

# Hospital Clown Newsletter

A Publication for Clowns In Community and World Service

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Shobi took a Baby Clown Workshop with John Turner on his farm on Manitoulin Island - that's in Lake Huron, Ontario, Canada. It was a 16-day intensive of precognitive creative exploration - and Shobi will never be the same. The Baby Clown experience is the creation of the visionary teacher/director: Richard Pochinko (see Page 6)

How does all this relate to Hospital clowning and to the caring clown? It was about honesty and connection, love and magic. John kept repeating "love and magic, love and magic." Those of you who have taken workshops with me know I'm always talking about love and magic. And you've experienced the 40 + character masks I use to pull the magic out of the pedestrian. Well, at the clown farm we painted, danced, growled, laughed, screamed, talked gibberish - and made masks.

I was worried about taking the workshop, as I thought I would not be able to access the innocence of my clown. All three areas of our work: clown, mask and painting, I've done professionally for years. But actually I found it very easy. Especially as John was so open to questions. He also never criticized us, only encouraged us. In the later days of the workshop when we did "turns" (short skits) he only made suggestions. Interesting that all the Native American Shamans I've studied with all did the same kind of teaching. For me it was like reaching back into my life and pulling out my baby clown. Now how many of us can have that experience?

But how do I tell you about the process? I can explain what we did, but not in detail. When I got home and tried to explain it to my friends, it took an hour. I look back and wonder how we did so much in 16 days. So I will tell you briefly what we did, but the process was, I'm sure, different for everyone. But here goes.

After physical warm ups and theater games, we *physicalized* the color of the spectrum into our bodies and spirits. It involved being talked through the process of becoming each color: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. After each color we made a painting of the color. We then moved on to the mask making. This includes looking into your inner directions. Native American Indians revered the six directions. North, South, East, West, Sky (above) and Earth (below).

After we were "talked" through taking in and physicalizing each direction, we worked with clay with our eyes closed. (The Mask "Above Above" was done out in the middle of one of the farm fields under the stars!) Talk about magic!

We then papier machéd the clay, and painted the masks. But not just painted the mask. We went through all our colors and asked the mask what colors it wanted. More magic!

As you can tell, this workshop was not for the weak of spirit or heart. And we did all this living in tents in the fields and cooking our own food on camp stoves. Mostly magic and a few mosquitoes!

## *From Shobi Dobi, Editor*

Lying in my tent staring up at the fourth mask I've made this week The Fourth Direction - West. I feel like I'm suspended in a globe of creative images -- ancient creatures, elves, fairies, shamans, witches, spirits of every kind – all wiggly creative thoughts that swim around in my mind in colors and costumed in emotions. The thoughts fly in and fly out with ease.

Who are you, *West*? A wind outside whips my tent, as I float in and out of sleep with the mask hanging in a net over my head. Images float in my mind - one stays. I am a boulder on top of a mountain. It is very cold and still. Nothing moves except the wind blowing against my hard rock surface. I am alone, very alone. It begins to snow - light little beautiful flakes of crystal water. They dance around me and land on my hard surface. They cover me completely. I am not alone. There are thousands of the little ones I love them. I delight in them. I am young and free and happy. All around me there is innocent play and dancing and joy.

But slowly the snow flakes begin to melt. Their juice runs off my surface and again I am a lone, cold, stone. The morning sun begins a glow over my tent There is a message there. I go into the barn to *physicalize* it – express it with the love and magic of the Clown.



*Masks hanging to dry in the Clown Barn*

## ***Wearing the Mask***

After each mask and while working on the other masks, we went through a process of wearing the mask, finding its voice. The description on the cover pretty much tells that process. Some did that process in the barn. Shobi had to take the masks to her tent and let the unconscious seep in.

*Physicalizing* the mask was something to behold. In the mask character we ravaged through bags of costumes and let the mask pick out the clothes. Most of us looked like creatures from other worlds (indeed our imaginary worlds) – far, far from anything we in the US or Europe would call a clown. Maybe the Hopi Kachinas would recognize us right away! But let me tell you, with no critical mind or drill sergeant telling you what to do, the sky was the limit. What fun!! What fun and what incredible magic! And are you beginning to understand the self-honesty part? We were exploring our own inner worlds.

