

# *Ripples of Love from Russia*

*Sarah Mixson of Seattle Washington*



Sara Mixson, as *Sally Suze Somarsal*, has been clowning since 1986. She is a graduate of the advanced clown course at California's Dell'Arte School of Physical Theatre, and has a BA in Dramatic Art from Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington. She toured Russia with Patch Adams in 1998. Recently she sent me this description of her trip. Sarah is completing requirements for the Practitioner's License in spiritual counseling, with an emphasis on clown ministry, through the Center for Spiritual Living in Seattle.

It was a very high-energy trip - we were required to go in clown on the airplane and for most of the time we were in Russia. So five of us met at SeaTac airport - perfect strangers, but easy to find each other. Even before we saw them we could hear the honks and whistles. I came with my dear friends Deborah and Kathleen (they were in civilian clothes.) They were treated to 5 clowns all showing off their particular tricks to each other and anyone else who'd watch. Clowns break right through all the usual formalities. We were all hugging like we were long lost family. I had found my people. Balloon animals suddenly appeared, music was played, folks danced, puppets pranced. And that was just at the check-in counter!

Patch and about 20 others left from New Jersey and we converged in Copenhagen. (They were a much rowdier bunch, I'm sure). We had a brief introduction in Copenhagen, then boarded another plane all together to Moscow. Once in the Moscow airport, we cavorted while waiting to go through the passport line. Patch went into high gear, teasing the airport security, going through doors marked with do not enter signs. Most everyone was laughing. We had a very dour passport stamper - she wouldn't crack one smile as far as I could see, but when I looked at her with such clown delight and goofiness she finally cracked, but caught herself before becoming too unseemly.

Once through that pass-point we were greeted by all the Russian clowns and orphans (as clowns). More pandemonium and the authorities finally waived us right through customs - get em out a here! And so the adventure began.

## ***Look out! Love has arrived!***

For those of you who saw the movie Patch Adams, with Robin Williams, it captured Patch's spirit well, his compassion and his silly ways. The real Patch is actually much wilder.. He's also 6ft 4in tall, with a long gray ponytail and a big handlebar mustache that curls up into a huge wide grin. Add to that silly colorful clown pants pulled way up exposing skinny legs in clown shoes, a wacky duck hat, a rubber fish and a giant pacifier in his mouth, and you begin to imagine the presence of the real Patch Adams. His heart is as big as his persona and he creates an enormous energy of love and laughter that is impossible to resist. Multiply that by all us other clowns and look out! Love has arrived and will spare no prisoners.

On the long bus ride to our hotel we started to get to know each other. I was lucky to sit with a regular clown tour clown - Dr. John Glick, with Maria Yeliseyeva on his lap and I had a lovely 16 year old orphan, Nadya on mine. All the kids were great and Maria was amazing. Maria is a small woman with the most loving presence I've ever felt - she reminded me of a clown version of Glenda the Good Witch, with genuine warmth and glee... She is making a huge difference in the lives of these orphan teenagers and now is also working with orphan babies.

Patch and Maria set the stage for one amazing, loving rush of love to descend upon the streets of Moscow. Imagine 40 plus clowns in all sorts of get-up. Pink and green wigs, big floppy hats and shoes, honking, banging, whistling, playing the harmonica and ukulele, laughing and greeting. Playing with balloons and bubbles, all going down the longest escalator into the bowels of the Moscow subway system and onto the cars. We were noticed. Pictures were taken. Kids and adults were grinning from ear to ear, asking who we were.

Patch's clowns are known as the Peace Clowns, for we come with love and energy to visit the most unfortunate. We spent most days at a hospital or orphanage, some times at an old

performers home. We came to serve, to bring the silly and delight back into the eyes of folks going through a very hard time. And it made a big difference.

I went to serve and to learn from the master, Patch. And learn I did. I followed him down the corridor of an old folks home and watched him interact with Paulina, an 88 year old blind woman. With Marina, a gentle Russian clown translating, he held her hand, invited her to explore his clown gear, explaining what it all was, talked to her about her life, her passions. He found out she was a puppeteer, and out came puppet after puppet for her to explore and figure out what it was. An octopus, a cockateel, and so forth

And we sang. She was shy so Patch and I sang *Zippity Do Dah* and *You Are My Sunshine*, with Paulina and Marina chiming in. Then they sang a lovely Russian folk tune. And then the magic really happened. Paulina sang to us the most beautiful, sad, soulful tune, her face glowing and her voice pure. Patch asked what it was about and she explained it was about two trees in love, but on opposite sides of the road, unable to reach each other. Patch said, "Oh, but when they grow up, their branches could reach out and touch." Paulina said, "Oh you Americans are such optimists. But it is a Russian song and that doesn't happen!" We spent about 25 minutes with her. (I was mostly weeping in the back ground). Patch encouraged me to touch, hug and kiss her goodbye. That was worth the whole trip right there.

I learned from everyone there. The clowns, the orphans, the kids in the hospital, and the tour guides. Julia, our guide in St. Petersburg, started calling us "My Dear Clowns." Pretty soon she was clowning too at the hospital. She said she goes into the hospitals all the time to translate and such and had always gone away so sad and depressed. But not this time. She saw the delight and hope that the kids expressed and determined to go back, with her husband, as clowns. And they have. I just got a Christmas card from Julia. She now has a baby girl and continues to clown with the other Russians she met on our tour.

### ***Music Is the Juice of Love***

I learned so much: that it is the connection that matters, all else is gravy. And the silly antics and props help bring down the walls. And music is the juice of love. I took my harmonica and toy accordion and discovered what value they had. From *Ode to Joy* and *Minuet in G* to *Oh Susanna* and even a couple of Russian folk tunes, it brought people out and got them singing and dancing, even on the subway. It is the little, silly moments that matter. No I wasn't a doctor, I could not fix a broken bone, but I could bring a smile with some bubbles and help lift some pretty weighty spirits.

I stay in touch with Maria and Julia and other Russians. It is my intention to continue to support those orphans. They now have a summer camp that I want to sponsor orphans for

and hopefully get myself back there for that either this year or next. If anyone knows of grants or individuals that would like to support an orphan, please have them contact me. It would be great to have a group adopt one, who knows? I can also sell cards and calendars of the wonderful folk art Maria's Children do. It is absolutely stunning and all income goes to Maria's Children.

I would never have made it there without your initial support [her supporters]. I cannot thank you enough. And that energy and love you gave me has taken root on all sorts of soil, Russian, English, Italian, Australian, Canadian, all around America and back to Seattle. The ripples are still going. I took you all with me and I finally can begin to explain what you did. It is amazing what love can do. What support can do. What service can do. Patch said it was just the beginning. To take that love and grow it back home. In the little things, the friendly hello at the grocery check out line, or on the bus. It is my privilege to share it with you. This is a force that cannot be stopped. Praise God!

Sarah Mixson