

# Silliness in Jamaica



"When the bus let us all out in front of The Morgue, we all had to have our picture taken. We joked and thought of captions like: *We killed time in Jamaica or They Died Laughing.*" The clowns are top row from left: Ellen *Mama Clown* Dillon, Lucy *Feather* Sheffield, Connie *Nurse Chickie* Coble-Roe, Lise *Lise* Egeberg, Marie *Sun Doc* Dixon Seidel, (Jamaica), Tammy *Tambo* Danforth, Jack *Grinnee* Beals, Karen *Casey* Clapp, Olinda Lusher Worthington, Linda *Clown Dode* Sweig, Front Row from left: Mauren *Oochee* Mould, Larry "Jubles" Davis, Linda "Clown Cheeky" Simon

The group stayed in a private villa in a residential area out of the tourist area between Montague Bay and Eucarya and went to St. Ann's Bay where they clowned at a girls school, hospital and elementary school. This was outside a tiny town called Dunkin. Following are comments from the clowns of Goodwill Clowns Jamaica.

... to **Dare Growth** *The Experience of Jamaica*  
From Lise Egeberg, Copenhagen Denmark

"Jamaica is a country of contradictions. Nature is breathtakingly beautiful, yet there are holes in the road big enough to swallow a Fiat. The food is wonderful, the fruits come straight from the trees, yet many houses look like the tool shed at the summer house. The children are dressed fairly modernly, many have cell phones and yet the girls' home is short of money for essentials as the government doesn't give much money and it is hard to find enough private sponsors (See WGH, Page 19) .

"And still the Jamaicans are a proud people who take pride in performing a good job in spite of low wages. That is, the people who are lucky enough to have a job. They value their families and have close bonds and help each other when needed.

"And in between all this you find the very rich, closed tourist areas, where the houses look like Hollywood villas and everything necessary is within reach: Golf courts, private beaches with their own beach bar and local people to perform the

dirty jobs, and the cruise ships that land at the harbor so the tourists can run to the market and buy the appropriate exotic souvenirs that prove their visit to this island and that they have met local people.

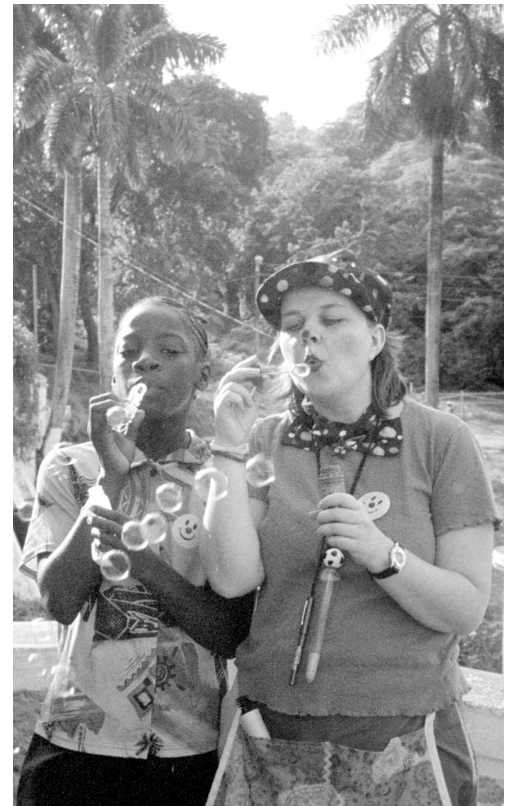
"And this is the place where we were to travel as hospital clowns. It was a very special experience.

"The group consisted of 11 clowns from USA, myself from Denmark and a Jamaican who had only been back for three months after 20 years in Europe.

"All but one had been on similar clown trips to other parts of the world: Siberia, Cuba, China, Mexico, Russia, Israel, and several work as clowns on a regular basis in their home towns. So we were a group of fairly to very experienced caring clowns. But none of us had clowned in Jamaica before. And indeed, it was different.

"Clowns are fairly unknown in Jamaica, and caring/ hospital clowns are not known at all, so many people in the streets thought that we were celebrating a late Halloween. The Jamaicans are very religious people and thus a couple of individuals thought that we were performing the Devil's work and asked us to go away quickly. But most people found hospital clowns to be a great idea and wished us a happy journey.

"We were there for eight days in the beginning of December 2003. It was hot and very humid, so some of the clown's noses simply slid off as the glue dissolved. Eventually several gave up wearing clown noses, but we still had our colorful costumes.



Lise blowing bubbles with Jamaican Boy

## **Clown Challenges** ( . . . Lise Continues)

“As a people, Jamaicans are generally very poor and apparently begging is natural for the children. As the families must pay for a child’s school, the children asked for change “to pay for school.”

“Once when I was blowing soap bubbles several children asked for the whole container. They were not interested in playing. They wanted the bubble container. Playing with balloons was also difficult as the children held tight to their balloons and would not play together. We therefore tried to blow up the balloons first and give one balloon to each child. There was no waiting one’s turn. Everybody pushed up. Many children pulled at my sleeve “Miss, Miss, Miss” to get my attention, some used a smaller child to manipulate themselves into quicker balloon delivery and maybe even took the little child’s balloon. There were a few places where adults lined up in front of the children in order to be the first ones to get a balloon. We simply had to ask the adults to move back and let children come first. This was not a nice experience.

