



Los Payasos con Corazón

Clowns with Heart: Front Row from Left: Andrea AZ *Rainbow* Michaels, Laura *Pixie Sprite* Haldane, Katie *Sunny Flower* Hernandez, Hope *Jolly Jellybean* Marquez, Patty *Patty O'Patches* Meagher, Lucy *Feather* Sheffield, Sondra *Heart Throb* Upham, Maureen *Oochie* Mould, Natalie *Lovie* Shoop, Second Row: Shobhana *Shobi Dobi* Schwebke, Connie *Nurse Chickie* Coble-Roe, Karen *Casey* Clapp, Larry *Jubal* Davis, Chuck *Palo Alto* Stilwell, William *Rigoletto* Waters.

Third Row: Lois *Dr. Dot* Elliot, Helen *Oy Vey* Bakeman, Linda *Clown Dode* Sweig, Bill *Dr. I.C.U. Giggle* Schulte, Fourth Row: Dionette *Checquers* Hudzinski, John *Johnny Sunshine* Haldane, Marcy *Nurse Ducky* Graves, Susan *Susy Q* Stilwell, Sarah *Anna Banana* Hostelley, Bart *Dooey* Marcy. Group members not pictured above: Martha *Blossom* Gunter, Peg *Gee Gee* Marcy, Robert *Bob-O-Link* Lamb, Arne *Dr. Laffngiggl* Swensen, Neil *Neilie* Wakley

What a happy group of clowns. Some of the clowns are “seasoned hospital clowns.” For some clowns, it was their first experience in a hospital. For some it was their first time clowning at all! And for all of the clowns it was a fun and inspiring.

Laura “Pixie” Haldane of Mesa, Arizona writes:

As I expected, I encountered marvelous opportunities on this trip. There were opportunities to learn; to experience a place, a people and a culture that have interested me since my childhood; and a glorious opportunity to be with clown friends. As a result, I have

expanded my repertoire of clown antics, I am energized, and I feel connected to my fellow human beings in a profound way that is difficult to put into words.

Lois Elliott, aka Dr. Dot and Zanie, who clowns at Maricopa Medical Center and Phoenix Children's Hospital went on this trip to reclaim her clown soul. She commented:

I do so much by myself at the hospital that I needed the fellowship of other dedicated caring clowns. I truly did get renewed on this trip!

One of the things we tried to stay away from on the trip was becoming as Patch would call it “a vendor” The focus of Clowns with Heart is not on entertaining or giving things away, but on making a heart to heart connection with every individual we meet, and in true clown form that means everyone. A caring clown does not see rank, race, position, or status. That means we played with children, staff, patients, street vendors, restaurant workers, hotel maids - nobody escaped our foolishness.

When we don't stand and crank out balloons or pass out little gifts, but we are animated, we found that we played more in the true spirit and magical world of the clown. And we all found out it is more fun to clown, than stand and give things away. Many of us found ourselves doing things we never imagined.

Laura “Pixey Sprite” Haldane from Mesa, AZ writes:

Traveling to another country and clowning as part of a group makes it possible to observe a wide range of personalities and clowning styles, as well as to encounter novel situations. My husband John (Johnny Sunshine) & I (Pixie Sprite) have done most of our clowning in a local nursing home. Beginning the trip, I was comfortable with older adults and also with young children. I wasn't so sure what to do with adolescents and young adults. I'd done most of my clowning one-on-one or in small groups. This trip included clowning at a school with 2000 boys and in crowded plazas where people of all ages gathered.

One of the lessons I took away from Shobi's workshop was to slow down, observe, stay in character and react. Actions and reactions that take place too quickly may be missed. Slower, bigger reactions are easier to see and fun to watch. When I found myself in situations that were a little too far outside my comfort zone, I watched other clowns. I stayed in character and reacted while I learned from those clowns who were more comfortable in these situations.

In one such occurrence I noticed Rigoletto (Bill Waters) spinning a plate on top of a long stick. A small group of preteens to young teenage children, mostly boys, gathered to watch. Then Rigoletto offered the stick to a child, inviting him to try. The plastic plate had been designed so it was fairly easy to achieve some success quickly. One by one the children spun the plate, and reveled in their success and the applause they received.

That gave me an idea. I love to teach. I scanned the edges of the crowd and saw three older teenage boys off to the side observing the mayhem. It was apparent that they wanted to join in but thought they were too old. I approached. Using some of the very limited Spanish I know, I asked them if they could please help me. This got their attention. Quickly, I inflated four 260 balloons, handed one to each of them and kept one for myself. I didn't know enough Spanish to tell them what to do, so I showed them step by step how to squeeze, twist and lock bubbles in the balloon to create a dog. When we finished, I applauded and thanked them as they showed off their creations to other children who had surrounded us.

