

What Patch Adams Means to America and to the world



Photo by Ali Hadjarian

"Behind his clown-like persona lies a great deal of wisdom, and it often falls to the court jester to speak the truth that those in power need to hear." ~ Bernie Siegel, M.D.

Excerpts from an article [What Patch Adams Means to America](#) by Jan Thatcher Adams

Jan Thatcher Adams, M.D., has traveled with Patch Adams clowning in some of the troubled spots of the world, such as Russia and Bosnia. She retired from active practice after 25 years and is Clinical Professor in the Department of Family Practice and Community Health, University of Minnesota Medical School. (She is Patch's friend and colleague, who just happens to have the same last name)

The Trickster and Fool

In mythology, the Trickster figure, through playing pranks and acting the fool, transforms aspects of the world for the benefit of humankind. Patch, whose personal recipe for health care delivery includes a whopping dose of laughter and goofiness, is a skilled and internationally sought after clown, juggler and rope walker--one who thinks nothing of frolicking in a bathtub filled with oiled noodles. Patch is surely this Trickster for all of us, and, as such, goads us into whatever transformation is needed to be living more fully and in more connection with each other.

But Patch is also clearly The Fool. As those who understand the tarot deck know, this archetype, The Fool, is the most necessary in the whole tarot journey. Without the innocent idiot, the distracted and happy one who steps gaily off the cliff, the journey of transformation cannot even begin. Patch steps off that cliff, over and over again, in very public ways, and with a childish delight that causes us all to understand the transformative possibility inherent in taking the big risks of beginning journeys.

And while Patch would not pretend he has not suffered the same dark times and quagmires we all experience, he does live as a constant expression of relentless joy. Besides, "It's a huge secret,"

he says, "but following a dream is invigorating. If you sink your passion into something, your life will explode into breathtaking vistas." And so, even in the darkest of times, Patch knows there can and must be joy, and that breathtaking vistas always draw a person on down that path lit by relentless joy.

Dedicated to Service

So Patch moves in his unpredictable way, as the Fool and the Trickster, traversing the planet as an Ambassador of the Possible, illustrating and demonstrating the unlimited power of creativity. One of the possibilities he constantly represents is what can happen when individuals and societies and governments dedicate themselves to the idea of Service. There are dozens and dozens of stories of individuals all over the world who, inspired by Patch's message, created something new to provide needed care and service to others.

One of the most remarkable is that of Maria Eliseeva, a Moscow artist mother of four, whose dream was to somehow help orphans. With some input both financially and philosophically from Patch, she began to do just that, and now runs a thriving and paradigm-shifting project that has the attention of all Russia. She teaches the orphans to tap their previously unknown powers of creativity and make spectacular folk art murals of brilliant color and life--and they sell all over the world. In this way, the children understand, usually for the first time, the possibility hidden in their grim lives, and their own enormous self-worth. And she models Service for them, so the ripple effect from Patch moves ever wider in the world.

Through the sale of artwork, Maria's orphans now financially help support another orphanage, which cares for children with cystic fibrosis. These orphaned children, brutalized and devoid of any possessions themselves, are joyfully in service to others. And of course they also clown in hospitals, other orphanages and nursing homes. Covered in HCN Vol.4No.4 and Vol.5No.4 [See www.Mariaschildren.org]

American Health Care

Patch Adams, the movie, jolts the vast American dissatisfaction with their health care delivery system. We have all witnessed the steady deterioration of the physician and patient connection, with the resulting depersonalization and businessification of the healing arts. We are all frustrated by bait-and-switch insurance sales, lack of continuity of care, hard-hearted run-around about coverage in the midst of illness, and an endless assortment of other difficulties.

Patch takes very seriously the solid research and knowing that humor and laughter heals, and he feels the hospital environment must nurture these activities to provide the most efficient healing. He sees no reason why a sick person shouldn't have fun while recovering. What could be more healing than a hospital filled with health care workers who love being there and who live as an expression of laughter and joy?

And so Patch, a very human man and a generous humanitarian, skips and shuffles and farts and belches and sings and poetically recites his way around the planet, sprinkling a generous dose of transformative fairy dust wherever he goes. And in his wake, the huge possibilities of Service and Joy sprout and fly and green the lives of countless individuals everywhere. And the planet smiles.

– Jan Thatcher Adams

Patch's Message to the Medical Profession

from *Friendship as Therapy*, The Doctor-Patient Relationship.
<http://members.fortunecity.com/joergdao/friend.html>

“Medicine, you are blowing it! Transference paranoia and professional distance be damned! For the health of the patient, the staff, and for the health of our profession, patients and staff must strive toward friendship in the deepest sense of the word. Bedside manner has nothing to do with information! It is the unabashed projection of love, humour, empathy, tenderness, and compassion for that patient.

“Please, keep your scientific brilliance, it is an important tool, but it is not the magic inherent in healing; for that, we must look to love and caring. If this science could keep everyone alive, healthy and vibrant forever, it could join the pantheon of subjective therapeutics, but even when it tries to, it fails miserably. Psychotropic medication and death bed heroics are just two glaring examples where science's outcome falls embarrassingly short of its goals.”

Patch reminds us all about our need for community. “Friendship” he say “is a fabulous tool for the doctor.” [and Caring Clown Groups too.]

“There would also be a tremendous positive medicinal effect on the patients and staff if health professionals, in their respective settings, put great effort into eliminating the hierarchical nature of hospital (or clinical) staffs and instead chose to be friends with the whole team. Membership alone does not make team effort. A true group effort is learned by groups being with each other both professionally and recreationally. The hope here is to have a staff like each other so much that simply riding to work, or walking down the hall and saying 'hello' to a co-worker, is a delight. A bubblyness among staff can have dramatic healing effects, so even if a loving, friendly staff is not affected, the patient sure is.”

“ . . . [Living a life of service] is the shortest path to meaning. Meaning is important in people's lives. It's a great attractive force for karma. Good begets good. And, I've been a giant attractive force for friendship. Also, givers get trust quicker than other people. People trust generous people. If we didn't use money as units of such a strong and pulsating force of value, we would be able to see values in our society that were actually much stronger than money. And the value of friendship and just deep human contact grows out of giving. Giving is it's own kind of insurance.

“It's my life to inspire people. I like to see it as a river. I jumped into the river of love and fun and life as a celebration and a concern for the world, the river of hope. Most people went for a swim in the river of hope and then went and dried off. The river's current was too strong or not strong enough. I encourage them to put their trunks on and jump back in. I'm a seducer, I give them paradise and the hope that paradise is possible now. I use theatre and poetry and humour and a project that they can't believe is true but is.”

For more info, see the web site at www.patchadams.org, or write Gesundheit Institute, 6855 Washington Blvd., Arlington, VA 22213, USA Volunteer Coordinator Kathy Blomquist, Gesundheit Institute, HC 64, Box 167, Hillsboro, WV 24946, USA For information on upcoming trip with Patch visit www.patchadams.com