

The Clowns of Operation Red Nose

Following are The Clowns of Operation Red Nose - all 12 of them. Some sent me a story or comments. Those will indicate that they are written by that clown. The comments on the other clowns are written by Bia. I really wanted you to meet this talented group of clowns. Thanks Bia!



Beatriz Quintella aka *Dra. da Graça* (Dr. of Grace/Fun) Bia is from Brazil. Her doctor clown speciality is misbehaving.

A Little Girl, a Mid-Size Clown and a Big Hug by Beatriz Quintella

This summer vacation I had the great thrill to go clowning as a guest in the Brazilian hospital clown program, "Doutores da Alegria". I have been working as a "doctor clown" in Lisbon for a long time and I feel very at home in the hospitals where our program is established, but going to clown in a completely different environment was of course a big challenge.

Well, it turned out I had a ball! The clown doctors in Brazil are excellent performers and outstanding people, and were very generous and attentive with me. (It makes me so proud to be part of this amazing tribe.) I worked for two weeks in São Paulo and Rio as the third element in duos, and I got to bring hilarious and loving memories back with me to Portugal.

I won't forget though my very first day in São Paulo and how *Dra. da Graça* my doctor character using exactly my very

human fear of being in this completely strange environment developed, together with the other two clowns, a wonderful routine.

As the two doctors, who were very well known in the hospital, started to introduce me to the people we were meeting: kids, mothers, staff, everyone, I would greet them all as good old friends and say things like: Uau! I can't believe you are here! It IS you! You haven't changed a bit !!! All the time pretending to be closely acquainted to virtually everyone in the building. Of course nobody recognized me, but everybody got the joke, and soon little kids were whispering their names to me so that my friends would think I really met them before, and I was sharing these wonderful childhood reminiscences with a 92 year old lady (and I'm telling you that girl use to misbehave when we were together in kindergarten!).

My partners were baffled ! How could that be? She knows everyone!

But one little moment struck deep in my heart and I shall cherish it forever. At some point, I spotted this little girl on the far end of a long corridor. She was six or seven and was wearing a pretty red coat. I looked at my friends and said: "Uau! look who is here! I'm sooo glad to see her!" Than I kneeled down and spread my arms open. Of course, I was just pretending once again... but what I didn't expect was the little girl's reaction, letting go of her mother's hand and running all the way down the corridor into my arms. Her hug felt so real. And at that moment the three of us just knew that although the little girl had never seen me before, we were indeed great friends. For me this is the magic of true clowning. It is delightful. It is unexpected. It's a little girl, a mid-size clown and a big hug... It's simply meant to be.

Mark Mekelburg aka *Dr. P.P.P. Pipoca*, (Dr.P.P.P Popcorn) is an American. His doctor clown speciality is goofy magic

[I asked Mark, "How is it an American comes to be a Clown Doctor in Portugal with a wife from Angola." This was his reply.]

It all started with a few magic tricks at a birthday party for a friend of a friend. and 2 years later I find myself working at something I never imagined myself doing - a clown. I had a friend who returned from Portugal as a missionary. He invited me to

go back with him and teach at an international Christian school in Portugal. Three months later, I am there for eight months. I discover a ministry called Youth for Christ using drama, music, dance and, can you believe it, even some clowning to share God's love with young people. A vision is born to return to Portugal and work with them full time. I mean, it's no longer like God is sending me back, but I am asking Him to let me come back! And with that, before I know it, friends are already opening up doors to do some professional clowning work on the side.

It was there that I met my wife, Amélia Eunice de Jesus Simões dos Santos. She fled from Angola in 1975 with her family as a refugee, having lost everything in the process. I would love to tell a few of the stories of our experiences of mixing languages, cultures and faith in a way that only God could do. God has blessed us with two wonderful children, Ola Ruth (now 6½) and Lucas Lee (now 2½). They are Afro-Luso-Americanos! On the side, the Lord led us to begin to work as "tent-makers," a missionary term which means we would work some kind of regular job to help support our ministry. Soooo, I find myself already doing what we really enjoyed -- clowning!

