

♪♪ BeBop ♪♪



Aurora Krause from San Antonio, Texas

BeBop has been clowning for six years. She's a full-time bank officer, who works four-ten hour days per week which allows her to clown one weekday and weekends at hospitals and nursing homes. BeBop belongs to a San Antonio clown alley, the Jolly Joeys, TCA (Texas Clown Association). After meeting BeBop at several conventions, and at clown camp, this year she and I roomed together at AATH in San Diego. She is such an enthusiastic clown and it shows in the quality and the attention she gives to the detail in her clowning. I thought you all would like to meet her as well. The following are pieces of conversations taped while in San Diego in February.

My love for clowning allows me to share my interests in music, dance and humor with others. BeBop is the musical name my clowns' buddy, Kim Oxford, and I came up with during my first year in clowning. I truly have a passion for clowning, I find few aspects of clowning difficult, simply because my heart is always 100% in all my efforts. I enjoy being a "Caring Clown," but also love to do skits, character competition and stage performances. I continue to learn the art of clowning from all levels. When I attend clown camps and workshops, I enjoy learning from first-of May clowns as well as from veteran clown instructors.

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In my experience I have found that a sincere effort to relate with our audience is key to making a difference. In a hospital room, nursing home or a shelter, we need to find the eyes that are always looking for a little attention or at least acknowledgment. Approaching with an open heart and offering a visit with your clown character can mean so much more than a quick giveaway. A gentle touch, or a sweet conversation will let them know you want to spend time with them. You've become a warm curiosity that interests their heart.

Finding the eyes was important to me another time. I remember peeking into one room. There was a little girl sitting on the bed looking perfectly normal, but when she turned her head I saw that half of her face was totally gone, due to bone cancer. Having learned to focus on the eyes, this became a special challenge for me, as this child had only one eye. She was so excited to see me and so ready to play that nothing else seemed to matter.

When she saw me, she had to move her head back and forth to see all of me as she had use of only her right eye. She became so excited acting like "Oh we're going to have a party" I speak Spanish and they were Spanish speaking, but this was all just really play we didn't need to talk. At first she was just looking at me and I paused long enough to give her time to see all of me. It is so important to slow down in a case like this. Then her mother came over and sat next to her. She then got very animated, looking first at me and then at her mother.

I did some magic for her and she clapped enthusiastically. She was so happy. Then I made her royalty by putting a crown on her head. You know one of those inexpensive ones you get at Oriental trading company. But it was the idea of it that was important and the play that made it fun. I made her a princess and performed and danced for her and then bowed to her. Then her nurse walked in and caught on right away and also bowed to "royalty." The little girl didn't think much of me bowing, but when her nurse bowed she was just so delighted. So I gave her a magic wand and we did more magic together.

Of course there is always the challenge -- the hospital room of a teenager. BeBop does a bit of play that has worked many times in a teenager's room. Most of the time there will be family and friends in this room. What BeBop does is select a good candidate and says, "My sidekick did not show up today, can you help out?" This always interests the patient and it allows the new sidekick the opportunity to make the patient feel better or at least provide them with a little distraction. I proceed to "clown-up" my new partner with Groucho glasses, clown nose or hat. I have a little boom box and play a short version of "Side by Side" or "Best of Friends" and we follow with a simple routine. Everyone joins in the moment. Then they get to keep the props to clown around with later.

BeBop comes in, and sure enough Mike, the Child Life Director explains that the father is here with one of the 7-year-old daughters, and he wants BeBop to visit. He said he wanted to see his little girl laugh and play. Although she was hurt and would soon find out about her mother and sister, there was so much of her that was just a perfect little child wanting to play. The father, his little girl and BeBop had some play time together.

Then this father, with all the pain in his life at that moment, was so grateful for the playful distraction, that he kept thanking us over and over. I felt we'd really done so little, but I also felt so grateful to be able to do anything at all. I find clowning to be a true blessing, something I enjoy doing with all my heart -- to bring smiles and joy to others.