

Red Noses Create a Tour Detour in Mexico



by **Bart "Dooley" Marcy**

(Bart is the clown pictured in front of group with hands on his knees)

After several years in the investment management business in San Francisco, **Bart Marcy** switched to executive recruiting and spent the next twenty years traveling the world in search of talent for some major corporations. In 1993 he moved to Tucson, Arizona, to pursue his other interests. With some childhood experience as a magician and ventriloquist, and with a degree in Psychology from Hobart College, Bart headed to the Clown Camp at the University of Wisconsin and emerged in 1996 as "**Dooley**" the clown. Now while cruising the world as a Host for The American Express Mariner Club, Bart regularly visits children's hospitals, orphanages and senior citizen homes in various ports. He has clowned in Russia, China, Norway, Mexico and many places in between.

Mexico's Copper Canyon is four times the size of Arizona's Grand Canyon, and friends told me the best way to see it was on the Chihuahua al Pacifico Railroad. The internet got me in touch with S&S Tours of Sierra Vista, and before long my bags were packed.

Arriving at the Tucson airport for a flight to the agricultural city of Los Mochis, I was introduced to the Tour Leader, Sue Stilwell, and thirteen fellow travelers. That night during dinner at the Santa Anita Hotel in Los Mochis I asked, "besides seeing sights and cathedrals, have any of you ever thought about leaving behind a bit of yourselves when you travel?" There was silence.

Sue explained that I had spoken to her about the possibility of working some clowning into our Copper Canyon tour itinerary. I wanted to test my theory that, given the chance and some encouragement, many tourists might eagerly forego hours of shopping for souvenirs, if they could experience the joy of clowning.

Sue assured us she could find places to clown, as long as the fourteen of us wanted her to. I commented, "never mind that none

of you have clowned, most don't speak a word of Spanish and the children won't be able to understand a syllable of English. Clowning is easy. It's an international language. We will communicate through mime, silly sound effects and clumsy, rambunctious stunts."

After saying "sleep on the idea," I distributed *Magic by Gosh* red sponge noses from my Eagle Creek Pack-It Compressor bag, promised balloons and Kazoos for everyone appearing at breakfast with their red noses, and we said good night.

The response was overwhelming. Everyone in the group showed up for breakfast with a red nose and a grin. By morning the tour had taken on a new dimension. We would be sightseeing and clowning our way through the Copper Canyon. The front desk, observing the change in our demeanor, eagerly joined in by donning red sponge noses and sending us off to the train station.





Before long the group was aboard the train and traveling through the spectacular Sierra Madre Mountains to Bahuichivo, and the small community of Cerocahui.

On the train was a perfect opportunity for the new clowns to begin their training. We had been joined in our railcar by vacationing ten year old Alex Osuna Olmeda (pictured above) and his parents from Guamúchil. Alex was responsive, playful and enthusiastic. He loved wearing novelty glasses and a squeaking nose as much as inflating balloons and tossing them off the train to children as we slowly passed through their backyards.

Before we got to the town of Cerocahui, the word was out. Clowns were coming! Sue had called the manager of the Hotel Misión to solicit his help in arranging a visit to the Tarahumara Indian boarding school next to the hotel. But the school was on vacation for the Easter holiday and he had made a decision on another venue. What was going to be a quiet visit to a boarding school had become a "clown show" in the town square!

There were half a dozen curious kids waiting for us at the hotel. We panicked. Suddenly the pressure was on. We had to do something because the show had to go on. Fortunately, we were staying at the Hotel Misión for two nights. So the hotel manager postponed the show for the following afternoon.

Carol Morrison, who lives in Tucson and had lived in Mexico, recognized that we might need some time to practice and suggested we gather in the lobby. Before heading out for an afternoon of sightseeing, Kazoos had appeared; fifteen Copper Canyon tourists had been transformed into a band playing old favorites like Happy Birthday, Jingle Bells and Old MacDonald; and Neil Wakley of Seattle had checked the local stores for ice cream and had arranged to have 250 sent up on the first train in the morning.

The plaza performance turned out to be a success. Three hundred children showed up, balloons and Kazoos filled the town square, and some of the town's children had their very first ice cream. Equally important, a handful of tourists had done something for a small town 5,400 feet above sea level and had redefined their

definitions of a tourist.

