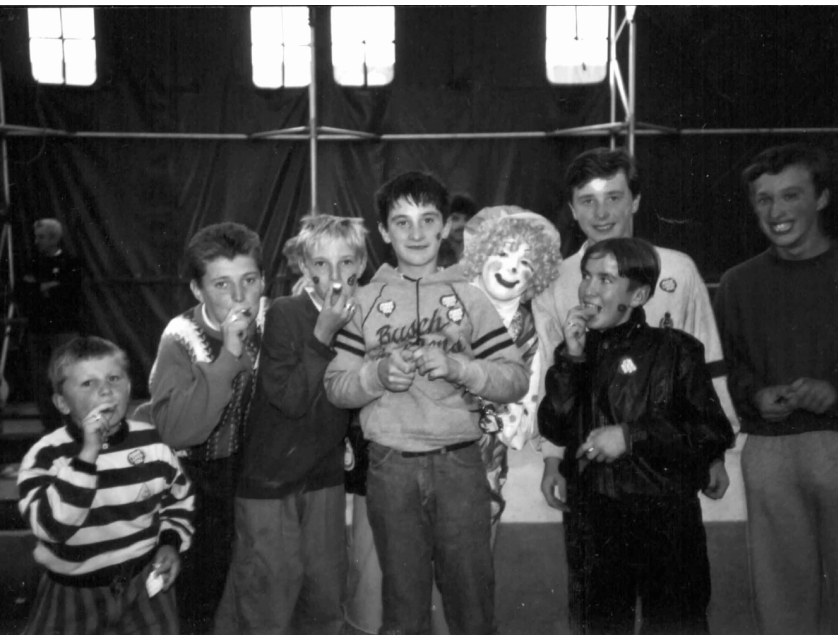


Maria Beck  
Mischief, the Clown  
aka  
Dr. Funnybone

Maria works as a hospital clown with “Clowns on Rounds” of Albany, New York. In 1993 she went on a pilgrimage to Medjugorje, Bosnia. Her experiences in Bosnia in 1998 follow:

“I clowned in refugee centers where you could still hear the bombing and gun fire, but the area was relatively quiet -- that is why the refugees were there. But signs of war were all around. In the house I was staying, the father would be home for two weeks and then off to war for two weeks. That’s how they did it.

“You just had to be ready for anything. One time on our way over the mountains from one city to another our guide asked, “Can you be ready in 20 minutes to do something for the refugees in the next school?” (In Bosnia at that time some were in school as students, but many families were taking refuge in the school.)



Maria, as *Mischief the clown*, peeks around some teenagers inside a very large tent that housed refugees near Bosnia/Herzegovina. All these children fled with their mothers over the mountains to a safety where they were living in these tents. Here she handed out kiss stickers, kazoos, and candy.

“Well, I wasn’t “in face,” but I had my face paints with me. So on the bus, I just painted my face and put on my wig, rolled up my jeans which showed my stripped clown socks, and went out in ten minutes and clowned with some magic tricks.



“A couple of days after I did a clown show in the tent I went back as myself and did face painting/hand painting. The kids loved it. They have nothing but their lives. They left everything when they fled their villages.

“A lot of clown things are universal. If I turn around to get something out of my bag and wiggle my fanny, they all laugh just like they would here. A wiggle is funny no matter what country you are in. A wiggle is a wiggle. I just had fun with everyone and kept everything simple. I used a lot of participation with the magic. For example, I used a magic change bag and would have a child wave a magic wand. “Now wave it like this” and I’d wave the wand and wiggle my hips. So she would just wave the wand with no wiggle. I’d say “No, no, no, like this!” So the next time she waves the wand, she wiggles her hips too, and everyone laughs. Later on I’d get some of their teachers to wiggle their hips. And they laugh even more when I get an adult involved. It’s simple fun.

“In one school, there wasn’t an auditorium, so they put me on the stairs in the hallway. Nobody was there at first, but then all of a sudden there were hundreds of kids -- of all ages, some were on stairs above my head and some lower than me, some on the stairs behind me. I had four stairs as my performing space. So I let out a loud whistle (the kind with two figures in your mouth) and I said “Sit” (with the interpreter). Again I did simple magic like paper tears, and mouth coils. Also, I have a pair of gloves with one really long glove. So it’s fun getting someone to pull off the long glove.

“At one point one person in our group said “We have a lot of tennis balls to give out.” Well, I juggled the balls and then threw one to one of the kids. That was a mistake. All the kids ran up and grabbed all the balls. I had intended to play with them, but I instead got mobbed. You have to be very careful you don’t get mobbed with what you give out. The “kiss” stickers which the teenagers loved were good giveaways.

“Puppets are something you can use anywhere. You don’t have to talk with them -- actions speak louder than words. And sometimes I would dress up the adults and we all would have so much fun clowning around.

“You have to be so sensitive to the local customs. You don’t want to do anything that will hurt your clown’s relationship with the people. You need to ask a lot of questions before you go. But in the end it’s like walking into a hospital room. You have to be sensitive to all the surroundings and the people’s feelings.

“People say “Aren’t you afraid?” You can be afraid of so many things. But if you can bring joy, a little pleasure and to be able to lift part of the burden, the fear diminishes in their smiles. What a joy it is to be able to make somebody smile.