

Cruise Ship Delivers the Clowns . . . again

By Bart "Dooley" Marcy

Bart is at it again. It seems he never gets tired of "making clowns," or maybe it's liberating the inner child of those looking for the rich experience of exotic Mexico. Instead of shopping at the local markets for souvenirs on their cruise stops, they start to wear silly clothes, find funny noses, and go into schools, hospitals and orphanages - going where tourists seldom dare to tread. What they get touches their hearts, not only with their own joy, but that of the wonderful spirit of the Mexican people.

Arriving in Mazatlan, Mexico, on November 13th aboard a giant cruise ship, Dooley the clown headed down the gangplank to visit Orfanatorio Mazatlan - a private non-profit orphanage. Christmas merchandise was everywhere as he walked through the cruise ship terminal and out to the waiting transportation.

Joining *Dooley*, on this visit for the Payasos con Corazón (Clowns with Heart) to Mazatlan, were some nurse practitioners attending an educational cruise sponsored by Fitzgerald Health Education Associates, Inc., the world's largest provider of nurse practitioner certification preparation and continuing education.

Marc Comstock, Chief Executive Officer of Fitzgerald Health Education Associates, had never clowned but saw this as an opportunity to try something he had read about. Before leaving the ship he had applied a rubber nose and mustache; thrown on a bucket hat with built-in hair. If the shirt and pants look familiar, they are my second set. Marc Comstock is someone I have known since 1946! It wasn't hard for me to get him to clown for a day.



Nurse Practitioner Michele Dodds, who is associated with Greenfield Family Practice in Ohio, had scurried up a pig nose, found a Charlie Chaplin mustache, and had topped it all off with a tall black hat. Her fellow seminar attendees did not even recognize her as she left the ship for the day.

Licensed Practical Nurse Hope Tolle had read about Patch Adams' clown trips and had always wanted to experience a day as a caring clown. This was her

opportunity. She assembled a clown outfit on short notice and came down the gangway ready to clown at the orphanage, an elementary school, and a private Mazatlan hospital.

We arrived at the elementary school first and it was recess time. The orphanage children and their schoolmates were milling around the school yard and eating mid-morning snacks. Once we were spotted word traveled quickly throughout the schoolyard, and



Bart "Dooley" Marcy and Marc Comstock

before we got through the front gate we were swarmed by several hundred children hollering "payasos!"

George (Jorge) Beu, a retired elementary school teacher from Fairbanks, Alaska, a new resident of Mazatlan and a staunch supporter of the orphanage, had made all of the arrangements. George - better known as Jorge in Mexico - had stocked up at Sam's Club and loaded us up with lollypops. They were a great hit. We tried to have the students form four straight lines so we could distribute the candy, but there was too much excitement.

The kids were "on a roll" and didn't have the patience to form lines. Christal, a sixteen year old orphan who accompanied us for the day, managed to get the children settled down a bit. She made enough room for Hope Tolle to lower the candy container from above her head so she could distribute the lollypops.

After the candy had been distributed the school principal took to the microphone to introduce us from the stage - and the children found our ad-libbed shenanigans hilarious.

Marc Comstock stepped to the front of the stage, accepted the children's applause, bowed, and had his hat - with hair attached - stolen by *Dooley*. Believing Marc did not know he was missing his headgear, and being unaccustomed to seeing a middle aged clown with a bald head, the kids were hysterical. Laughter and excitement filled the courtyard as Marc discovered his hat and hair was missing and *Dooley* stood innocently with them hidden behind his back.

Seemingly unbeknownst to Marc, the hat was returned to his head, our clown troupe had a final curtain call, and we were off to the orphanage as the children waved us goodbye.

The Orfanatorio Mazatlan is housed in a building that was constructed beginning in the early 1900s but not completed until 1926. Treasurer Consuelo Virissimo met us at the front gate and took us on a tour that included a visit to the kitchen, and an introduction to the cook who was making soup.

Most of the orphans were at the school we had just visited, but there was a small number of pre-school children being watched by staff members. Michele and Hope focused in on two severely traumatized children who refused to make eye contact. But once the clowns had inflated a bunch of balloons and bounced them around, the children began to respond. By the end of the visit Hope had one little boy in her arms, who did not want her to leave.

George Beu made sure the clowns would experience lunch at Pancho's in the center of the Gold Zone of Mazatlan. The restaurant has open air tables facing the beach, a strolling Mariachi band, and numerous beach vendors adding to the atmosphere. We had a wonderful, fun-filled lunch and lots of the cruise passengers stopped by to wish us well. Pancho's is now on the list for a future Payasos con Corazón clown trip.

Our final stop on this whirlwind tour of Mazatlan was at the Sharp Hospital. Norma Sanchez, Director of Promotions, welcomed us to what is widely regarded as one of the most modern and well-equipped hospitals in the country outside Mexico City.

It was spotless, and surprisingly quiet. We quickly realized it was quiet because it also had very few patients. Unless someone has the resources and/or insurance to pay for their medical care, showing up at a private Mexican hospital does not make much sense. If you are unable to pay, you will not be admitted.



One patient who obviously had enough money to be admitted was in a private room in the maternity section of the hospital. The baby had been born and the mother and child were doing well - at home. The husband was the patient, and as clowns we were delighted to be able to cheer him up before dashing for the ship and sailing away to the next port.

We all had a wonderful day bringing joy to a few of the one-half million people who live in this principal Pacific coast port for fishing and trade. A future Payasos con Corazón trip and/or cruise will certainly return us to the stops we made during this visit.



Photographs of the Payasos con Corazón 2003 trip to Guadalajara and Puerto Vallarta can be found at:
http://www.laffngiggl.com/Mexico_Gallery/Mexico2003.html