Another boy who had observed indicated he wanted to try. I inflated two more balloons and went through the steps with him. He matched them quickly and then went off happily with his “perro.” Soon he returned with an uninflated blossom balloon he'd gotten from another clown. This time I handed him my balloon pump. He inflated the balloons and I showed him how to make and



Laura “Pixey Sprite” Haldane from Mesa, AZ doing her “magic” with a young boy on a Mexican street.

attach a stem to the blossom. As we admired his flower, I said, “Para su novia,” which means, “for your girlfriend.” As if on cue, he was immediately surrounded by girls all wanting the flower.

A little later, we made hummingbirds together. I recalled the thrill I felt the first time I attempted balloon sculpting and discovered I could do it. I had wondered in that moment what else I could do that I'd never tried and I had become excited about trying new things. As my new little amigo and I twisted colorful balloons into birds, I hoped he had that same feeling.

Magic Stickers: From Shobi Dobi: I use one of those very small inexpensive plastic magic boxes to give away stickers. “It is one of those boxes that you open and nothing is in it, then you reopen it and there are “stickers” in it (or whatever you load in before hand). I love to find the shy child or the obvious “outside” child and only he or she can open the box to reveal the stickers for the other kids. It is one of my favorite clown toys and works so well.

In a hospital in Guadalajara we broke up into groups of 4 and 5 and a nurse led us to different parts of the hospital. My group was to go to the children's wing. On the way into the Pediatric Emergency Room, five of our clowns came out saying “*We've already done this area. The little boy responded well, but the teen-age girl in the corner doesn't want to see anyone.*” I don't remember what I was thinking (If anything, Shobi doesn't think too much) I went over to the little boy with my sticker box. Mom opened it and it was empty, the nurse tried - Empty. The boy tried and “Stickers!” I had my eye on the teen-aged girl in the corner. I guess it is just experience, but I know that sometimes the way to interest people is for them to see you play with a child. The corners of the girl's mouth were just slightly turned-up. “I mimed (as Shobi doesn't speak Spanish) “You want to try?” The girl shrugged her shoulders, which in teen-age language means “yes.” So I bounced over to her and several nurses came over too.

Of course the nurses found nothing in the box, but the teen found stickers every time and got to sticker the nurses.

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I brought out my Minnie (magic show in the hat pictured to the left) and Minnie and I and the teen played a while. Then I left.

“Outside several rather frantic adults came up to talk to me. Of course I had no idea what they were saying. Fortunately Christina was our little group’s guide and she told me that the teen had tried to commit suicide and they wanted to know if I had gotten her to laugh. Well, laugh? No. Smile? Yes, lots of smiles. I thought “nice” and silently thanked the Universe for allowing me to be there.

Later, after doing several floors of children, I noticed that my little magic box was missing. I looked in Minnie’s hat (where I usually keep it), in all my many pockets, and in my big clown purse. I looked several times and probably looked a little panicked as Christina came over. “Let’s go back down to ER and find it”

So down the elevator around the corridors of six floors we went. When we arrived back in the Children’s ER, the little boy pointed right to the box which was in plain view in Minnie’s hat. Hmmm! I didn’t have much time to think about that as the nurses came over and handed me a big syringe (empty and no needle, of course) and indicated that I should give them all shots in the rear. Well, we played and played (in front and with the teen who had just tried to commit suicide). The teen alternated between outbursts of laughter and being cool as teens will do. It was great fun.

On the way out of the room, Christina asked me something like “What happened in there?” We had both looked earlier for the box that was so visible when we got down to ER” I explained “We clowns from the heart get a lot of help from the Universe. It happens all the time.” And on we went to find some more children. I think angels clustered around us for two weeks!

The Gentle Art of Dusting

Linda Clown Dode Sweig from Chicago The people were so open, loving, and playful. When I showed someone how I wanted to play and mimed asking if I could play with them, most were eager to interact. Many times, when I would blow a kiss, a kiss would be blown back to me, or the person who I was dusting with my feather duster would raise his arms so I could dust his arm pits, laughing all the while. People let me “fluff up” and dust off their shoulder so I could “comfortably” go to sleep (snoring loudly) on them, and would pat my head. We had such fun.

From Shobi: One of the techniques I teach in my workshops is “gentle dusting.” It’s not just brushing someone off with a feather duster. Dusting is actually touch - caring touch. Human contact stroking! We don’t do it fast. We don’t do it in two directions. This is how it is done. You take a feather duster and stroke slowly down an arm or a back - never in the face. I usually do it in waiting rooms especially pharmacy where people have been waiting for a long time. “We don’t want any dusty people here.” Sometimes if you instinctively feel the need to inject a little giggle, lift the person’s arm and dust under the arm. You can feel people just melt under your caring gentle stroke.

Of course, we don’t use a feather duster in the patients rooms because of hygiene concerns as it could spread germs from one room to another. A duster can only be used in a patient’s room if it is new and you can leave it there. I taught this technique in a workshop on this trip.

One day when we visited a museum with very large murals on the ceiling there were long benches meant for people to lie on their backs and look up at the murals. I was lying there with my eyes closed because I was exhausted and my feet hurt. Someone took a feather duster and stroked from head to foot (one direction) on each side. I felt all my fatigue go out of my body. A bodywork practitioner will say it is smoothing out your energy. It was so powerful, I got up and saw *Johnnie Sunshine* (John Haldane) standing there with a big grin on his clown face. “Oh let me try it on you!” I said. We were both amazed. So you’ll know why there was all this dusting on the trip.

