

# Angels Among Us

by the Real Santa Claus

A book by Phil Smart Sr

Reviewed by Shobi

"Could it be that children who face physical challenges or whose lives are foreshortened have consciously chosen their fate? Why are so many of these children exceedingly patient and wise beyond their years? When looking into their eyes in the quiet moments I can't help but wonder, "Are these well developed souls who are wearing small disguises?" While I do not pretend to understand the mysteries of this life or the next., I have come to believe that we actually do have angels among us."

-- Phil Smart Sr., *Angels Among Us*

While reading this book I kept marking paragraphs I wanted to quote and found that I wanted to quote this whole book. Phil Smart writes from the heart and from the wisdom he has gained through 40 years as a volunteer on the wards at Children's Hospital in Seattle. Bruce and Carole Johnson sent me this book and I am so grateful for it. I will read it every time I feel overwhelmed and fearful.

Phil Smart is not a clown but does play Santa Claus at Christmas time. Other times he visits in "pedestrian" twice a week and has been doing this for the past 40 years. I found that this book not only affirms the work of the hospital clown, but it speaks from the heart of someone who has processed day in and day out, the joys and suffering, life and death of children.

It is a lesson that all of us who have clowned for children on a consistent basis, who have come to know hospitalized children over the years of their illness, who have been with them when they are in pain and when they die. It speaks to that question we are so often asked. "How can you clown with sick children?"

When we open our hearts to young children we weep for them, but we also have to come to terms with our own mortality and day in day out this exercise expands our own compassion and ability to hear and understand the wisdom of the small child. Shobi very early in her clown life found that she could tell the children who had Sickle Cell Anemia because they "glow." There was just something about these children who knew they would face pain and not live past their twenties. They knew this all their lives and had come to terms with this. With the reading of this book, yes, I could call them angels.



There is so much wisdom in this book. He tells of a hospitalized child, and how she taught him to listen.

"I believe her gift was the way she taught me how to listen. Young people are expected to listen to adults but more importantly, we must change the way we listen to them. April taught me to surrender my need to know the answers and listen from the vulnerable place of not knowing. When we quiet our minds, our hearts open on their own. It is in this place that we can listen for these young soul's innermost thoughts, view points and concerns about life."

This book will make you glad you do the work you do. It will make you weep, but it will make you open your heart and glow. The prose of every story in this book is so moving. Here is an encounter of Phil as Santa. When he entered the room he brought a gift to an ailing young girl.

"Her response to the gift bordered on boredom. Suddenly she stretched out her arms to their limits and surprised him with a total embrace. As he began to gently pull away, the hug became more of a cling. He abandoned any notion of withdrawing, welcomed her gently into his soft white beard and wondered, 'Could this moment have been heaven sent?'"

Later he went into the hospital in his "pedestrian" suit and Lisa recognized him when their eyes met:

"Time stretched like warm taffy. They seemed to see each other soul to soul. Finally, he broke the silence and told her of his pending trip out of town. Making a note of two phone numbers, one for her room and the other for the care facility, he promised to call once he had arrived."

In the hotel he made the phone call and was told Lisa had passed away.

“The words hung in the air like an unwelcome echo. A tremendous vacancy engulfed him. The clamor of the hotel lobby slowed and softened until there was only stillness. The hotel seemed to disappear completely. Then as though it were actually happening again, he could feel Lisa’s loving embrace pressing indelibly into his heart.”

People say to me this is just too painful. This book is proof that the heart will survive, grow and envelop anyone who has the courage to become a hospital clown. As I have said so often, you just learn to live a little deeper in your soul, and that is a such a beautiful place to be.

Someone commented to me once “I don’t want to see that picture it reminds me of my friend who died.” Instead of remembering the pain of separation, think of it as a kiss from the heart, a kiss from heaven, a kiss from the past from a loved one. Greet it with a simple “Yes, I hear you. I love you too.” This simple shift of attitude will flood your insides with the warmth of remembrance.

“First you have to go deep inside yourself to find your answers. You can tell you are getting the answer when your heart and belly get warmer. Courage is power from the heart. You feel like, ‘This is pretty scary! But I have to do it sometime, so let’s do it now!’ And then you just look straight ahead and you make yourself do it. But be careful to be honest and kind.”

– Lydia W. , 8 years old

When we stop fearing and contracting around the fate we all face, and embrace the life we have together, it is a beautiful place and our experience as hospital clowns takes us up and down the bumpy hills of emotions. It is not something we learn once. It is a road we all walk everyday over and over again.

We cannot have “professional” detachment. We cannot clown from our heart with “professional distance”. We open our hearts and love and learn over time to love every minute of it as Phil Smart so beautifully and elegantly puts into his writing.

I’ll leave you with this child’s wisdom from the book:

“When someone you love is sick you feel upset. You might be afraid about what will happen to them. But it helps to pretend they are still nearby you, even if they are in the hospital faraway, because when somebody loves you, it’s like they are right inside of you wherever you go.”

Bobby M. -- age 6.

## ***Book Review of Angels Among Us***

***by Bruce Johnson***

This book reaffirms the value of the work done by those involved in hospital clowning. Through anecdotes and quotations, Phil Smart Sr. shares the wisdom he has learned from the young patients during more than 40 years as a ward volunteer and Santa Claus at Children’s Hospital and Regional Medical Center (Seattle, WA). This heart warming, eye moistening, mind stimulating tribute also includes works of art created by the children.

During his four decades at the hospital, Phil has gotten to know 24 patients who passed away as a result of their illness or injuries. Some of their stories are told here. There are also stories of triumph, for example, Bonnie whose spine was nicked by a bullet at the age of nine. She attended school in her wheel chair, eventually earning a Master’s Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling and returning to work at the hospital where she had been a patient.

Phil doesn’t brag about his many hours as a volunteer, but focuses on the children whose lives he feels privileged to be a part of. He calls these youngsters his teachers, and their words illuminate important lessons of life.

This book was written to honor the children and inspire the reader to give of themselves. According to Phil, “We all have the same twenty-four hours in each day, no more, no less. Most of us work eight hours and sleep eight hours, which leaves a third eight hours in each of our days. It is how we use this third eight that defines the quality of our lives. We have to ask ourselves, how are we choosing to spend that most precious commodity, our time?”

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It can be ordered on-line at [www.Roots-Wings.com](http://www.Roots-Wings.com) or [www.LifeSkillsPress.com](http://www.LifeSkillsPress.com). (Soft cover for \$21.00) One hundred percent of the royalties from the book are being donated to Children’s Hospital and Regional Medical Center.