

For the Love of Eloise



In memory of Eloise Cole, who died on December 18, 2005.



From Shobi: I first met Eloise Cole on one of my trips across the USA. I had heard about a clown who worked in a mortuary and finally got her phone number from Rich Snowberg. I called to see if I could interview her on the way through Arizona. "Sure," she responded "and why don't you stay the night?" I stayed a week! I just couldn't seem to leave. That is the way Eloise was - inviting, caring - you just didn't want to leave her presence! She kidded me about it for years - Shobi came for a night and stayed for a week.

Back in 2000 the COAI International Convention was held in San Francisco, California. I was on the Steering Committee, so we had a whole day dedicated to Caring Clowns. We had no money and no budget, but I wasn't worried. I got on the phone and in a day had lined up the whole roster with people to give workshops. One of them was Eloise Cole who flew in from Scottsdale, Arizona.

As all the caring clown participants paid their own transportation, the Convention Steering Committee gave us the complementary hotel suite and we all stayed there - on roll out beds and air mattresses. The night before Eloise arrived, Camilla Gryski from Toronto, Corey Thompson from Milwaukee and I were sitting around the dinner table in the suite. Camilla was sharing her experience with the death of one of her young patients at the hospital whom she had clowned with over a long period of time. She didn't feel like coming to the convention at all. "But" she said "then I remembered Mother Grief is coming." That is what Eloise was like, just the thought of her made you feel comforted. She called herself "*Mother Grief*."

The Power of "Wow"

Camilla clowned for years with The Therapeutic Clown Program at Sick Kids Hospital in Toronto. She now has a private practice working with hospice children. She shared and reminded me of something I do to this day.

From Camilla Gryski:

I was thinking about what I learned from Eloise the several times I heard her talk. The first thing that came to mind was her use of the phrase "Wow," or "Oh, wow." I found some notes from her presentation at COAI where she talked about what to say in difficult situations. "Wow" is a very useful phrase and I use it quite a bit in my practice. It can be said in a variety of ways with many different inflections: "Wow" (that's hard); "Wow" (that's amazing); "Wow" (that's great); "Wow" (that's sad)... I always share this insight with my students.

Also, her acronym FEAR: Friendly, Empathetic, Appropriate and Responsive. Her emphasis on simply listening and being present is a good touchstone for anyone in everything we do.

There are several articles by and on Eloise on the HCN website www.hospitalclown.com. These articles are in PDF format and can be downloaded. Please look under "Past Issues." The acronym FEAR is in Vol 5 No1

An article entitled Rainbow's Remedy is in "Past Issues" Vol 4. No1. Eloise created Rainbow the clown to work with grieving children. She also put out a video with the same title. Again the clown goes to the child's level and speaks directly to the heart. And please read "Sharing the Tears as well as the laughter" an article by Shobi which was inspired by my first visit with Eloise -- also in Vol 4 No 1. There are also articles in "Past Issues" by friends of Eloise in this article - Camilla Gryski, Corey Thompson and Allen Klein.

Oh Wow, Eloise! We are going to miss you.

From Corey Thompson

Corey Thompson, former director of the clown program at Children's Hospital of Milwaukee, specializes in clowning with the elder population and Alzheimer patients. She is presently pursuing a Natural Health degree. Articles by Corey on clowning with Alzheimer patients are on the HCN Website

The Funeral Home Clown has *transitioned* to the next phase of her journey. Eloise Cole was a woman who knew pain and grief from personal experience and chose to persevere rather than run from it. Eloise was an everyday counselor for those in pain and regularly found herself engaged in conversation with strangers over their recent loss. Her family came to accept that with Eloise, there was no such thing as a quick stop at the grocery store!

Eloise had a way of wisely stumbling into places many choose to avoid. Well known and loved for her, "Oh wow" in the face of a challenge, Eloise knew how to keep the situation centered on the person rather than placating some nervousness of the visitor.

Eloise instructed scores of professionals and para professionals about being in service with those in pain. "Oh wow--looks like there's a lot going on here," is the magic opening phrase. But the next part of interaction is equally important as those 10 words themselves: The visitor keeps quiet!

