

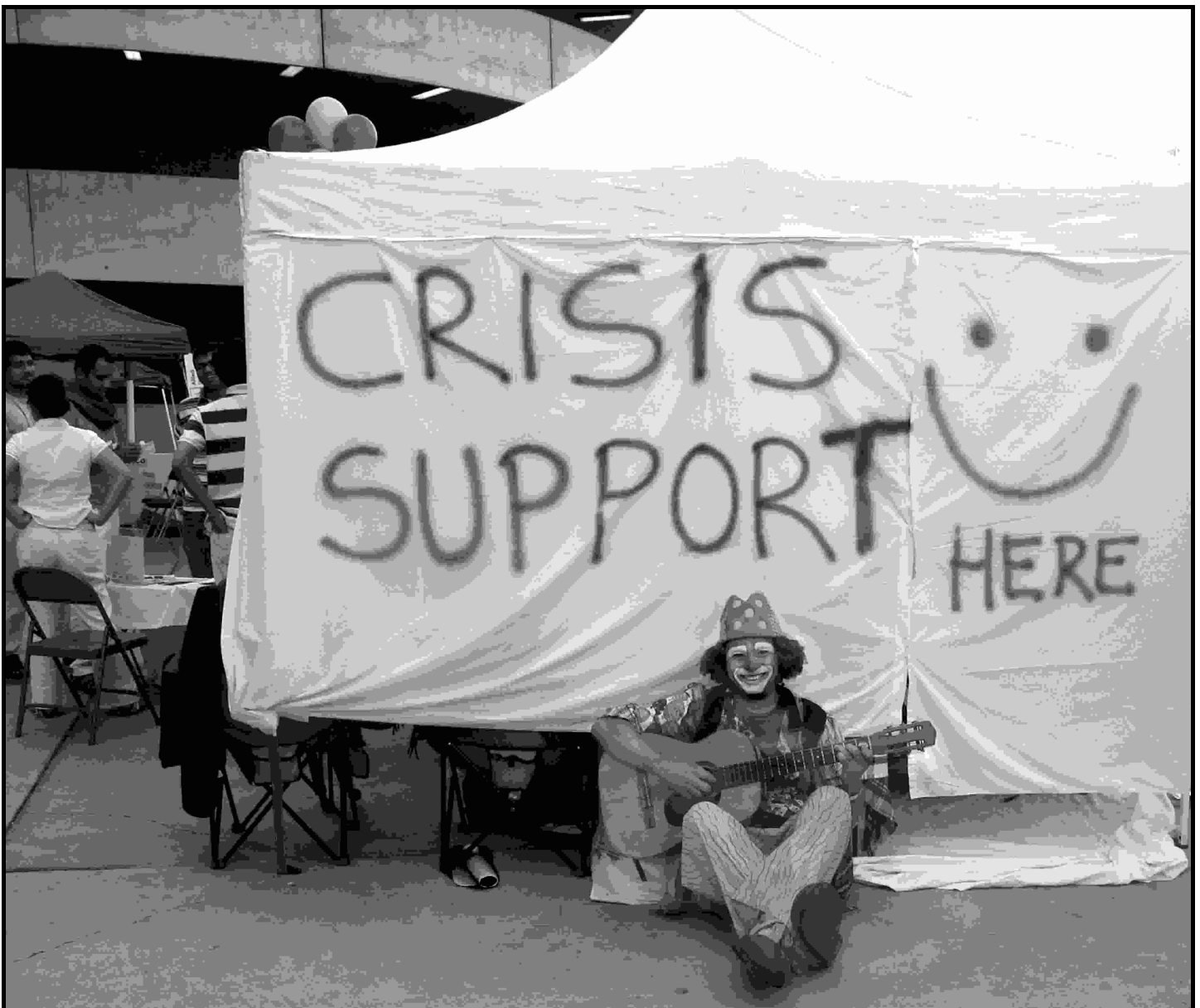
Hospital Clown Newsletter

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Red Nose Relief and Crisis Response

Antolin Rodriguez aka *Solecito* (Little Sun), brings his sunshine and music up and down the shelters in Southern California during the wild fire where a half a million people were evacuated from their homes. Pictured below is *Solecito* at San Diego's Qualcomm Stadium which served as a shelter for 20,000 evacuees. His story and that of other clown responders begin on page 9.



