

. . . . on being the flags of love and vessels of wonder ~ from Shobi

As populations expand, borders clash, and the weather lets us know who is really in charge, clowns have been expanding into new venues. We are no longer just the court jesters, but the trickster reappearing in the theater and on street corners all over the world, busking our foolish wisdom. We are in hospitals, nursing homes, disaster areas, war zones, and anywhere the human spirit is in stress. We go to remind our world of the integrity of the human spirit. Whether clowning with an individual or a crowd, we are there to remind the community of the power of love. We are not waving flags of our countries, but flags of love.

Although material possessions move our countries, our wars, our economic lives - it is always love that must be the result. Oil may fuel our vehicles, but it is love that fuels the human heart. Love will always survive, because it is what we all want and yearn for as human beings. It is the power that really runs the generators of life. Everything else is just *gears* we use to function.

In my journey to observe and report the news of clowns in community and world service these last eleven years, I find that I am constantly running alongside a strong current of spirituality. Under all the polarized events and tragedy of our time - so many events motivated by fear and hate - I find myself emerged in clowndom - clowns in service. What a wonder group of people you are. Do you know that? It does not matter what political persuasion, country, religion, or what other surface facade is taking place in our country or community, we as clowns have a connection to this strong current. I'm sure most of you are shaking your heads "yes" right now. Now I ask you how many editors can say that of their readers!

Jo Wilding's book, *Don't Shoot the Clowns* [see next page] took me three months to read. There are so many horrendous stories about the people who are living in this war. Yes, there are touching stories, but as I sat in my big comfortable easy chair, so many feelings were coming up. We are not used to having our noses pushed up against the window exposing the effects of war on a population. There were unfamiliar feelings of guilt, fear, and helplessness.

The enormity of the world hunger crisis, global warming, war and famine is flying around this little planet of ours on the Internet faster than sound. Is it no wonder we feel helpless? Never before in the history of this planet have human beings been exposed to so much information about current events. Is it asking too much of the human heart to see, and therefore experience all this tragedy day in and day out on our TV screens? But is the alternative to stick our heads in the sand and stuff all this somewhere in our souls? Or join one extreme or the other - one polarized opinion or the other - and become part of an angry mob? Can the human heart really take all this in and not have our hearts broken? Can human kind really handle all this tragedy information?

Sometimes I just want to run back to my soft easy chair and escape into the lap of TV-fantasy land. But I persevere, thinking of all wars where the populations have been left out of the killing fields to pursue their lives in everyday comfort.

Mother Teresa said "God will never give me more than I can handle, I just wish he didn't trust me so much." Even a saint can get overwhelmed by it all.

Flying over one ocean or another as I have been doing, I get a perspective of the world. I have noticed that I don't think of myself

as an American: I think of myself as belonging to the world. I see that maybe the pandemic is not the bird flu, but a pandemic of hopelessness, powered by fear of loss - loss of security, love, power and even dignity. When we are overwhelmed by powerlessness, we are hopeless. When there is no hope for joy there is a great anger and *dis-ease* that spreads everywhere - from heart to heart, country to country- regardless of race, religion or status. What is the antidote? Can we survive and thrive with this *dis-ease*?

As a hospital clown I have felt the difference between "professional distance" to suffering and compassionate, open heart listening. As a hospital clown I have had to face my own fear of death and suffering. It has made me live a little deeper in my soul and it has made me a stronger, and more spiritual person. I no longer avoid those grieving like I did before I became a clown. Now I actually move towards them. I have learned to look past the disease of the body and make a deeper connection. But most important is I have learned to listen to that person and not my own fear marching through my mind.

What can we do? I can be aware of the truth, and not avoid the real. I don't have to let it make nests in my psyche, i.e., I don't have to dwell on it. Is that not what we do when we enter ICU or ER? We focus on the human heart, and like magic everything falls into place. It is a matter of where we focus.

Why do we love to watch children play? Because they radiate eagerness, wonder, openness and infinite curiosity. I find that in my life when I clown. It is the clown's ability to bring that innocence of a child into adult play. As a clown I wear my "inner smile" on my face, and by clowning I can become that vessel of wonder and love. Even if it is acting, my soul and body live this experience. So the first person that I am "treating" by my clowning is me. It is how we can walk into the hospital, become a source of rejuvenation to everyone including ourselves! That is why we can go into prisons, hospices, war zones and the streets of Baghdad.

What a wonderful medium in which to glow - a clown. How fortunate we all are to be clowns. I have always said that my *raison d'être* (reason for being) is to glow. But now I know that it is my responsibility as a clown to share this glow wherever I go. That is why I travel and teach everyone to clown, to laugh for no reason at all. Laughing together, crying together, singing together, drumming together heals the heart of the world into one community. I do believe that every laugh, and every giggling bubble of joy adds to that current of love in our human existence. Clowning allows me to be a vessel of joy radiating love. Now I ask you what could be better than that! It brings to mind this sung by Josh Groban; *You Raise Me Up* lyrics by Brendan Graham in part:

There is no life - no life without its hunger;
Each restless heart beats so imperfectly;
But when you come and I am filled with wonder,
Sometimes, I think I glimpse eternity.

You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains;
You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas;
I am strong, when I am on your shoulders;
You raise me up: To more than I can be.

"You" could be God, a loved one, a spiritual teacher, and for me it can also be my clown. Shobi, my clown, raises me up: to more than I can be!

Thank you all for the love and joy you bring to our world!