In this same year, I met Beatriz Quintella, a wonderfully funny and energetic clown from Brazil at a company Christmas party where we both entertained. We traded



Mark Mekelburg aka *Dr. P.P.P. Pipoca*

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contacts, began exchanging jobs filling in for each other for some birthday parties and collaborating on a few shows together. In 2001, Bia invited me to join her and another friend of hers, Barbara Ramos Dias, in a project doing hospital clowning as "Clown Doctors."



Barbara Ramos Dias aka **Dr. Kika Larica**, (*Dr. Kika Larica*) is Portuguese. Her doctor clown speciality is storytelling and fantasy.

Dr. Kika Larica is actually a fairy lost in this silly clown world. Still, while trying to find her way back to fairy land she has made excellent friends with our children in hospitals. In real life Barbara comes from story land but has been working as doctor clown for three years now and is one of the founders of the program. She is also responsible for all our relations with hospitals. Within the program she also manages the big crises and ego fights we eventually have. (Meaning she is in charge of human relations.)

Ana Teresa Costa Figueiredo (Ana Pui) aka "**Chôtorá Ninonete**" which means an ambulance siren. Ana Pui (as she is known is a native Portuguese). Her doctor clown speciality is Hugging and Kissing.

Healing an Old Dream by Anna Pui

When I was a little girl I always listened to my grandmother say that what we need is good health. At that time for me it was just an old saying for old ladies. Today I feel that it's an almost absolute truth. Mental and physical health is what makes us accept life and death.

"Chôtorá Ninonete"



During my childhood I had a nightmare where I was in this hospital in an enormous corridor where I kept calling for my mother, and although the nurses kept saying she would come soon, she never appeared. Later on I found out that I really lived this experience. I was three years old and at that time parents could not stay with their children the whole time. No mother and not even clowns!

Now I visit the children as a Dr. Clown in this exact hospital where the services remained identical. It was the light and colour of the yellow walls that caused me an overwhelming "déjà vu" when I came back 27 years later in a completely different role. But I believe the children that we visit today will, 27 years from now, have a memory of the hospital more sweet and happy than mine. Maybe some will even come back as Hospital clowns.

I could tell long and short stories from this year and a half that I have worked in hospitals – magical moments, of fatigue, of tenderness, laughter, complicity, solidarity. We are creatures so great and so small before Creation. The presence of the Dr. Clown is like a river that keeps running and running.

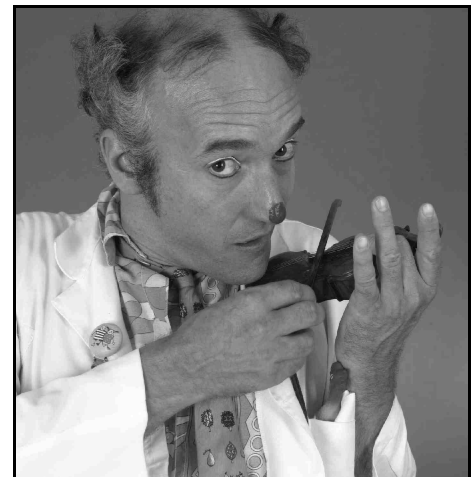
Andreas Piper aka **Dr. Felix Férias** (*Dr. Happy Vacation*) His doctor clown speciality is Tropical Diseases and Belly Bottoms.

Andreas is German but has been in Portugal forever... well not forever... but at least long enough to be married for twelve years and have two kids. He is an excellent improviser and a very dedicated artist.



Andreas Piper aka **Dr. Felix Férias**

Dr. Felix looks very stern and very vulnerable at the same time which turns out to be an irresistibly funny mixture. His character name means happy vacation and is a tribute to German doctors who according to Andreas are always on lovely paid-for vacations.