In the morning we were back on the train climbing to 7,500 feet and the frontier town of Creel, which is in the heart of Tarahumara Indian country. Scheduled for this stop was a visit to a cave home, a mission, a school, a rancho - and a hastily arranged afternoon visit to the Tarahumara Children's Hospital (Clinica de Santa Teresita). Our noses were out and we were ready.

The Tarahumara Indians would be a challenge for even the most experienced clowns. They have maintained centuries of old culture and traditions. Many inhabit the remote parts of the canyons and still live in caves. They are nomads living in the lower winter climates and moving during the summer to higher cooler climates. Red noses are not part of their lives, but somehow we managed to bridge the gap with our balloons and our smiles.

Visiting the rancho, where eight families live together, we experienced the warmth of these timid people. We danced with the children, inflated balloons, and managed to momentarily compress the distance between our two cultures and lifestyles. The Indians responded to our silliness.

Later in the afternoon at the Tarahumara Children's Hospital we encountered a somewhat surprised, but appreciative, staff and many very ill children. We set up a reception desk in the lobby, visited with the patients, dispensed clown prescriptions and drawings, and passed out the last of our balloons.

In the morning we were on our way to Divisadero and an overnight stop at the beautiful Posada Barrancas Mirador Hotel on the rim of the Copper Canyon. We gathered for dinner and discussed the breathtaking views from our balconies, but soon the conversation turned to our five days together.

For those who had never clowned before - nor ever imagined that they would be clowning - the consensus was that they would be changing their future travels. In addition to carrying maps and guide books, they would be filling their pockets with balloons, stickers, funny noses, noise makers, and a variety of other paraphernalia. The Copper Canyon Tour had turned out to be more than anyone had expected.



Holland America Line Brings Clowns to St. Petersburg



By Bart "Dooley" Marcy

During its inaugural season, Holland America's 794 passenger ship MS Prinsendam arrived in St. Petersburg with a team of clowns. Assistant Cruise Director Mark Cox plus crew members Lisa Eri, Lindsey Hardy, and Maria Sneath, accompanied cruise passenger "Dooley" the clown on his third visit to the Komcomora 6 Children's Hospital.

Russian clowns Marina Shusterman and Svetlana Motovilovets, who are well known to anyone who has clowned in Moscow or St. Petersburg with Patch Adams, handled the local arrangements. The clowns assembled on the pier and entertained dock employees and cruise passengers before departing in a public bus for the mile drive to the port entrance.

Aboard the bus were a dozen local workers who were ending their shifts and headed home when suddenly they found themselves surrounded by bus riding clowns. The workers disembarked at the gate with smiles on their faces, rubber noses and kiss stickers on their faces and heart shaped red balloons in their hands. It was a hilarious start to a wonderful day of caring clowning.

The ride through St. Petersburg created the excitement normally expected when energetic clowns hang out vehicle windows to disperse inflated balloons, and wave continuously at the crowds enjoying the summer sunshine. People were pointing, laughing, and responding after their momentary shock at seeing so much fun.

On one pass by the world famous Hermitage Museum the clowns were greeted by a round of applause from the lines of people waiting at the door. At St. Isaac's Cathedral we pulled into the

parking area long enough to surprise about thirty Russian children who were impatiently waiting to begin their tour.

Thanks to the generosity of Holland America Line, and the support of Captain Peter Bos, Hotel Manager Brian McNeill, and Cruise Director Susan Wood, the clown van arrived at the hospital with three large boxes filled with wrapped candies.

We moved from room to room and floor to floor performing in the hallways and giving individual attention to the children confined to their beds.

The clowns saw a young boy who had been thrown out of an apartment window by his father before being abandoned by both parents. His full body cast was forgotten for a few minutes when Svetlana and Marina, who had made arrangements to have a piece of candy placed under his pillow every night for three weeks, assured him that the clowns would be visiting him daily - although their schedules were so busy the visits had to be made at night.

After returning to the ship *Dooley* serendipitously met a family from Guadalajara, Mexico. When they learned *Dooley* and twenty-five other clowns would be visiting Guadalajara, Ajijic, Jocotepec, and Puerto Vallarta March 4th - 12th they were overjoyed. A family friend is the owner of the world's largest balloon manufacturing company, and it happens to be in Guadalajara. So plans are being made. The clowns will be visiting the balloon factory to entertain the employees, and show our appreciation of their products.