

# Over the Rainbow



*Cami and SnickerDoodle on the day of the story below.*

Remember *SnickerDoodle* Mary O'Brien from a year ago in the Newsletter Vol 5, No 1? Mary wanted to do this work so badly, she couldn't wait for clown camp, so several of us clowns worked with her by email. "I can't wait to get started" she said back then. The article was called "A Leap of Faith." We printed some of her diary on her first caring clown visits.

She did go to Clown Camp and she now is in charge of the Gem Jester's Hospital Clown Unit that regularly goes into 2 hospitals -- St. Lukes and St. Alphonso -- both in Boise Idaho. Shobi will go there to do another workshop in October and will report on their group in more detail then. I wanted to print this article because of the timeliness of Cami's illness.

Mary has spoken so often of Cami that I asked her if she would share her story. As you read this story there is a good change that Cami will be undergoing special experimental treatment for neuroblastoma in New York City. The stem transplant that was given to her in this story did not take. Cami was three years old this month.

As you read this story, please send little Cami and her family her your blessings and prayers.

[Mary now heads up a Caring Clown Troupe in the Boise Idaho area]

-- Shobi

## By Mary O'Brien, of Boise Idaho

Printed with the permission of Cami's family and St Luke's Hospital in Boise

I met Cami and her mother, Brenda, on my very first trip to the hospital as a First-of-May Clown <sup>1/</sup> last fall. Although it was supposed to have been a very easy day watching our mentor, Boomer, the day began with a pediatric hospice party, instead. SnickerDoodle astonished me with her ability to tell her jokes and be silly despite the sadness on the faces in the room, and with the response of laughter and smiles from one so ill, I knew in my heart this is what I was created for.

After the party was over, girded with newfound confidence and assurance that I would not fall apart in the face of suffering,

<sup>1/</sup> A beginning clown. The first of May was the beginning of the circus troupe tour and for new clowns their first tour.

SnickerDoodle began rounds at St. Luke's Children's Hospital. A few doors down, I met Cami, a tiny two year old blonde, angelic cherub, who had just begun treatment for cancer.

Unsure of me at first, she did not speak to me, but after our first visit, she blew me a kiss goodbye. Unfortunately for her, she was at the hospital every two weeks as SnickerDoodle came for rounds. Over time, we developed a routine with a squeaker, hidden in my pocket. We always start with my nose, then her nose, which always brought a wide, priceless grin and giggle, and then it became a wonderful game for her to pat around the bed to find out what squeaked and what didn't. Her toys' noses always do, Momma's nose squeaks, even Cami's toes also squeak, but only Big Toes!

Soon the unsure little cherub ventured closer to me, checking out my change bag, my hand-shaped "hand bag," even once sneaking something out of my pocket and running off with it so quickly that her mother just barely caught the IV pole in time! Her giggle, especially her devious giggle, is the stuff of which clown dreams are made.

Early spring, after several surgeries, Cami had to travel to another state for an experimental double stem-cell transplant. Her mother, by now a dear friend of SnickerDoodle's as well, didn't know a soul in the town, and as Cami was isolated in her room for months, they both went through a great time of loneliness and pressure.

May finally arrived, and the day of Cami's second transplant, SnickerDoodle learned, was a Big Day of Celebration. In fact, a birthday party on transplant day was customary to signify a new start. That day happened to be my birthday, as well, so I gave myself a present and flew down, changed in a tiny bathroom into SnickerDoodle, and held my breath until it was "time."

After chatting all night with her Momma about how excited she was to have "Snick-Doodle" visit, when I entered her room, she did not smile and was very quiet. She was very solemn even as I brought out her big birthday presents, and opened one of them. The nurses laid a blanket on the floor for us to sit upon, and moved her lines and poles around so they could administer her meds as we sat and played.

I brought out my change bag and she made kisses appear and plastered them all over the staff that were present for the party. She loves to boss SnickerDoodle around, so she told me where to put tattoos and stickers. Still only two years old, she could tell me the staff's names, and gave orders to the nurses about where they could and could not put things.

Brenda, her mother, showed me Cami's new book, *The Wizard of Oz*, with the sound buttons that go along with the story. Her eyes lit up when anyone mentioned the book, and she would try to tell me about it even with her pacifier in her mouth.

The stem cells arrived, a tiny red bag of life, connected to her lines without fuss or much notice, except for the gentle singing of "Happy Birthday to You," a banner unfurling with Cami's name on it, with gifts coming through the door. By this time Cami was knee to knee on the blanket, with Snicker Doodle, checking out pockets and seeing what was squeaking nowadays.

Suddenly, a wave of this new life surged up in Cami's face, and she turned a grey color and asked to lie down. The staff who had arrived for the party sat quietly while Brenda and the nurse lifted her to the bed barely before vomiting began. Medicine was administered to help the nausea, yet her blood pressure lowered disconcertingly, and I looked around for something useful to do. I found a tiny keyboard and prayed that I could remember a song or two.

My fingers fumbled around a couple of songs that the nurses knew the words to, and they sang quietly with her mother as Cami continued to be ill. She finally dozed off, the staff returned to their duties, and her mother grabbed my hand asked if I would pray with her, and I did, more with my heart than my mouth, as I was humbled by her strength and faith in the face of such helplessness.

## *No, Clown Stay!*

Pacifier wobbling in her mouth, Cami slept and Brenda asked if I would take a walk downstairs with her. The angel woke from her sleep long enough at that instant to proclaim, "No! Clown stay!" SnickerDoodle waved goodbye to Mom and sat down, holding the only spot on Cami's arm that wasn't wired or tubed.

She asked SnickerDoodle to sing, and fell into a deep, comfortable sleep with a sigh as I choked out in my finest clown voice, understanding now why this is Cami's song;

"Somewhere over the rainbow, skies are blue,  
And the dreams that you dare to dream really do come true.  
Somewhere over the rainbow, way up high,  
There's a land that I've heard of once in a lullaby.  
Someday I'll wish upon a star  
and wake up where the clouds are far behind me....  
Where troubles melt like lemon drops,  
away above the chimney tops,  
That's where you'll find me...  
Somewhere over the rainbow, way up high.  
Birds fly over the rainbow, why, then oh why can't I?"

Dream, sweet dreams, Angel Girl. [Mary has a beautiful voice. "Somewhere over the Rainbow" must have sounded like an angel.]