Once the mask had its colors and costume, we were “talked” through a process of finding our environment - the emotional environment which gave off a flight of imagination. We went through experience and innocence in each mask, finding out where we lived and who we loved. We went into childhood and adulthood. We floated through seas of images following and letting go of impulses until something faintly settled in our minds - becoming a rock, a child, a chief, a warrior, a priest, a gnarled old tree. Shobi tended to be non-humanoid at first. Out of this process came a “turn.” We put together a little script for each mask. We were also told to let go of the script when performing, if the impulse was there.

Again nothing was ever wrong unless you went longer than two minutes and John had a stop watch! There were rules and guidelines up on the wall (See page 5). This process of “turns” was where the imagination became externalized. All through the workshop, flashes of ideas and images came up. We created basic skits that would have taken months in other workshops. In this process there were infinite places to go to find material. In my workshops at Clown Camp in LaCrosse, Wisconsin, I kept saying “You are your own best source of material - inside you!” This was about being honest. Finding your source, not reading a script or performing a role as a clown, but being a clown!

So how did all this fantasy and magic become a clown? That was in the “turn” process. AND with the incredible teaching skill and coaching of John Turner!

On page one I described my mask’s process of being a boulder on top of a mountain. How does this become clown? I go into the barn and begin to *physicalize* it - walk through the feelings of innocence and experience. I am cold. I have an old pillow case that I had

picked up as part of my costume. It barely covers me. I am shivering. I am contracted, I am shy, but then how do I show snow?

We were told not to use mime. Wow! No mime, but read on. So if I can't use mime how do I show snow? I go into town and buy some confetti. In my "turn" after establishing myself as the clown boulder alone and freezing, I pull out a little purse hanging around my neck and throw confetti up into the air and react to it with the delight of a child. I play with it, taste it. Ok, sounds ridiculous. Yes, I am a clown, and I can do that.

## ***I was having fun and so was the audience.***

I hope you can picture Shobi playing with the confetti. I loved the joke and so did the audience. It was really fun. And that was the point. I was having fun and so was the audience. I then went back into *Mask 3 West Experience* to “frozen and alone.” Yes, poignant, pathetic, sweet, real, profound and honest!

## ***No Mine?***

John restricted us from using mime in Baby Clown largely as a teaching technique. Richard Pochinko did this also. And Shobi learned from this technique. If I had just decided to mime snow, I would have never discovered that ridiculous place. For me miming would have been the familiar route to take. By not being allowed to mime, I had to go somewhere else. The snow confetti was a clown's reality - a clown's spoof - and it is totally believable that I, as a clown can do this. I am being dishonest, but I am not pretending to be anything else. As John says, "Clowns are honest about the fact that they are lying!"

It's like doing clown magic. We all know and the audience knows that magic is a trick - that is its given in the 21st century in most places on the planet (except in remote areas of India - I speak from experience). A great magician will astound the audience; we clowns make them laugh at us. We screw up the trick or get the audience to do it. We are always the butt of the joke.

So if we mime, it presents a different "reality" to the audience. John explained further:

"Mime and non-mime are presenting two conflicting realities at the same time. On some level this confuses or disengages or distracts an audience. For example, an actor drinking mimed fluid from a real coffee mug is a double reality. The mug is real, but the hot fluid is not. We notice there's no fluid. At this point the audience, however minimally, is distracted by a technical reality."

A clown beginning to drink "something" from a mug, might stop and share with the audience that there is nothing in the mug and then go on drinking it. A clown might even "use it" by doing a clown fake mime (ridiculously exaggerated) gagging on nothing and then go on drinking it. It is sharing the joke with the audience.

It would also probably involve switching into another mask. Hmm. For me, being aware of mime makes me open up to other possibilities rather than taking a familiar path. It is a learned clown habit for me to mime. In the Baby Clown workshop, not using mime makes me "clown think" and find more, more, more . . . and open up to new clown antics.

So what does this have to do with hospital clowning? When we are vulnerable and share our feelings with patients, we make a connection to them. I'd better give you another example of a "turn," so you'll get the idea.

And because that is not the end of the process!

