

# The Magic of Silence

By Susan "Rosie" Prindle



*"Rosie" Susan Prindle - A Silent Caring Clown*

Clang, clang, clang. It was 4 a.m. and very dark. This was my first morning at a Vipassana Meditation Center in N. California and already I hated the wake-up gong. I struggled to my feet and tried to open my eyes. They were burning. Of the three women in the room, only two of us were slowly and methodically pulling on heavy socks, thick pants and sweat-shirts. Our roommate just pulled the pillow over her head.

We shuffled out the door and stepped into the cold darkness. Heading up the hill we followed the flashlights ahead of us. Thus, we began ten days of silent meditation.

Silence can be a very scary place. Each day we meditated for ten hours and during the few breaks in between, I walked around the lake again and again, trying to send the fear down through my feet into the ground, anyplace but in my body. On the 10<sup>th</sup> day, when we were finally allowed to speak, I could not believe I had endured those long days and my voice sounded strange as words tumbled out.

In the silence of meditation we are left with nothing but ourselves. For most of us it is this looking inward that is so frightening and we manage to avoid those darker corners of our soul with all the distractions of everyday life. But it is in the silence of meditation that we begin to connect with our true being, and only when we have done this can we truly connect with others.

I do meditate occasionally, and I can also find silence in a garden, on a beach, or on a walk in the woods. And then there's Rosie. I discovered Rosie during a week long intensive at The Clown School of San Francisco. The first time I was asked to get up in front of the group and perform, afterwards I sat down crying – tears of surprise and also fear. My teacher, Arina Isaacson, asked me "Did you know you could do that?" No I didn't. I had discovered a new being inside of me that I never knew existed. And this discovery of Rosie the clown also came with some responsibility. I felt that she was someone very special in my life, but what was I to do with her?

Rosie doesn't talk. She laughed loudly once. It didn't fit at all. So now, even though sometimes she can sense that people are frustrated by her lack of words, she remains silent except for an occasional "tee hee hee." Sometimes I, too, am frustrated and question the wisdom of this wordlessness. Until the day that Rosie met Michael.

It was Friday, Rosie's day at the hospital. She pushed the door open and entered the darkened room. A man sitting in the corner said, "Come in. Michael loves visitors." It was Michael's father. Michael appeared to be about 10 years old and it was clear that he lived in another world. His eyes had difficulty focusing as they roamed the room. He, too, did not speak. Rosie stood by the bed and looked into his eyes curious to see who was behind them. Michael spotted her red nose and all of a sudden his face broke out in a huge smile. He smiled bigger than I thought possible and he moved his head back and forth as if somehow that would let more of her in. It was as if he were swallowing Rosie. I watched as Rosie almost gasped for breath and then Rosie and Michael just drank each other in.

It was a thing to see, in the silence, where Rosie and Michael met in the space between them. In this place of no words, spirits meet and connect. Words can break the spell and even the telling of it does not reveal the magic of that moment.

Just as it takes courage to sit in silent meditation so it takes courage and patience to look into the eyes of another and listen, to hear their heart beat. Yes, it's easy and quick to tumble in with words to cover the awkwardness, to avoid the intimacy. And yet, when one stays there and waits, the painful place is passed and joy fills in the space.

Clowning is a sacred art and Rosie is a sacred being. She is saving my life. I want to be Rosie all the time. This means unlearning years of training, hurts and disappointments, of failed expectations. Rosie accepts life as it unfolds before her and as it passes by she lives each unique moment, and then lets go, to fully experience the next and the next. There are no words to intrude upon this feeling of each moment.

Most clowns speak. I'm not suggesting that you suddenly stop and become silent. Rather I am inviting each one of you to pause before you do speak, to take a moment to look into the eyes, to listen to the heart, to experience the silence. For it is in this place of silence that we discover a true connection, where two souls meet and experience the joy of simply being.

Susan Prindle lives in Portland, Oregon. She began clowning in 1995 at the Clown School of San Francisco studying with Arina Isaacson and now Christina Lewis. She clowns for the children at Legacy Emanuel Hospital in Portland and is also working on a one-woman clown show. Rosie lives in Susan's bedroom closet and frequently comes out to entertain her three grandchildren. Susan and Rosie can be reached at [daffydil@earthlink.net](mailto:daffydil@earthlink.net)