

... here's "Blab-i-Gail"

a.k.a. Dorothy Miller of Orland Park, Illinois

Blabs, as she is known to her friends, is an inspiration to all of us. Her enthusiasm and passion for caring clowning has endeared her to many a jolly clown heart including mine. Shobi met her at a WCA convention years ago, when the newsletter was not yet started.

I've always felt close somehow to Blabs. Maybe it is that she has the same birthday as my mother (April 2) or she lives in the Chicago area where I grew up. She kept saying "there is always a cup of coffee and a bed waiting for you in my house whenever you drive across country. So on a recent flight back to California from Toronto (returning from the Canadian Association of Therapeutic Clowning Conference) I took her up on it and stopped in Chicago.

Blabs and I had many cups of coffee and she told me story after story of her years in the clown world. Of course, I can't put all of it down on these pages, but here is a sampling. Clown Camp this year (www.uwlax.edu/clowncamp) is honoring Blab-i-Gail in their logo. (See logo on next page)

"In 1976 a clown group was started in Chicago by Richard Spielman who worked for the Chicago Police Department and Charles Spielman who worked for the City of Chicago. They were the only clown teachers in the Chicago area at that time teaching at a local college. So we started meeting once a month. These were mostly educational meetings as there were no instructional clown books we could learn clowning from at that time. They also got clowns to come in and teach us. Mostly we went to hospitals and homes for the disabled in groups of four to six. Because both Charles and Richard worked for the city, we got to do all the parades in the Chicago area too.

"There was Gene Lee *Cousin Otto's* newsletter from Wisconsin. It was just a little newsletter that would offer articles from local clowns and sometimes from the Ringling clowns who would come into town and visited our group. We eventually became the NIAROME Clown Troupe which is still going strong. We had 40-50 clowns that would come every month to a meeting at my house.

"In those early days I was secretary to President Virginia Keehan at Richard J. Daley College, one of the City Colleges of Chicago, who just loved my clowning and asked me to teach a class. I had three years of clowning and I thought 'What am I going to teach them?' I had 16 students and taught them everything I knew the first night. Then I had to work really hard to find things to teach them the rest of the time. I did get a lot of help from other clowns and COAI alleys. I taught clowning at Daley College for 15 years after I retired." Dorothy was recognized as *Senior Citizen of the Year for Chicago*, ten years after she retired.

"We had about 20 alleys in the greater Chicago Area, so we formed the Guild which is now called the **Clown Guide of the Metropolitan Chicago**. (Continued on next page)



Cartoon by Angel Contreras www.clowns4art.com



Blab-i-Gail aka Dorothy Miller and Shobi at Clown Camp

(Continued from previous Page)

“We did go to hospitals, but we were not organized. We would go and make rounds. We just played it by ear. The Education Director from St. James Hospital wanted us to do visitation every week. So we organized and had two different clowns each week. We did it for three years. It was all volunteer work, but they gave us money for travel. This was all part of the Clown Guild with clowns from all over the Chicago area.

“From that time we started to go to conventions, but nothing was ever presented there as to how to do hospital clowning. At that time we just played it by ear.

“I remember once going into the hospital with Tootsie - Phyllis Meister. She was a wonderful clown. She was little and I am sort of tall, so we were a real “Mutt and Jeff” combination. I’ll never forget there was this little boy who was dying of cancer. It was hard to tell his age because he was so thin from his illness, but when we walked in, he laughed and laughed. We just hammed it up. *‘Put you big foot in . . . put you big foot out’* and Tootsie and I got our feet mixed up as to which was the bigger foot. Of course, we had on our big clown shoes. The little boy just laughed and laughed. You should have seen the look of happiness on his father’s face. I’ll never forget that small little boy laughing. And you know that is what makes you do the hospital clowning. Sure there is illness but, oh my, you get so much back.