### ***The Image/Environment of the Mask***

"Above Above" was of a child on an ocean, delighted with everything she is finding. Then she gets hit by a big wave. There is a message here. We developed messages for every "turn" which helps to develop the "script." The message was simply: "Watch out for the big waves of life." The *innocence* of this mask, finding things on the beach, was easy - that is so much a part of Shobi before. But how do I show a big wave without miming it? So I asked John. He said "a bucket of water." So I had a tin can with a wire handle (I couldn't find an unused bucket) and some rocks on the floor to examine in innocence and a couple of inches of water in the bucket.

I then convinced someone in the audience to throw the water on me, and got hit by the wave and could react to it dripping ever so slightly. Are you getting it? It was fun. Getting hit by the wave from a bucket was clowning. It was ridiculous, and what a clown would do. And it involved the audience. What is happening here is a way of allowing the inside to create the clown.

### **Safety of the Audience**

There were other things to consider in this "turn." Was the audience safe? Had I used a full bucket of water, maybe not. I could also have thrown the water on myself. In another "turn" I used a plastic lid for a mirror. I could have used a real mirror, but believing that lid was a mirror was being a clown. It's clown thinking.

Another example: One of the other students in the workshop did a "turn" where he was a bird and got shot. He yelled "bang," pulled a red tie out his pocket (the blood) and fell on the floor in classic dead clown (on his back with his feet up in the air. Would it have been more fun (funny) to mime being shot? It could be great mime, this was great clowning.

I remember we took a solo walk through the farm property. One of the best moments I had was getting thirsty and then going through all my masks drinking as they would drink. I believe Mask 5 put the water in her eye.

There was a lot more to the process as we progressed through the directions of the six masks. We were to use other mask feelings and later gestures mixed in. So for example when I went to explore the beach as a child, my mask one "experienced terror" would suddenly scream at what I found, but then switch back immediately to the innocence of the child with a surprised look at the audience. All this is done not really concretely scripted, but there is just so much to access besides just sweet little Shobi. In the next column is the list of rules posted on the barn wall that John gave permission to reprint.

### **Things to Remember (Clown Rules)**

*Afer a 100 hours of workshop, we were only beginning to understand these "rules"*

Get yourself off! (And take us with you)

Rule of three

Be honest

Have fun

More, more, more

Clown Logic

Take us into your world

and bring us back with a new awareness

Make contact (with audience)

Present yourself

Up and out

Ride the wave

*Physicalize*

Be zany

Listen to us (audience)

Listen to yourself

Impulse six

Surprise us

Surprise yourself

Follow the impulse

Drop the script - you can always go back to it

Know when to leave

Keep the audience safe

Keep the conversation going

Breathe

Go for the unknown

Play with rhythm

Trust

Believe

Break All The Rules!

### **Things that you may not know about from the list:**

*The Rule of Three:* This is one of the great mysteries of the universe. There are probably a thousand ways that the *Rule of Three* works and twice that many ways to describe it. Here is one way: Do a specific action only three times. First the audience sees it, then they understand it, then they appreciate it. What we do know is that usually more than three times usually becomes redundant.

*Impulse six:* We worked with degrees of "emotion" - one being the lowest, six being all out there. I mean ALL OUT THERE. Getting yourself off.

*Up and out:* Looking up to the audience, not over their heads or at the floor, but making contact and including the audience - like having a running dialogue or awareness of them. Shobi in *Mask One - North* would recognize the audience with a growl and then go

back into innocence Done very quickly this is very funny. But it is honest, and connected both inside and out.

### ***By the way, what ever happened to Sweet Little Shobi?***



Shobi and John “mugging”

Oh, Sweet Shobi is still there, but there are all sorts of dimensions that got exposed. There are now more places to play and explore! The picture above is of John and I “mugging.” We clowns tend to “mug” (facial expressions) for the camera and get into habits of doing the same expressions over and over. We took this photo as an example of this habit. Mugging is a mask that is a pasted on, an expression unconnected with our emotions. This kind of dishonesty was discouraged in our workshop.

By the way, the photo of me on top of Page 4 was done by a friend (Carla Winters) who kept saying to me “don’t mug, give me the real Shobi.” What a difference. I think it’s in the eyes. Hmmm!