Crisis Response ~ from Shobi

Many US citizens responded to the Katrina tragedy by joining the Red Cross. Clowns formed the Red Nose Response. For the last six months Shobi has been volunteering with the Red Cross. That is Alice (my legal name) joined the Red Cross. Through the orientation process I eventually flowed into Disaster Services and became a DAT (Disaster Alert Team) trainee. In the East Bay (San Francisco Bay) there are about 200 fires a year. DAT teams are called in by the Fire Department to help families and individuals in need.

Part of my intention was to get the local Red Cross familiar with a clown – o establish trust. However, I have been out on many DAT calls, mostly in the late evening and have yet to find it appropriate to clown. Actually it feels good to be just “Alice” – just an anonymous person out there in the middle of the night stepping over fire hoses and helping people. The calls I have been out on, the “clients” are stunned and some cases in shock. This is *First Response* work. More like being at the scene of the accident compared to being at a hospital.

First Response Work

Last week there was a young boy walking in his shorts carrying his shoes, pants, and one of his mother’s high heel shoes – it was almost midnight and 40 degrees F. His home was totally destroyed and the firemen were standing around while all the hot spots were put out (which usually means ripping up floors and throwing out clothes and anything that might ignite.) It would have been easy to clown with the firemen and I did have my red nose and some pocket magic, but Red Cross (“RC”) instructions for DAT is, “You are there for the clients, not the fire or policemen.” I instinctively started to ask the boy questions to get him talking. This is actually part of our Disaster Service “DS” training. It is suggested that when a person is emotional (possibly in this case shock) ask them questions about facts to get them back into the present time. It worked. I sensed that this was just no place for a gag, a trick or a joke. It was 40 degrees outside and he was just standing there in his shorts. So I found out what school he went to, what grade he was in while I got him to put on his pants and shoes. A fireman brought over a blanket and I went over to do more paper work, and he followed me and we talked about his school. Still no time to be a clown.

But, I will always be prepared. You never know when there will be a shelter situation set up due to a multiple dwelling fire. When there is an earthquake (the RC doesn’t say “If”), a mud slide, or flood and a shelter is opened, they will know that Shobi the clown will be available with her clown friends.

So I am just laying ground work, but I will stick to this DAT work. I like it! And I will be able to get notification of shelter operations more quickly than hearing it from the media. So often you hear about a need after it has passed.

Second Response work at a shelter is similar to hospital work. We still need to be very sensitive to people;s feelings, and privacy. I always proceed with caution, so if need be I can “back off” (in character of course as everything goes better “in character.”) You can find information about *Second Response* from the Red Nose Response at www.RedNoseReponse.org

The Call Went Out and the Clowns Responded

Red Nose Response: The Southern California Fires 2007

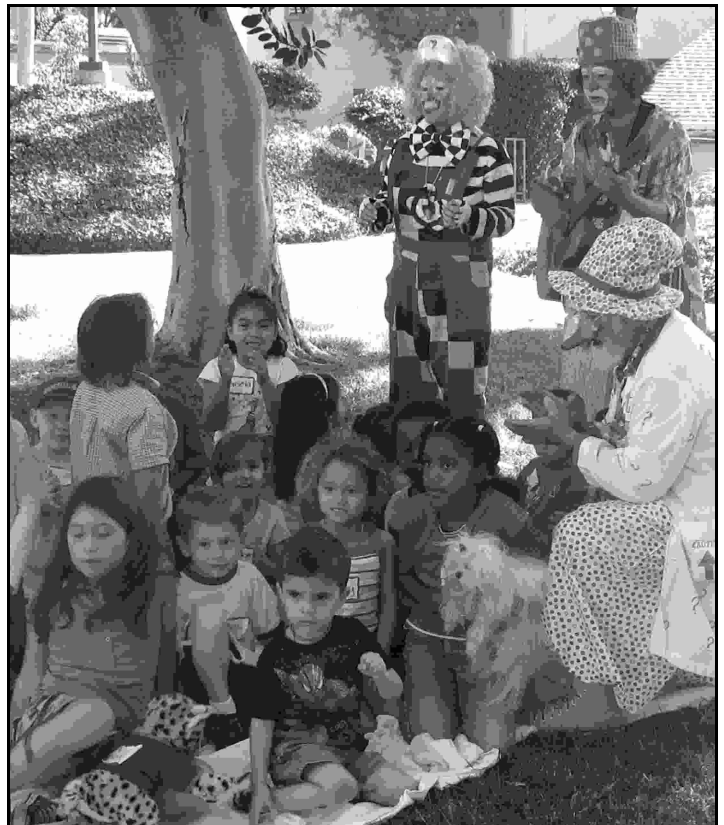
The October 2007 California wildfires (SOCAL Fires) were a series of wildfires that began burning across Southern California on October 20. A total of 23 fires burned from October 20 to November 9, 2007 burning more than 500,000 acres from Santa Barbara County to the U.S. – Mexico border; 3,204 structures were destroyed (2,233 homes, 5 businesses, 966 outbuildings).