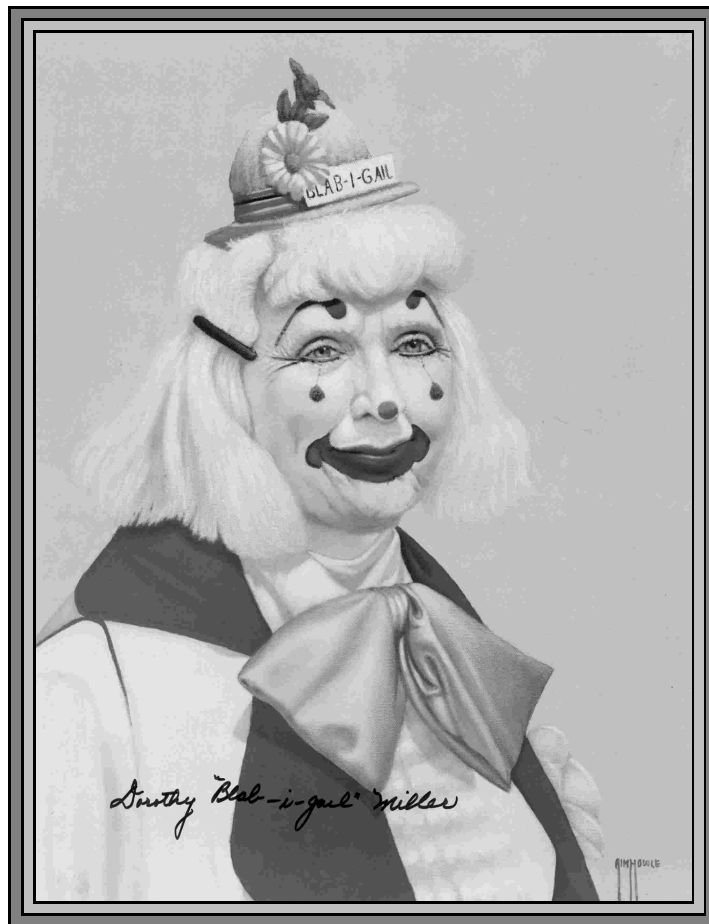
“Tootsie was a marvelous clown who passed on now. She was always tucking dollar bills in your ash tray to pay for gas and things and when we would try to stop her she’d say “Just say ‘Thank you, Tootsie’” So now we say that all the time. When ever someone pays for gas we say **‘Thank you Tootsie.’** *

“I heard that they were having a clown college in LaCrosse - the first Clown Camp, which Rich and Jan Snowberg had begun. I just loved Clown Camp. I went with members of the Guild the first couple of years and then Rich Snowberg asked me to teach clowning. I was on staff at Clown Camp for twenty years until my health failed. I’ve met so many wonderful clowns over the years. And they all manage to stop by my house on the way to and from a convention.”



The list of Blab-I-Gail’s clown honors are many, including “WCA Clown of the Year” 1994. She was one of the sparks behind the establishment of the Bo Dino Educational Scholarship Fund. Cover Clown on Clowning Around the WCA publication, Vol. 25. No 1 February 2007

She was also honored in portrait by Jim Howle in a series of painting of USA Clowns. See reproduction to the right.



Of course no article about Blabs would be complete without mentioning Fritz. As “Inky” Rich Warner and “DeeDe” Janice Rozhan (Chicago clowns) wrote to me: “A story about Blabs would not be complete without the mention of her husband Fritz. This tall handsome man in the cowboy hat attended more conventions than most clowns in the area. He teased Blabs about the many phone calls and people stopping by, but he loved every minute of it. Blabs and Fritz were a real team.” I remember the first WCA Shobi attended. They surprised Blabs by presenting Fritz “in clown.” Fritz passed several years ago, but is remembered fondly by us all.

Blabs always says “Clowns are always welcome to my home for a cup of coffee, a bed for the night.” And if you need it, advice and certainly a story or two. It’s interesting to sit in Blab’s living room amongst all her 32 years of clown memorabilia. You see the pattern of her life and how she became one our clown legends. It is so apparent that all we do is gently (and sometimes not so gently) move towards our more “complete clown” - our life purpose and our service clown. Blab’s birthday is April 2, 1919. Her email address is: blab-i-gail@att.net

*** Thank you Blabs! Thank you Harry! Thank you Chicago!**

On the plane going home to California, Shobi discovered money tucked in her pocket. Blabs emailed me the next day, “Did you get the money I tucked in your pocket for the bus?” So I can say **“Thank you Tootsie”** or is it “Thank you Blabs” and for sure “Thank you Harry!” Harry Tekler was a Chicago *clown supporter* and sponsor of the Hospital Clown Newsletter who passed this year. Shobi was hoping to spend time with him in Chicago this trip, but it didn’t happen. He never wanted any acknowledgment and always said “You are clowning for me” so I can say it here and now - **Thank you, Harry Tekler!**