

# Puttin' the Fun Back into Your Caring Clown Group

*A Commentary by Mona O'Lovely*

*Mona O'Lovely (Shobi's hospital partner) pictured to the right on Shobi's Hospital Cart is a frequent contributor to this newsletter. She comes from Folkmanis Puppets. (But don't tell her that!).*

When people speak of their Guardian Angels, I always giggle a little to myself, as I get so much inner help. I call mine "The Committee" i.e., a committee of guardian angels. It may sound a little schizophrenic, but considering my different clown and puppet personalities, I feel it is very descriptive. I'm not calling it a belief system, but there is good evidence that there are some forces working to help us with our hospital clowning and with this newsletter. You've heard me say "I have to listen to what I say as very often I have never heard (or thought) it before. Some people call this inspiration, but I have learned to give these visitors a name. "The Writer" wakes me up in the middle of the night with ideas, projects, inspiration, and answers. I have to be careful I don't just "think" them and not write them down, because The Writer doesn't linger. However, The Writer can take different forms, for example talking through Mona. Mona loves to talk and I never know what she is going to say. She has a real "Gift for Gab"

*– Shobi Dobi and "The Committee"*



*From Mona O'Lovely:*

Ya knows I go with Shobi when she travels across the USA and sometimes I get to go with her to Europe, but I don't like being stuffed in a suitcase in the belly of a plane. I really don't care much for flying ever since the security guard at the Waco Texas Airport put his big hand up my skirt when he was searching my suitcase. Did he think I had a bomb in my pantaloons? Shobi talked to him before he got his hand bit off. She said "If I were you I'd be careful about puttin' your hand up Mona's skirt. She's liable to bit ya!"

But I lose my thought here. You know Shobi comes into the front seat of our truck and sighs. I'm sittin' there in the passenger seat and I reads her mind and sometimes her heart. She's thinkin' "What is wrong with these clowns?. One minute they are doing wonderful compassionate work in the hospital and the next minute they are bickering over who is going to bring the cupcakes." I sees in her mind that JJ the Clown is tired of doin' all the work and bringin' the cupcakes and PiPi the Clown is angry 'cause JJ doesn't want to bring the cupcakes and SoSo the Clown is upset because she can't control the meeting and everyone is tighter than a wound up golf ball! Well, I just look at the pictures in Shobi's mind and holler out "Point of Laughter," but Shobi don't hear me, 'cause her mind's so busy. So I decided to keep my mouth shut until I can write you'all about it. So forgive me for being so blunt, but I am Mona O'Lovely and I'm 999 years old. Yap, the human race has been bickering at least that long. It think they bickered about all the little stuff in my grandmas day too.

Shobi ain't immune to this either, sometimes she gets this little knot in her heart. I talk in her ear and she hears me, 'cause the knot in her heart hurts and she don't like it. I call the knot "competition" Ya know ya think with all the education that human beings get you'd know by now that competition can make yas ego close down your heart. I sees on the TV way people are hurtin' each other and politicians are calling each other names. Oh, my! it gets real bad, but I'm here to keep the clowns straight, not the whole blasted world. If clowns can't laugh with each other then things had gotta look pretty bad.

It's just plain and simple, we clowns gotta have compassion for each other! But I understand you human beings too well 'cause I'm your shadow or maybe I'm your conscience! Ya just gotta have something to remind you all the time. You forget who you really are and start with the knee jerk reactions. Your egos just get in the way and ba-boom off you go thinkin' you're right and everyone else is wrong. Shobi calls that "black and white thinking." I calls it just stupid. Why is it that everyone has to be right and wrong? Especially clowns. You deals with the grays all the time. So if you're bloomin' egos are hangin' out there to get smacked all the time so ya angry or pout and get hurt!

Shobi pouts when she gets smacked. She frustrates me. I tells her that is stupid too. Just know what's goin' on inside - in your heart and everything will be all right. That usually straightens her out. Sometimes she just needs to look at me and I zap her my telepathic charm. But sometimes she has to give me a squeeze. She calls it a hug. So, I zap her anyways. Hey, you know we got a whole conspiracy here goin' – me and my sisters around the world. Oops, there I go off the road again. Ya should be glad I'm not drivin'!

Soooo, I was thinkin' maybe I should write some procedures for runnin' meetin's. You know like Parliamentary Rules of Procedures only these are Clownimentary Procedures or better yet Clownelementary Procedures. It is elementary you know - the heart stuff.

