

# The Center Ring

By Pat Barner and Judy Vermillion-Witt

“Blue and Argus”

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*“The clown in each of us offers the potential for self-healing, as well, as connection with the clown in everyone. We can then join each other in The Great Ring.”*

– Bernie Siegel, M.D.

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Here is a wonderful book written by clowns about their clowning. Blue and Argus clown in hospitals, nursing home and also teach clowning. They share their experiences on a personal level, showing clowning as a tool for self-discovery and growth; as a method of tapping into our creative source and energy; as a means of unleashing our imagination, of breaking down the barriers to communication, of facing fears and of increasing self-confidence.

“We have come to believe that there is a special energy of love that can exude from our very pores, our living cells, and can penetrate into realms we do not yet comprehend. The more we give up our egos, the more we see the essence of that special force. We have found that, as mystics and sages have taught, Love can heal. Love is that for which we yearn the most, that which we long to give. Our cultured, surface selves can be blocked off from the experience, the possibilities of love. But the clown is ever present, ever open to when it will mysteriously and magically appear.” *The Center Ring*, Page 65

Pat and Judy have given the Newsletter permission to print the following story. I think it shows the kind of understanding they have of hospital clowning.

“Years ago Argus and Blue started clowning in hospitals. Hired by the chaplaincy office at a hospital, we would venture forth, visiting assigned patients. One of them was Dan.

We were asked to visit him because he was battling severe depression. Dan had his second leg amputated because of diabetes complications. His was a serious blow to a man who was well known for his performances in a local theater.

We approached his room timidly. He was surprised to see us, but welcomed us in. Now, as you may know clowns have no sense of etiquette. We came in with our music and toys, but our first greeting to him was with gestures regarding the empty space in the bed where his legs should have been. We were puzzled by the emptiness, even going so far as to look under the

bed and in the closet for what was missing. Responding to our frantic gestures, Dan told us about the operation. We gave him stickers, balloons, and wishes with our magic wand. Our greatest joy was when he finally responded to our request for a song. We kept asking him to sing with our music, but he'd only reply, “I don't sing any more. You need to go to the children's hospital.” Finally he relented to our coaxing, and sang “Hello, Dolly” in a deep, rich voice. We all had tears in our eyes. But we kissed him goodbye with the knowledge that his spirits had lifted.

The chaplain reported that Dan's physical and mental attitude had improved remarkably. Several days later, Pat happened to be near the hospital and dropped in for a visit.

She popped her head in the door and said, “Hi!” He smiled and responded. She started off, “You don't know me . . .” But Dan replied, “Of course I know you. You're one of my clowns.” Pat expressed her surprise, and Dan reminded her he was a theater person and could see beyond makeup. Dan inquired about our clowns and confided how touched he was by our attention. We talked about the obvious – the loss of his legs. Obvious to all, but other people who came to see him and studiously avoided looking at the empty spot on the bed. Friends never mentioned the loss, perhaps from their own embarrassment. This was understandable, but it meant that no one gave him the opportunity to acknowledge his feelings or to express his loss – until the fools came to see him. [The Center Ring](#), Page 17

In the book's introduction they offer: “The clown invites us to experience the world with trust and encourages us to expand our horizons. We use this symbol of the clown to enhance our personal growth, and offer it as a tool for self-growth and exploration to be used by counselors, patients, clergy, and those truly remarkable people who want to take advantage of all life has to offer.”

*“People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experience on the purely physical plane will have resonances within our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive.”*

– Joseph Campbell, [The Power of Myth](#)

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