

# Den Følsomme Joker ~ The Sensitive Joker

## *Clowning in Danish Nursing Retirement Communities*

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Mulle "Big Mulle" aka Dr. Bent Eikard

Ketty doesn't want to come into the community room today, but the door can be left open, so she can sit in her own room and still follow what is happening when the clowns *Little and Big Mulle* are visiting.

"Hi Ketty" *Big Mulle* peeks into the room.

"Hello, can I come in?" he continues. "Hmm" affirms Ketty.

And *Big Mulle* with his bird puppet, Julius, enters the room.

*Big Mulle* aka Bent Eikard is a 68 year old retired doctor and a clown with lots of thoughts under his big black bowler hat.

"All my life I've been attracted to the clown figure. The clown is both sensitive and sad. But at the same time also very outrageous and funny. For me, it is a new idea to think of the clown in a therapeutic setting. But the clown fits there perfectly. The clown understands his own pain and can go into these situations with sensitivity, yet the clown creates a way through the pain with humor."

Together with *Little Mulle* (aka Anne-Mette Pedersen) Bent Eikard visits several nursing homes in Farum, Denmark. In some of the units, the residents have dementia, in others they are just old. *Big and Little Mulle* clown for both. Bent explains, "The caring clown does this not for applause, but puts himself aside so that he/she has loving empathy with the situation. The clowning is done in conjunction with the treatment staff."

Bent Eikard quotes Socrates: "The only thing I know, is that I don't know anything." Bent feels at home in this truth.

"As a young man," Bent explains, "I was seduced by my own intellect and it was oh so important for me to be amongst the elite. But as I entered my doctoral practice, I had to realize how little I knew about helping others. And throughout my life I have become more humbled by this fact."

Ketty is calling from her room "Where is the coffee! When will it be ready?" *Big Mulle* is friendly reply comes from the kitchen. "It's coming!" Again he goes into Ketty's room and stays a couple of minutes. Then he reappears out in the community room again and sits next to Erna.

### **Som Barn Igen - As a Child Again**

Almost all the light is out of Erna's eyes. She doesn't seem to know what is around her. It doesn't matter to *Big Mulle*. He takes her hand, sits quietly and strokes her paper thin wrinkles. Across the table tells *Big Mulle* about her knitting.

"Without being like a child again you cannot reach wisdom. It is through the play and innocent attitude of the child that one is realized as a human being. Because when you simplify your speech, your needs and your way of living, you can reach the ability to enjoy yourself over very simple things. That increases the love of life in general."

At the coffee table in the next house, Gudrun sits all alone. All the afternoon visitors have left. The other residents have retired. Gudrun lights up when she eyes the clowns.

### **En Smerte at Skulle Dø - Waiting to Die**

"Yes come and sit down, I think there is a little coffee left," Gudrun invites the clowns. She's stone old, but absolutely fully present and up for a good chat. *Big Mulle* lets Julius, his bird puppet, go to her and touch her lovingly. She smiles. Then *Big Mulle* has Julius jump up onto Gudrun's lap. "Oh no, don't do that" Gudrun protests with great coquettish drama - playing a young girl protecting herself from the advances of a suitor. And so they play.

"There is a certain pain in growing old and having to die one day. That is a fact." says Bent Eikard with a little dark shadow flashing over his eyes. "One knows that a successful clown visit to a hospital can heighten this atmosphere several degrees for both patients and staff. I think the same is true at homes for the elderly. Here people are often not very well physically or psychologically. A tender and warm clown will be able to soften that pain by releasing a worry or reviving a good memory."

### **Den Røde Næse ~The Red Nose**

There was an article about Denmark's first hospital clown a year ago that inspired Dr. Eikard to put the red nose on top of his own. He signed up for a hospital clowning course and took the deciding step into the role that he in fact has always wanted.

Now, Bent always walks around with a nose in his pocket and knows that it can always be worn in the middle of his face and be an instrument in loosening up a sour atmosphere anywhere, even people standing in line at the post office.

"In my life, I think it is so, that I have saved the best for last," says *Big Mulle* Bent Eikard