## ***Point of Order .... Point of Laughter***

So here goes. The first thing I thought of was "Point of Order." When ever anyone gets off track (like I do all the time) and starts wandering away from our compassionate hearts someone - anyone can call out "Point of Laughter" (which is our whole point right?) and everyone has to laugh for 15 seconds. You'd be surprised how having a good belly laugh together can help you solve problems and mend ya ways.. Ya don't need nothin'

to laugh about, laughter is so contagious ya just have ta start to laugh. . . and laugh . . . and laugh and pretty soon everyone is laughin' and if someone ain't laughin' go over and do a "group infection" until that person is bending over in belly laugh to.

Then go about your meetin' and see how much more cooperative everyone is. It ain't the whole bush of berries, but it sure is the first couple of sweet morsels!

Shobi taught this to a teenager once who in the middle of a heated discussion with her mom said: "Shobi says we should laugh for 15 seconds" They did and then they couldn't remember what they was arguing about. You human beings are a funny lot ya are.

Breathing is another break you might consider. Well, you would think or maybe everyone takes this for granted, but an old friend of mine, Friz Perls, the father of Gestalt Therapy, said "Fear is excitement without the breath." So what is the natural reaction of you human beings when you get scared or excited? Ya hold your breath! Now that just don't make any sense at all. So, taking a deep breath would calm you down. Shobi calls this "Taking a big gulp of the Universe." I say just take a "group breath together." Just close your eyes to the world and breathe!

Well this sounds like Shobi ought to take over - I could continue and write the whole newsletter and say absolutely nothin'.

See ya again soon.

Love ya, *Mona*

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### ***Energizing Meetings and Building Community From Shobi***

I spent a couple of hours on the Internet searching for group meetings, reaching consensus, agreements, etc. The best information I found was a couple of manuals in PDF file format available on the internet from the Universal Church. If you are a group leader you might consider reading through these two sources:

<http://www.tjd.uua.org/de/board%20manual%20ch10.doc> and  
<http://www.tjd.uua.org/EffectiveGroupFacilitation.PDF>.

It will make you aware of the dynamic of running a meeting. Of course these good folks have never had the privilege of running a meeting full of cats, I mean clowns. (From "*organizing clowns is like herding cats.*") We all have our own ways, egos, and certainly particular ways, but clowns oh my! However, and that is a big however, caring clowns are a special breed of people. We all know that. Which is why we need to laugh, breathe, and dance instead of making goals, concretizing and logical-izing.

Here are some suggestions to energize your meetings.

***Group Belly Laugh.*** Start your meeting with a belly laugh. Limit it to 15 seconds. That's all it takes. Have a time keeper who ends the laughter with clapping their hands (two long and 3 short claps). Let the group know that this means it is time to join clapping and to stop laughing. This is the best way I have found to stop large groups of noisy clowns having a good time. Once the rhythm clapping is established the leader raises and shakes their hands and everyone knows it's time to stop and listen. This is quite easy to establish. I learned it from the World Laughter Clubs.

***Resonating together:*** The things that Mona spoke of: laughing as a group, breathing as a group, and clapping as a group are all things that groups and communities did with each other that caused the group to resonate together. Ever notice how a group of people who are good friends can sing "Happy Birthday" on the same key, but your office party cannot? They don't resonate together. That is one of the reasons church groups sing hymns together and yogis chant together and people drum together, play music together – like a kazoo band!

***Dancing in the Dark:*** You might start your groups with simply dancing in the dark. Everyone loves to dance or would love to know how to dance. But this is not to learn how to dance, but just enjoy being in the moment with yourself and with your clown self. Tell people to keep their focus only to themselves without involving others and to be for the moment silent. Ask them to resist the temptation to wise-crack or make jokes. Maybe turn the light down or almost off. Turn on the music and have people dance in their own little worlds without any physical contact, without competition, without fear of being watched and judged. Five minutes will do it. Have different people bring in different music each meeting.

***Milling and Scything:*** When a group of people "mill around," they move about with no particular purpose or in no fixed direction. "Scything" is to move very quickly through a group of people or things. Acting classes call this milling and scything. This is the way I learned it from Arina Isaacson and she learned it from her improv teacher. It is a good way to mix up people in a workshop, so why not a meeting? Get some really up beat music. Not the obvious circus or calliope music, but maybe some Scott Joplin or Moog Music.