“This difference in culture gave me some clown challenges that I was not at all prepared for and simply didn’t have a clue how to handle. For this, my experience simply wasn’t big enough. At first I went into “clown shock” and lost my courage pure and simple. Then I spent much time talking to and learning from the experienced clowns. That helped me get back into my clown shoes and do my best. And was I clown frustrated! I was, honestly, also offended by this type of behavior I witnessed which was completely contrary to what I have been taught as a Dane. That is until I understood that it only was about cultural differences and not to forget – poverty. Many of the children came from families who couldn’t afford anything extra for Christmas so our visit became these children’s Christmas present. That, I found, put certain things into a thorough perspective and made it absolutely impossible to stay offended about their actions. Besides the children here loved our visit and found it wonderful, fun and exciting to be with all these weird adults with funny noses that came to play.

“A whole different matter that made a big impression was being judged by the color of my skin. In Jamaica white skin to many people equals a tourist (American) who has money and is the opportunity to charge a higher price for the goods. It made me think much about how I/we in Denmark treat various citizens different only based on the color of their skin, and/or religion. It is both sad and embarrassing, but good to discover one’s own narrow-mindedness as it opens up for a widening of the human horizons.

“In 2001 I was in Siberia and that trip actually changed my life. I got addicted to smiling children and happy eyes. I was amazed at how much you can do with soap bubbles and just having a good time. How easy it is to forget just for a little moment that your life may be sad or sick. I found it was a wonderful way to travel and get to know people. I decided in Siberia that I wanted to do more of this. The friendships you make when doing this is so special. Most of us were strangers when we started out, but were friends by the end. It didn’t make any difference if you were a first timer like me or a veteran of many clowning trips.

“I am still very affected by how much I learned as a person on this trip to Jamaica. Seen from a clown technical point of view I maybe failed greatly, but being a hospital clown, my opinion is that it is one’s ability to be human and *to dare growth* which is important, and if that’s the way things are, it was most certainly a success after all.”  
lise.egeberg@get2net.dk

**Lucy “Feather” Sheffield** ( below): “It doesn’t matter who you are, what you do, clowning is such a bond between people. It’s just so joyful and it’s a great way to see how people live and struggle.”



## **The Little Things that Tugged our Hearts** *From Linda Clown Dode Sweig*

“When setting up our visits to the schools, we made it clear that the caring clowns do not perform on a stage or put on a show; we interact with the children.

“When we arrived at the Bamboo Primary and Jr. High School, well over 100 children were running around outside. The principal ushered the children in to a covered seating area, with seats so close together, one couldn’t walk between the rows of children. “Sit still and be quiet. Here are the clowns.” the principal ordered over the microphone. Oh boy! I’ll never forget that. She handed me the microphone, and all the clowns introduced themselves. We sang a few songs, and the clowns split up to get close to as many children as possible. I still had the mike, so I started interviewing the children. “What’s your name? How old are you? What’s your favorite color?” And we would all clap for the child. The children loved their few minutes of “stardom.”

“It was a difficult gig and did not go smoothly by any stretch of the imagination, but I must say that as goofy as that gig turned out to be, the children loved us. I remember as we were leaving, one little boy, near tears, said “Oh no, are you going away?” He tugged at my heart.

“At St. Anne’s Hospital, a young patient was sitting in his wheelchair on a balcony. I was on the ground below. I caught his attention and dramatically blew him a kiss. He caught it, put it on his cheek and blew me a kiss. We blew kisses to one another for a few minutes. I went up to the balcony to meet him and we shook hands. His grip on my hand was tight and I cupped my other hand over his. It was a very warm moment.

“One day, I was pretty tired from the day’s activities when we arrived at High Hope Spa for dinner. The owner of High Hope had delightfully invited children to greet us, and the group clowning with them in the garden. I was just too tired to clown, so I sat on a bench and watched. A little boy, about 6, came over and gazed, wide eyed, in to my face. I said, “I’m a tired old clown and I have to rest” whereupon the little boy cuddled up to me. I asked his name. He just hugged me without answering, so we cuddled on the bench without a word and watched everyone else clown around. What an experience!

### ***Meeting the People on Their Turf*** ( . . . Linda Continues)

“One night, we had dinner in Steertown at the home of a Jamaican. Home was only one room. We washed our hands from a spigot in the ground, the outhouse had no sink. We sat wherever we found a seat; on the porch, on the car, on the ground, and, of course, we clowned with the children who were delighted with their visitors. The lady of the house had invited her friends to help her prepare dinner. She turned out a dinner for 14 (13 clowns and our tour bus driver) from a tiny kitchen. We thoroughly enjoyed the family and mingled with the neighbors. I know the family was paid to provide dinner for us and the meal was delicious. But the hospitality and friendship they offered were priceless.

