

“..... I Could Even Cry with these Clown”

From Shobi Dobi



Lolli and Pops, Ken and Stella Thiessen



Doctor Happy Go Lucky and Nurse Payne In The Butt

I met Ken and Stella Thiessen at one of my workshops at the Clown Conference in Winnipeg several years ago. I've had their picture on my bulletin board ever since. They sent me a tape of an interview that was done on CBC (Canadian Broadcasting)

The story of how and why they became clowns is far from funny. They think it is a miracle that they are even alive. Their lives took a dramatic turn five years ago. They were returning from a wedding in Vancouver when their car was hit broadside by a woman driving 60 miles an hour. Their car flipped and landed in a ditch. The car was completely mangled. No one should have survived. The Thiessens and the woman that hit them were uninjured. They believe it was nothing less than a miracle. We thought "If we are still alive, we must have yet an important job to do."

The job however, came to them in a way they didn't expect. They were taking a volunteer course in Palliative care when Stella saw an ad for an evening clown class. Stella signed up, but didn't want to go alone. Ken agreed to go along. By the end of the course they were both hooked and Lolli and Pops were born.

With their hospital characters *Doctor Happy Go Luck and Nurse Payne in the Butt*, making people smile seems to come naturally. However, there is a system in their silliness. Stella takes a quick read of the room to determine the patient's mood and asks if they may enter. Ken slides into his doctor's routine. He's wearing a stethoscope with a miniature bottle of "Scope" mouth wash tied to the end. "I have a special stethoscope." (It makes a musical sound when he checks a heart. "That's a happy heart," Ken jests. "You made my day," the patient laughs. His wife agrees, "Yep, he has a happy heart." "You gave me more than the doctor," the patient teases.

A 79-year-old woman who's been in the hospital for two months comments "I just got to know them as such a kind, caring couple and it nice to see the humorous side. I look forward to their visits. I think they are terrific."

Jennifer Pierson, the former head of Palliative Care at the Selkirk Hospital, also thinks they are terrific. She's impressed with their passion and dedication.

"I think what amazes me about them is they come not with just frivolity or flippancy as clowns. When we think of clowns, we think of the funniness and all the light heartedness, but to me clowns come with a special part of compassion, empathy and tenderness. Yes, they make you laugh, but there is that other side with the clown. You can easily cry with a clown, too. I think that is what they bring to people as well - the sense that 'I could even cry with this clown.' That's often what I would discover when I saw them in the rooms. Sometimes there would be so much joy that it would even bring people to tears as they valued life and appreciated this incredible moment of being lifted above where they were."

For the Thiessens the payoff for all of their volunteer work is seeing the looks on people's faces -- the smile, the laughs, the joy. "We are still very young clowns and have a lot to learn. We're young at heart and slightly older in different places." They both agree that they will be clowning for a long, long time.

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