We as clowns still live in a big world of people walking around with dishonest responses to everything. It is a lot of work to live with an awareness of the now. Our adult minds are so used to being in the future and the past and not in the present. Can we be honest with our audience or our environment unless we are really aware of it?

Imagine sitting back in your mind and watching the world like one big TV set. Just letting it play. It is not about judging, but about observing: silent awareness - the wide angle observer. As Kristnamurti said “. . . look with eyes that are full of affection - not with condemnation, not with judgement, but with care” It is in the daily life that the clown thrives - in our own follies, falls and surprises. How fortunate we are to practice an art that demands that we live in the present moment. There is magic in those wonder-filled moments. As caring clowns working in the hospital and health care facilities, we are even more aware of the need to be aware of everything - without judgment, but with care . . . and love and magic.

Consider that walking through a nursing home or hospital is like walking through life wearing our clown SOUL. We react out of that clown soul, not out of a scripted routine. This is what brings the magic into the hospital. We connect into parts of us that are really silly, really ridiculous and sometimes really stupid, innocent, scared, frightened etc. You all know the response when you have a child that is frightened of you and you fall right into getting really scared of a child’s pet teddy bear. “Will it bite me?” The connection is fabulous as you go to the child’s space and level.

Another example of being honest: I remember the time I walked into a hospital room of a man dying of skin cancer. The room had a terrible odor and I gagged. I tried to get back into “Shobi” but still gagged. I was so embarrassed. That is because I wasn’t being real. I had no place to go spontaneously except to sweet Shobi. With the experience of my masks, I might have gone to one of my other faces (masks) and become a bag lady looking around for the garbage that smelled so badly. And both the patient and I could have had a laugh. It’s a risk, but it would have been better than being dishonest and helpless. He might have just told me to “get out.” Then I would have reacted to that with another mask (and probably wept pathetically).

Another example was visiting a young girl who just had a leg amputated. “Where did it go?” asked Shobi, looking under the bed. This is an honest response from Shobi’s innocent six year old side. The girl got to tell me what happened. If I had just ignored it, like everyone else, it would have been dishonest and there would have been no connection. And as we all know, in hospital clowning it is the heart-to-heart connection we are aiming for, not the applause or the audience approval.

### ***The Clown Nose Is the Seventh Mask***

As I said, the process didn’t end with the sixth mask. We had to be born into the *Seventh Mask* and were then given our clown noses! It was very interesting for me that during the birthing of my clown the ultimate clown came out as Shobi Dobi. Which actually surprised me. However, in 16 days I experienced parts of Shobi that I never knew nor would have even imagined I could play with.

The clown nose represents the heart connection. It is the hat that is our connection with the sacred - the Universe. We had to always wear a hat or cover our head with something called a “hat.” This is in the Pochinko Method. I often wondered why, as Shobi, I felt naked as a clown without a hat. In China when I loaned Lui, our guide, my hat, I had to put a bow on my head. I don’t mean I put a bow on my head. I HAD to put a bow on my head.

What Baby Clown Workshop gave me was a whole world for Shobi to live in. I didn’t have to live in just sweet 6-year-old Shobi in a flower garden. I could be 6-year-old Shobi as an old soul picking through garbage. In my processing of a mask (2- *South*) I was an old snarled lonely tree that picked with curiosity at everything that landed on her - her only companions. She played with everything. The part that makes all this really interesting and funny is going from one mask to another - surprising myself and going yet to another mask. It was like putting the process on the outside of the clown. It is unrefined emotion that gets exposed. It is honest, honest and honest. Baby Clown is just the finding of those worlds inside - an infinite place.

I don’t know how all this will play out in my teaching and workshops. I can’t tell because I never use a script for teaching either. Teaching is a fluid process. When I trust the Universe and listen to my “student audience,” we create something together. I learn from them and they learn from me. It no longer retains a teacher student relationship, but is more like - I take you on a journey to a place I’ve loved - a guide who has traveled the area a few steps before you. I go there so I can take you there, too. What magic! What magic! And it is all based on love - the real force of the Universe. It is true that our clown cars are fueled by love and our exhaust is Joy, and now our road is paved with magic.