



## Happy Times with Uncle Button and Dr. Balloonie a.k.a, Sam Tee

“On 4th of March 2004, IBC organized a clowning representation for the children in two of the Turkish container camps. IBC Turkey and MERCY Malaysia’s joint action for the children of Bam organized a clowning representation for the children. The name of the activity was "Happy Times with Uncle Button,” under the motto "Laughing Across Borders.”



“The Malaysian clown Uncle Button was welcomed with a very loud happiness and curiosity by both the children and the elders of the two camps. Magician, prestidigitator and a fine specialist in children psychology and "crisis clowning,” Uncle Button had an interactive representation, delighting the audience with his surprises taken out from "the magic box.” He did "ballooning" - making different shapes from balloons and he handed it over to the children. During his interactive performance, he sent to the children of Bam encouragement messages for recovery, strength, self esteem, for passing over the difficult moments caused by the earthquake and solidarity of all the other children in the world. Also, IBC and Mercy Malaysia distributed, after the "clown program," balloons and cakes for all the children present at the event.

“This activity held in the two named camps, took place in front of the containers to be used by IBC as Children's Social Centers, so the event represented, at the same time, an informal introduction of the children to the location they will activate in the very near future.

### **From Sam Tee “Uncle Button” and “Dr. Balloonie”**

“It was indeed a unique and different experience for Iskandar and one in Iran. I managed to clown in a few camps outside our zone --Bafiah Camp and Turkish camp. It was an experience for the Iranian people as they have never

seen a full attire clown. Curiosity and excitement arouse the occupants as they come out to greet us.

“Clowning in an environment where the need for basic necessity is acute can be very challenging. People are desperate to grab whatever they can. Being mobbed was usual, that's why two body guards were assigned to us -- for safety and to secure our belongings.

“Ana the Turkish coordinator was excellent in getting the show going. Flyers handed out a day earlier made the children and adults anticipate the event. We put up a banner written in Farsi, but none of us could read it.

“Upon our arrival, people of all ages came to watch a 'Dhalaghat' – clown in Farsi – in action. IT'S SHOW TIME! But getting the people to understand my jokes was tricky. My language had to be simple and understood by my interpreter too. Overall they enjoyed most of the gags I presented.

I also found out a simple action can draw laughter and fire too. Sensitivity to the culture and lifestyle is vital to ensure the acceptance of the locals. "NO THUMB UP!" I was warned, for it was equivalent to putting up the middle finger in the west. Oops! I DID IT AGAIN!



As a clown, I can enjoy the freedom and grace that transcend cultural barriers, stretching clowning character to its limit and venturing to the unknown which is very rewarding at times.



“Little Ameer (pictured above with *Dr. Balloonie*)” lost all his siblings and both parents in that earthquake, leaving him alone with an aunt. He may not understand it right now or even grieve for them yet, but will soon grow old enough to feel the loss.

He is a bubbly kid, smiles as he greets us, running to and fro to get the other nephews, nieces and friends to see my act and balloons. As we leave the family and neighborhood, the memory of five year old Ameer remains.

The family bond is very strong in Iran, and as I reach out to an old grandma with balloons or even a small gift, the others will come and intercept and receive it on her behalf.



It's an exception in this picture below. I hold a grandma's hand and presented her with a flower balloon bracelet. I've spent 20 minutes with the family members and they begin to feel comfortable with me. Being what I am at that time, allows me to have the grace to be part of the family for a while, enjoying the closeness that only the immediate family members can have access to. It's a rewarding experience.



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