Harry Rothermel AKA **Dr. Batota**, (*Dr. Cheater*) His doctor clown speciality is Ear, Throat, and Nose Buggers.

Harry is the other German clown! Actually he is the original German clown... and anyone who thinks Germans have no sense of humour have not yet met our Dr. Batota. Watching this huge man, with this very clown like hairdo walk in a ward with the eternal look he has done something terribly wrong is a memorable event. He is lovely with kids, who instantly connect with his unique charm. In real life Harry and Andreas are brothers in law. They both married these lovely sisters from Mozambique and Harry will be a father

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again soon. (Everybody here is Operação is very happy that we'll soon all have a new clown baby to play with)



Pedro Fabiao aka *Doutor Neira*, (*Dr. Faucet*) is Portuguese. His doctor clown speciality is plumbing.

Love, sadness and joy giving birth to a new emotion in people's faces, like some kind of alchemy.

By Pedro Fabião – "Doutor Neira"

To work as a clown in a hospital means living many amazing and moving situations each month, all of them touching us in a special way. To elect one from the rest makes no sense. It's like when one of your kids asks you: "Papa, who do you love the most, me or my sister?" You don't answer and just hug your child and make him feel loved. So I'll choose something objectively different and base my choice only on that difference. In "Operação Nariz Vermelho", our ultimate focus goes to the child. However, I'll tell you a story in which I was called to be with an adult.

On that day I was working with Dr. Bambu and we were kind of lost in the Sta. Maria Hospital. It was my first time there, Dr. Bambu's second. No problem, we always seem lost in a hospital, even when we know exactly where we are and where to go. It was then when a woman's voice called us from the other end of the corridor. This lady already knew Dr. Bambu from the previous week. He had given her a red nose for her forty-something years old son, Antonio,

who had been hospitalized for a long time. Today was Antonio's birthday and he was leaving the hospital for good. He had a terminal disease and was going home to die. It was a delicate situation. I don't know how, but I get more confident in those situations. Antonio's mother, along the way to the floor where he was (Sta. Maria is HUGE), told us, always smiling, how unlucky her life has been, with many relatives with serious problems that depended only on her. But she was strong, she said, and was the only one there for everybody. It was not a complaint.

When we arrived there, Antonio had nurses and family around and was in a wheel chair at the corridor, waiting to be taken home. It was his goodbye to the hospital and everyone there. It was not a light atmosphere. But Antonio had an enormous sense of humour, he was the clown there, trying to make people forget what was happening, even if he could barely move and was speaking inarticulately. What we needed to do in that moment was to brighten the faces and make things look magical. I don't remember very well what we actually did... Dr. Bambu is a specialist in "bad magic". I had learned some tricks some weeks before, which made them pretty bad, too. But that was the fun of it. Antonio, laughing played along: "Alright, that was bad... Do you have something worse?" Everybody was laughing and crying at the same time.

Love, sadness and joy giving birth to a new emotion in people's faces, like some kind of alchemy. We all said goodbye singing the birthday song. It was a celebration of life and death. And we offered him a red nose.

João Paulo Reis aka *Dr. Bambu*, (*Dr. Bamboo*) is Portuguese. His doctor clown speciality is bad magic

Ramones (the nickname for João Paulo) is one of those people who was simply destined for clowning. It's completely impossible to imagine him doing anything else... he is a mixture of Buster Keaton and Jerry Lewis with dashes of Chaplin poetry. And although he never makes jokes he is simply the most hilarious doctor clown we have ever met.

He is single, but on the market, so be careful all you doctors and nurses cause our *Dr. Bamboo* can be quite irresistible. (Actually after being drilled during our training

João Paulo Reis aka *Dr. Bambu*



program to go to the head nurse and ask what children he should visit he insists on going to the children and asking what nurses he should visit!!!)



Juantxo Berasategui aka *Dr. Melo Dias*, (*Dr. Mellody*) is Spanish. His doctor clown speciality - Feeling Lost.