The same visual cues can signal either good news or not-such-good news. The cluster of machines may be about the road to recovery or a sign of a dramatically worsening condition. A quiet room may indicate a patient or family has just come to terms with what's happening, or they may be overcome by the trial and drudgery of it all, or they simply may be resting. A noisy room may be a celebration of another birthday, the last birthday party, or a manifestation of cultural expression. "Oh wow" is enough in any case. The person takes it from there and the visitor is compassionate friend/companion.

Eloise was always busy, driven by some force I doubt even she understood. She kept her rhythm to the end, playing Secret Santa in the chemo treatment room, clicking the heels of her Dorothy-red-shoes for strength in adversity, "adopting out" Christmas decorations she didn't have use for anymore, crying at the enormity of the challenge at hand, and going in to work during treatment when others might have put it off a few more days.

Oh wow, Eloise! We're going to miss you. We do already. Thank you for the wisdom you freely shared. Thanks for your incessant and nonjudgmental love. We'll recall your steadiness in the quiet after the "Oh wow" which allows us to hear the beating of our own heart. The mysterious force of healing and the memory of your distinctive smile will bring us again to the place of shared humanity. Thanks, Eloise!

Wishing you peace, Eloise, in that space beyond, Korey

Eloise was a Present to us all,

From Richard Snowberg (Director of Clown Camp)

Eloise was a unique individual, and clown. She was the first and, I believe, the only compassionate clown that brought her character and skills into mortuaries. She was a paid employee of two different mortuaries, and until last week, was still working in a counseling and care providing capacity at the mortuary. While undergoing chemo treatments, she was secretly sharing Christmas presents with fellow chemo patients—who had no idea the presents were coming from her. Eloise was a present to us all, and although missed greatly, will remain in our hearts.

From Allen Klein, President of AATH (Association for Applied Therapeutic Humor) www.AATH.org

Eloise was a true healer in what is perhaps the most difficult time in people's lives—grief from the loss of a loved one. I have written about humor in times of loss but Eloise got right in the middle of it and healed people with her love, with laughter and with compassion. We will all miss her.

Allen Klein is the author of *The Courage to Laugh: Humor, Hope and Healing in the Face of Death and Dying*

From "Blab-i-gail" Dorothy Miller

Eloise Cole was a rare lady. I remember when I first met her in Tucson at her first Clown Camp. I was there with Richard Snowberg. I alerted Richard to her work and he immediately saw what she could offer to caring clowns. She taught at Clown Camp many times and helped people through the bereavement process. She has a wonderful video of helping through with skits and many ways of easing children and adults through difficult times.

The following poem Eloise wrote about her two sons Mark and Dan Cole who preceded her in death. She shared her incredible journey and love with so many through her bereavement work.

For the love of you . . .

*I learned to be a mom,
When we began, I didn't know much about nurturing
Nor the power of touch and hugs,
Nor limit setting.
Balancing caring for you
With homemaking and working was new.*

For the love of you . . .

*I learned about braces, wheelchairs
And breathing treatments.
I learned to negotiate two wheelchairs
Through a crowded mall.
I found ways to enhance our quality of life.
I taught us to laugh during the tough times
And to find ways to handle the crises.*

For the love of you . . .

*I listened to your wishes
When it was time for you to die.
I watched as the energy of life ebbed away from you.
I wanted to try the medical miracles, but I didn't.
That is not what you wanted.
I did it because of the love of you.*

For the love of you . . .

*I struggled with the pain of separation.
I endured the days, months and years of painful grief.
I struggled with finding meaning in my life.*

For the love of you . . .

*I have learned to laugh again.
I have invested renewed energy
And have found new goals.
Cherished pictures and mementoes dot our home.*

For the love of you . . .

*I have found a way to go on living fully.
Thank you for the gift of teaching me about loving.
Through the pain of grief
And the struggle to renewed life,
There has always been, and always will be,
The gift of loving you.*

By Eloise Cole

Scottsdale, Arizona

published in Bereavement Magazine July/August 1992

From Eloise I learned that when we resist grief we become depressed, but when we embrace grief, it deepens our soul and the view from that place shines with so much love, that it illuminates our very understanding of death, and we learn to live a little deeper in our souls.

Thank you Eloise for your inspiration, love, support, caring, gentleness, wisdom and courage. We will never forget you.

– Shobi