At first have people just be with themselves, moving fast and slow: through fields of bees, tubs of molasses, floating on clouds, etc. Call out "Change Directions" often or people have a habit of walking in a big circle (interesting few people will "dance" in a circle. Hmmm!) Have them "Freeze" often and look at each other, explore something. After a few times you can add voice like sending them on a journey to talk to an inanimate object like a chair or a glass. There are infinite possibilities. Then add interaction with each other. "Freeze - See someone, go over to them and . . . (you have a partner for a mirror exercise for example - having each person mirror the other. Remember to go slowly so that everyone is capable of performing a task. Some people can no longer balance on one foot, skip or hop.) Let the directions be general enough that everyone can play. Even if it is "Freeze, look at someone, go over to them and clown cry," "Go over to them and greet them with great surprise, etc., etc."

Have a new group leader each meeting. Change off in some random way, so even the shy can lead.

This way it is part of a community not a group led by one person. It is community that needs to be built to develop trust in the group. Shy folks very often have so much to offer. They just need a little coaxing. Sometime the most shy person will come up with the most original ideas and even the most simple ideas that are wonderful and fun. **Participation involves people. Involved people collaborate.**

### **Establishing Trust in your Caring Clown Community:**

Trust is probably the most difficult thing to establish and keep ongoing, not just for improv, but for reaching consensus and for getting everyone involved. People often think they don't have anything to offer or they would not be good enough. Others don't want to be bothered - It's just not their "thing." There are clowns who are so insecure that they will come late to a meeting if they know they will start with improv. Then there are the "stars" who show off. And the "really funny" clowns. Competition raises its ugly head. **All the above Dance and Milling is done in the spirit of play not competition or performance.** The idea is to have fun together, not to perform. That can come later when trust is established.

Individuals need to have compassion for each other – the experienced with the inexperienced, the old with the young and vice versa. This is building a community of caring clowns!

**People who play together stay together!** The groups that I know that stay together, play together. They have pot lucks, they get together and make things for the hospital, they do projects, have parties, and enjoy each others' company. They are a clown community.

### Theater Games

After you group is comfortable it is time to do theater games. Try to do them in a spirit of play and not performance. Don't have any stars or performers. Do a lot of the improv in twos or threes. Then have some show the group, when the group has established some trust.

The Best Play book of games I've seen is on the Web free. [http://www.mariaschildren.org/english/artscamp/playbook\\_pt1.html](http://www.mariaschildren.org/english/artscamp/playbook_pt1.html) You can download the whole book, but you might want to read about Maria's Children in Russia while you are there, and make a small donation. The book is in English. I learned the games at the source - on the river boat north of Moscow Russia with the orphans. (Which, by the way, you can go on for your next vacation! Check out the website)

Here is my favorite Theater Game. I use it at almost every workshop as it is so much fun. The players keep moving, it's short and everyone gets to try a couple of times. Make sure your leader for the day keeps yelling out "push it a little further" into the absurd and ridiculous. This is a direct copy that is why it refers to participants as "kids." Put together by Julian Davies, Director of Russian Summer Arts Camps.

Hitchhiker: 1 taxi driver, 2 passengers at a time...

- Taxi driver picks up people who all have a specific character, character trait, physical abnormality or tick, emotion etc.
- When this person enters the taxi, the driver and any other passenger catches what they have, and they improvise until
- Driver finds a reason to leave, and the 2 passengers move over, one becomes the driver, and they pick up a new passenger.

This activity was great for providing them with a basic improv vocabulary and structural understanding of improvised scenes.

Emotional bus: 5-6 kids, 1 adult as bus driver (1 bus driver assistant...good role for shy kids who won't go by themselves.)

- The premise of this game is similar to hitchhiker. As the bus driver picks up passengers, everyone on the bus "catches" the emotion/characterization/physical idiosyncrasy the passenger has.
- The differences in this activity is that it focuses on one group of kids, no one has to find a reason to leave, and there can be an added challenge of not catching what the new passenger has till they pass by where you are sitting on the bus. This way you can see a wave of emotion/etc. affect each passenger.

## Sitting Around with a Bunch of Friends on a Dreary Afternoon

Do we have these kind of afternoons anymore? Sitting around a table with a bunch of friends sipping tea? Before the electronic revolution, people used to make things together - cookies, quilts, barns. Now we watch a good movie together, or play a game and/or eat - Something to keep our hands busy, busy, busy. Play as we spoke of earlier, is a way of making a group cohesive. How about sitting around a table and making things for your caring clown group as give-aways? It can be like decorating cookies, watch the kids get involved too. Here are a couple of ideas.