You won't believe it, but Juantxo is really a Doctor... no, we mean REALLY A DOCTOR! Actually he is a 5th year medical stud, who came from Spain in an exchange program to study at the University of Coimbra. He had also worked in the Spanish clown doctor program *Payasospital*. So, of course, he was one of the strongest candidates in our last audition... a clown with doctor experience or else a doctor with clown experience. When we asked him why he had chosen both paths he answered he loves medicine but also has this incredible urge to bump into doors... it figures!

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Ana Banana aka **Enf. Gira Sol**, (*Nurse Sun Flower*) is Spanish. Her doctor clown speciality is Photosynthesis and Chlorophyll treatments.

Loose as a Goose

By Ana Banana aka Joanne Ruth –

We, the Portuguese group of hospital clowns, "Operação Nariz Vermelho", had a wonderful visit from Shobi Dobi who gave us a one-day workshop. This really inspired me, so on my last visit to the hospital, before the summer break, I decided to do a Shobi!

We usually work in pairs, but on that day there were three of us in the hospital and I decided to go solo. I was free and loose as a goose in the hospital. As I knew the other two clowns would keep to the usual rounds visiting all the wards, I decided to call on who ever really wanted me for as long as they liked. It was a whole different world and I had a lot of adventures, but one touched me deeply.

As I was walking down a corridor a mother called me: "Come see my boy!" Well, off I went and like two school girls we skipped down the corridor. I knew that it would take a lot of clown spirit to do this, for I was in a cancer hospital and the week before this boy looked very ill, and I remember then being glad I had my partner with me. Today he looked slightly better, and I decided to tell him I was going on holiday now, because I had won a trip to the North Pole and that I was taking this basket of shells to decorate the beaches there for I have heard that the beaches there had none. I didn't know if he could still see or hear me, but nevertheless I kept showing him all the beautiful shells I had. I held one up to his ear, you know, the kind you can hear sounds from the sea.

Before I left I said to his mother that I would love to give him one. I got the shock of my life when this little hand, that I thought had no strength to move, shot out and grabbed the "shell you could hear the sea with" out of my hand. He held it to his ear immediately and there was no way he was letting it go. Of course I went to get the nurse making sure it was O.K. for him to keep it. She reassured me that it was fine and as I left his room I stopped for a moment rejoicing in his joy, and feeling myself filled with the warmth of gratification through the memory of the lovely moment we shared.



Fernando Mota aka **Dr. Molokoto** is Portuguese. His doctor clown speciality is music. **Dr. Molokoto** is a very talented musician who can create songs and sounds from almost everything. He uses a lot of traditional and ethnic instruments and plays the most unusual Portuguese guitar, which he had custom made for hospital clowning.

He has a very specific costume that makes him look like an old Arab story teller from the Sufi tradition. Watching him make Fado Duets with the janitor is quite an unforgettable experience!



Carlos Moreira aka **Dr. Kiko Satisfação**, (*Dr. KiKo Nice to Meet You*) is Brazilian. His doctor clown speciality is Meeting People

Weird sounds

by *Dr. Kiko Satisfação*

One day before entering a room at the Cancer Hospital in Lisbon, my friend *Dr. Da Graça* told me that she would like to introduce me to a very special patient: a 9 year old boy that after losing his sight due to a tumor became very unpredictable about his humor state. We entered the room playing hide and seek and calling his name (interesting game choice to play with a blind kid), "Where is Tiago? Have you seen him? He must be hiding somewhere!" And all the time he kept hiding behind his father covering both eyes with his hands. I approached him very slowly until I established contact, first with his father, and later with him. When I introduced myself I let him touch my nose and told him how I was dressed. Each time he touched my nose I made a different sound, the same happened with his nose and his father's. During that game we established a communication code. Gradually the sounds became transformed into "gas sounds". We stayed about 10 minutes, creating many different sounds and laughing a lot. The joy of my young friend invaded the room, and his blindness at that time was not important.