From Clown Dode: When we clowned at the school for deaf children, I encountered a little girl (age 5) in the yard. She was severely disabled, in a wheelchair, a brace around her chest, and her arms limp on the armrests. She wasn’t even uttering a sound or changing her facial expression, and just stared straight ahead.

I slowly approached her and she tensed up, so I backed away. A little girl was standing nearby. I dusted my arm with my feather duster and pointed to the little girl’s arm, and she came over to me to let me dust her arm. We stood in front of the severely disabled girl, so she could see me dust the other little girl.

I slowly approached the disabled girl again and, this time, she did not tense up. I started gently stroking her arm with my feather duster. She looked right at me, but never moved a muscle in her face. I kept smiling and gently dusting her. When I stopped, her little arms popped up off of the arm rests. It was her way of asking me to keep dusting her arms. I must have stayed with her for well over 30 minutes, she never took her eyes off me and I never stopped smiling at her. Whenever I stopped dusting, her little arms popped up. It was very special having this little girl let me get so close.

Some of the most profound moments on the trip came from the children themselves and their reaction to our softness and eagerness to “listen.” By offering our clown selves in play, both children and adults joined in the magic of the moment.

From Lucy Feather Sheffield of Haddonfield, New Jersey:

During a cold snowy winter in New Jersey, I was looking forward to warm sunny weather, clowning with old friends and new ones, seeing some of Mexico. I even hoped to pick up some Spanish. I didn’t study Spanish formally in school, but took a few private lessons before our trip. As it turned out, all of my reasons for going were satisfied except for one – learning Spanish. I had forgotten that one of the joys of clowning for me is its nonverbal aspect.

We visited a theme park with children from CRIT – an institute for children with mobility and mental problems – . Each child was teamed up with a very dedicated teenage volunteer companion who helped the child with their needs and mobility. Everyone wore bright yellow T shirts. I spent some time with one boy who was in a wheelchair. He didn’t speak and had poor control of his arms. He took my rattle with streamers and loved shaking it and pulling on the streamers. He let out squeals of joy.



Feather (Luch Sheffield) makes a feather-like connection

We looked at each other and then he moved his face very close to mine. We looked at each other intently and then did a dance --moving our heads slowly back and forth in rhythm. We did this several times keeping eye contact. It felt hypnotic and amazing to me. It was a powerful experience in nonverbal communication. Finally, when it was time for the clowns to leave, I reached for the rattle. But he held on tight and I knew my rattle with streamers had found a good new home.

From Shobi Dobi: At the theme park outing with CRIT we were all ushered into a concrete amphitheater for a Parrot show. The sun was out and it was incredibly hot. The teenage volunteers wheeled their charges into the shade at the back of the theater Shobi went down the line of wheel chairs with Huggy Bear giving hugs.

One young boy actually loved the touch of the bear's fur so much that he crawled into Huggy Bears arms which were my arms (in the bear's arms). It was a moment in my caring clown life that I will never forget - just being there holding this young boy as he nuzzled the fuzzy bear.



Young handicapped boy snuggles in Huggy Bears arms.

From Sondra Heart Throb Upham — Small Harmonies

I observed my fellow clowns - without the prop of language - clowning in simple, interactive ways. As I watched and learned, I saw that caring clowning at its best is simple: lots of eye contact, smiling, and "clown-brain" play.

In a hospital in Guadalajara, one of our clowns, *Oy Vey*, stood beside a female patient's bed, wordlessly stroking the patient's arm with an end of the feathered boa she was wearing. Think of the soft brush of a feather on your arm in contrast to the prick of a needle. After a bit, *Oy Vey* pulled out one of the feathers and presented it, with a flourish, to the patient-such a simple act, and yet, think of the pleasure to the eye of a bright red feather in the bland, gray and white world of a hospital. The patient put the feather to her lips and blew it lightly up into the air. The clown smiled. The feather drifted down; the patient blew it up again.

When we left the room and were standing outside the hospital, I went up to *Oy Vey* and told her how much I had learned from watching her, how comforting she was to the patient. Beaming, she thanked me and said she had never clowned before. I was amazed that she was just being her brand new clown-self.



Near us, at the entrance to the hospital, another clown, *Rigoletto*, stood in the warm, dry air, holding a tiny umbrella over his head. I watched as several, self-absorbed, worried looking people, hurrying toward the hospital, would catch sight of him, stop and smile. *Rigoletto* returned their smiles. And, at least for a moment, spirits were lifted. I think of these silent exchanges between clown and patient as "small harmonies," the heart of caring clowning.



Laura and John Haldran (*Johnnie Sunshine and Pixie Sprite*) met this parapalegic young man in our hotel. He had been severely injured in an accident. They arrived just in time to sing to him. Another wonderful touching moment!