“Impoverished Aggressiveness was not surprising. Experience has taught me to react to it by eliciting human contact. Often I was asked, "What do you have to give me?" and I would smile and answer "Me" and extend my hand. Frequently, I was met with a momentary look of confusion, then amusement as I kept my clowny smile fixed with hand extended. Most people smiled back and shook my hand warmly. Some, particularly but not exclusively children, wanted a hug. And, of course, a few people were not interested because I had nothing to give them. They were a clear minority. I've clowned in Russia, Siberia, Mexico, Israel, Chicago and New York City and smaller American towns. In my experience, sure there are cultural differences in the way people react and/or express themselves, but we are the same species. All people want warmth, smiles, to play, and human contact. Also, in clowning for many groups of destitute people, I have come to believe that, although people without (even with) things want things, people treasure warmth and human contact more.”

www.lindasweig.com

### ***Doing the Dance Jamaica Way***

*From: Ellen Dillon jedillon@semo.edu*



“I'll never forget the little boy in St. Anne's Hospital. He was very shy, and kind of afraid of us all. I took out a stuffed moose toy I had been saving and showed him how the moose was also overwhelmed by all the activity. Told him the moose needed someone to hold him so he wouldn't be afraid and that he needed a home--did he know anyone? He smiled so big and took the moose--we named it Melvin. The rest of the time we were there, he just lay their smiling saying quietly to him self "Melvin Moose". Very sweet.

“I think that we all grew incredibly from one gig to the next. I know that, as a less experienced clown, I went in expecting the kind of experiences I have had in the past. As I slowly let go my own limitations on the kinds of interactions I wanted to have, I started having a lot more fun with everyone and they with me. "Jamaican dancing" with the kids was a hoot--they were laughing openly at me and I WANTED them to, even though I thought I was pretty good!!!”

### ***Jamaica Will Never Be the Same and Neither Will I*** *From Tammy "Tambow" Danforth*

“Clown Dode and I had a captive audience waiting in the emergency room at the hospital and I had the privilege of blowing bubbles interacting and getting to watch the people chase after them. Clown Dode sang her heart out, she carries a tune in a bucket like I do! One woman in the group had a great time catching bubbles and then juggling my scarves and I think she might have been more entertaining than us clowns but she was having a blast which brought lots of smiles.

“We clowns were definitely so different that we couldn't help but bring smiles and laughter from people we met. I believe this was our purpose in Jamaica: to bring smiles, joy and share our heart. Jamaica will never be the same and neither will I, the biggest change happened in me for I fell in love with the beautiful people, their culture, food and their nation.”



*Linda Worthington dancing in the school yard*

### ***Clowning Your Way Through a Country***

*Linda Worthington*, from Billings, Montana, went to Jamaica on her winter vacation and did some serious clowning around. She made a video for a news commentary on KULR.

"I'd never done any clowning, but I thought, 'Jamaica in the winter, what could be better than that!' So I went along and it turned out to be just a fantastic trip. I'd been in theater and part of a comedy troupe, but this humor is different. In the theater you're in front of an audience. Even though it is improv there is always something planned even if it is just being on a familiar stage. In this type of clowning, I had no idea what to expect. It worked really well one on one in the hospital. We didn't work as a group with prepared skits like you see at the circus. We were noisy with a lot of toys, but it was on an individual level. You made a connection with each person.

*Linda Continues . . . .*

“Clowning your way through a country is a unique experience that allows and forces you to see what life is really like for the people who live there. From the minute we stepped on the plane we were on: in the airport, restaurants, wherever there were people. When we just walked down the street, people immediately broke into smiles and came up to talk to us.

“The Windsor Girls School was the place I learned that clowning doesn't always mean doing sometimes it's just being there that matters. Clowning isn't always easy - not much time to sit on the beach with little umbrella drinks and our one full day off to do just that we were brushed by the skirts of tropical storm Odette bringing more rain in one day than I see in one year in Montana it seemed. So I had time to interview all the clowns. I learned that clowns are a dedicated bunch. Everyone takes time out of work and families and pays their own way. Some get donations for the goodies we hand out, but for the most part the trip is funded by our own cold hard cash, with the payoff being a warm fuzzy feeling. For the people who clown that compensation is worth it's weight it gold.

“Giving of ourselves is really all there is. We were not taking food or clothing like other humanitarian service organizations. We were not there to bring an 'item.' With this you are just giving yourself. I was really hesitant to go at first. It didn't sound like such a big deal. You're not solving hunger, and anything. But once you're there and you see some of the differences it makes. Just brining a smile to someone's face that hasn't smiled in a long time really is important.”



**Mauren Oochee Mould:** “The essence of clowning for me has been being able to bring "miles of smiles" where ever we go and just to be able to make a person laugh without any language at all. You just smile when someone squeaks their nose. It's been awesome to look into people's eyes and sparkle and smile receive that smile back. I think the biggest piece about clowning is to be able to give of yourself and get absolutely nothing in return, but everything back you can possibly imagine. The greatest gift we can give another person is the ability to laugh at themselves and that is what clowning is all about - taking yourself lightly.”