

Caring Clowning – a Daily Activity

Johnny Sunshine and Pixie Sprite John and Laura Haldane of Mesa, Arizona

We don't just clown in greasepaint and costume. We take our caring clowning on vacation and to work. "Patch Adams taught us to bring love and fun to people in a silly costume as often as we can."

One way we do this is by wearing bright clothes and striped socks when we travel. Recently, we took a family vacation with eight other members of Laura's family to the Pacific Northwest. Each day on the trip, we wore brightly colored socks and bright clothing. Each day, we encountered numerous opportunities to bring a little love and fun to complete strangers.

One example was at the airport. Security is tight these days and moods are very serious. Certainly greasepaint faces and costumes that detract from our nation's safety would be inappropriate. But bright colors and striped socks are just enough. That and a few bubbles.

While waiting in a long line to check in and have our luggage tagged, we saw the frowns and heard the complaining from people unhappy with a 40 minute wait. Out came the bubbles. We used "touchable" bubbles that last a long time. The air in the airport lobby circulates strongly and soon bubbles were being carried aloft, up and down, swirling throughout the open spaces and among the people.

After blowing a few hundred bubbles, the children were squealing with delight, the adults were smiling and pointing, and the mood of the people in line had been transformed. Several people approached the clowns in line and thus came the opportunities to talk and connect and spread a message of love.

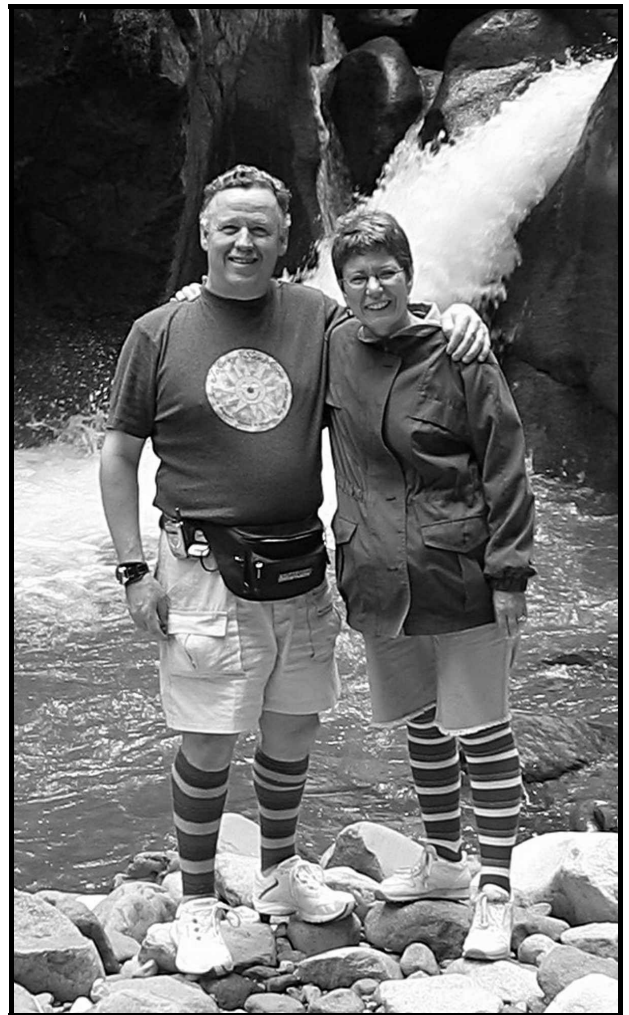
Other opportunities arose on a day-long boat trip to the San Juan Islands off the coast of Seattle, on a half-day boat trip to the Tillicum Village, and while walking around Seattle. Each time, the clown stockings attracted attention, started conversations that might not otherwise have occurred, and enabled the caring clowning that each of us enjoys and practices.

Hiking near Mt. St. Helens and again at Mt. Rainier also brought opportunities. Sometimes bubbles would draw attention; sometimes a quick little magic trick like the disappearing hanky would provide the opportunity; and sometimes just a silly walk combined with bright clothes was all it took.

So wearing bright clothes and clown stockings while on vacation will afford you unknown opportunities to make valuable connections. Try it sometime!

But it doesn't have to be a vacation trip, either. This week Pixie and I wore the socks and fun clothes to CostCo while we were shopping. I had a bright red fedora, a yellow shirt, blue cut-offs with a red belt, and, of course, clown socks (red and yellow striped, knee-high). Only a couple of opportunities arose to connect and neither was outstanding, but you never know. Sometimes it will bring a rare and wonderful chance to make a difference in someone's life. Sometimes it just brings a smile. Either way, it is worth it.

Don't forget about work, either. Yes, I work in a "stuffy" office where everyone takes everything way too seriously. For me, that is the perfect opportunity to be the ice-breaker, the smile-bringer, and to be the one to make people breathe once in a while. As a known quantity – I have worked in the same office for over 13 years – the close encounters and meaningful connections with strangers only rarely occur. But "fun and love" can still be brought without deep interpersonal connections.



I will occasionally wear a bright yellow shirt and a red fedora to work; or I may wear a bright red shirt and a yellow fedora! Or I may wear clown socks under my very "straight-laced" business clothing. At the right moments, and given the right opportunities, I may blow bubbles or put on a red foam nose.

There are those who roll their eyes, those who give me poor performance reviews such as "your humor is inappropriate in the workplace," and those who simply tolerate my "unusual" behavior. But for each of those, there are co-workers who smile and say "thank you" for bringing a little fun and love to the workplace.

Caring Clowning belongs in hospitals and Nursing Homes, and Orphanages. But it also belongs everywhere else in the world, too. Try it sometime. Ordinary dress with a little bright twist can go a long ways for both the clown and the recipient of his/her love and care! You may find it refreshing, rewarding, and just fun!

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