### Bear Fever

From Margaret Crooks of Kelowna, BC Canada

"I started a project making little Hug Me Bears for ambulance attendants. It's a simple project when you consider the intricate patterns the woman sew for the quilts. I donated a gift of 50 bears to the Caring Clowns from our guild and we all hope they will provide comfort to the children treated by the ambulance people or visited by the clowns in the hospital. You might say I have "bear fever" with our guild handing in 170 bears since January 2004. Hug Me Bear patterns can be found on the website .

### Hug Me Teddy Bears

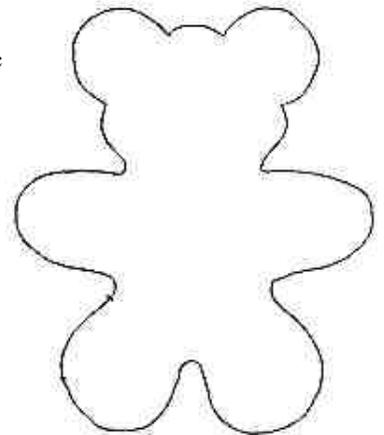
from: [http://www.sewing.org/enthusiast/html/ec\\_teddy.html](http://www.sewing.org/enthusiast/html/ec_teddy.html)

Materials:

- Two pieces of fabric approximately 8" x 10"
- Use knit or woven fabric
- Batting

Instructions

- Enlarge the pattern
- Trace pattern on fabric
- Add seam allowance
- Leave small opening
- Trim near stitching
- Clip curves and turn
- Stuff lightly with cotton
- Stitch opening



"We do not recommend adding a ribbon because this may be hazardous for young children. However, with embroidery floss you might want to add features and embroider a bow

"These little teddy bears are given to Emergency Medical Services. They like to keep the teddy bears on the ambulances to give to children after an accident. Check with your local ambulance service." – Margaret Crooks

If your clown group can't make them, maybe the volunteers at the hospital would like to make them. They do for the Comedy Connection in Clearwater Florida the last time I checked. Or it could be a great project for some senior residences, giving people some way to give back to their community. I remember my mom had a group called the BTO (Big Time Operators) A bunch of senior ladies who would get together weekly, just talk, drink tea and make things for the children's hospitals.

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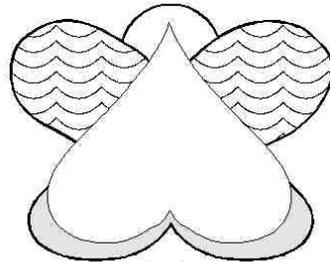
## An Angel to Watch over You

Why not do the same thing with an angel? Everyone in the hospital could use a guardian angel. Here is a pattern. Just enlarge it at the copy store and follow the instructions for the bears. You'll have to do some work for the eyes. But get out all the craft materials, invite the kids next door and have a party.

The angel to the right is made from a series of hearts cut out of old greeting cards and pasted together, with a string on the top. This is from "The Everything But Serious Group" at Kettering Medical Center in Ohio. On the heart back (the upside down heart they have typed

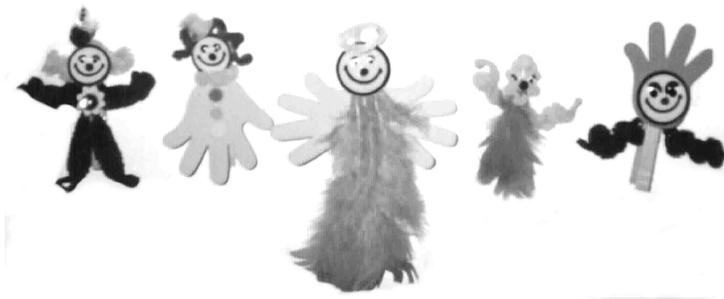


Front



back

Laughter  
is a melody,  
A concert from the heart,  
A tickling by the Angels  
Creative, living art,  
Laughter heals and comforts  
Sometimes gentle, sometimes  
bold. Laughter is a healing dance,  
Performed within the soul  
- Serene West



### ***Like Decorating Cookies . . . . . without having to bake them or eat them***

My favorite is sitting around, even by myself on a dreary day making silly little creatures. I have a big bucket of different shaped pre-cut foam board shapes (available at any craft store or Wal-Mart. It is important to use some sort of glue made especially for this foam board. Don't forget to get little red pom-poms for the noses. You can use fabric paint available in squirt bottles for easy face drawing. I added on feathers, cleaner hair. I then glued the creatures (with the same glue) to a spring type clothes pin. It is sort of like decorating cookies without having to bake them or eat them! Everybody loves them, staff, kids, parents, patients. Don't forget to carry them in "Cheer" boxes (empty of soap of course).