

The Creation of Payasos con Corazon

By Arne Swensen, Director of The Foundation for Therapeutic Clowning and a Hospital Clown in the Phoenix Arizona area

Payasos con Corazon - Clowns with Heart.

After seeing the healing power of clowns on trips with Patch Adams to Russia and China, Bart Marcy and I concluded that we should try to conduct our own adventure. Patch encourages everyone to spread the message of love and peace and joy wherever we travel. So Bart and I collaborated to forge a plan for a clown trip to Mexico. Mexico is close. Mexico has a lot of poverty. And we think there is a pressing need to bond with our next-door neighbors.

As founder of the Foundation for Therapeutic Clowning, I was interested in the potential value of Ambassador Clown trips as a training vehicle for new and established caring clowns as well as those interested in considering caring clowning.

Bart works as a host aboard cruise ships and often takes cruise participants on side trips when they stop in port. After passing out red noses, he leads them on good will visits to orphanages and hospitals around the world. Bart champions the concept of having tourists spend one day of service in the spirit of generating good will in other countries.

At a party in 2001 hosted by Mr. Jack Pecaut, I discussed the possibility of a Mexican clown trip with Guadalajara businessman, Augusto Rivera and his wife Nadine. They were immediately interested in the project and how they might help.



Cristina Carballo, a Guadalajara hospital volunteer, with Arne Swensen. We made up Cristina as a clown so she could relish the experience of being a caring clown. As you can see she fit right in!



Mariana Garcia and Blasito, two of our Mexican Clown friends.

On a trip to Copper canyon, Mexico, Bart discovered Sue Stillwell, a tour guide, accomplished in Spanish and skilled at leading Mexican tours. This provided the final team component needed to move forward.

Senor Rivera referred the team to Guadalajara hospital volunteer, Cristina Carballo. Cristina immediately saw the value of having clowns visit in a hospital and was eager to work on the project and learn to be a clown. Once she was given the plan, she visited potential institutions and gathered letters of authorization. She ran into some skeptics, but she successfully persevered.

We had hoped to get 15 clowns to make the trip. We wound up with 30 enthusiastic clowns from all over the United States.

One of the objectives of the tour was to meet Mexican Clowns. And that we did! We were embraced by them as brothers and sisters. The Mexican clowns even provided an afternoon of entertainment of their own; performing, demonstrating makeup techniques, and making us feel like honored guests. Plans are underway to bring them to the U.S.

Having our own bus proved a real asset as we traveled between Guadalajara and Puerto Vallarta. Along the way we saw volcanoes and Agave farms give way to the tropical topography of the coastal region. Each clown took the bus microphone and told us about themselves and their experience on the trip. Maureen Mould shared many of her experiences in New York, clowning at ground zero.

In Puerto Vallarta, the clowns earned a rest and had time to play. Outside of Puerto Vallarta, the tour featured the little pueblo of Sayulita. The villagers came out at high noon to greet the clowns that participated at the village square. Also in attendance were artisans and performers from the local area. It was a spirited afternoon.

With this experience in our memory books, I can say for certain that we want to go back. Perhaps the strongest evidence of their graciousness is reflected in a comment made by a nun at the Villa de Los Ninos. As we prepared to depart after our performance and the wonderful reception we received, I told the head sister that I hoped we would be invited back. She leaned her head to one side and with a warm smile and soft voice said to me, "Of course! We will be waiting for you."