The fires resulted in the single largest movement of Americans since the civil war with nearly one half million people evacuated, including hospitals, nursing homes, and prisons. A state of emergency was declared in 7 counties.

Grossmont Hospital (“GH”) in La Mesa California was in the middle of the San Diego wild fires. They have an established hospital clown program, so Imozell McVeigh, the volunteer coordinator sent out a plea for clowns. School grades 1-12 were cancelled for the entire week, and GH became a holding area for the school children of working parents, and of fire victims so the clowns stepped in on short notice.

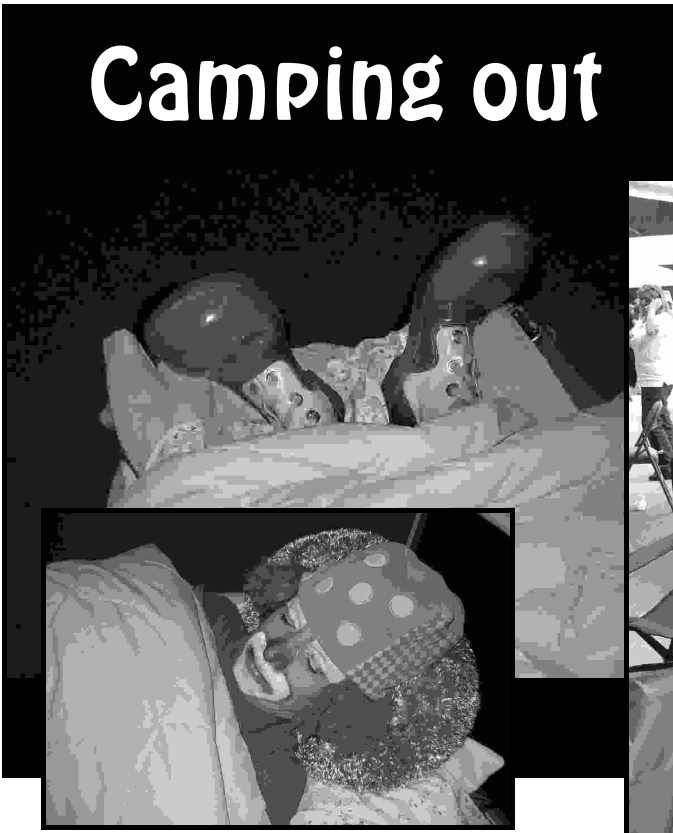
Below *Wower* (Rosemarie Ballard), *Solecito* (Antolin Rodriguez) and *Pokonose* (William Pogue) entertaining some of the children at day care. *Pokonose el payaso* used to work at GH as a radiologist and is now active in their hospital program. He also took his 3.9 pound Maltese Therapy Dog, named “Thunder” to the day care center. Each kid got to hold her. (Thunder is also in the picture below)

Garrett “*Dr Goodnight*” Knipe also clowned at Grossmont along with *Tango* and *Imax* (Leah and Ed Estrin) -- clowns from the North County Conspiracy Clown Group.



Clowns, Wower, Solecito and Pokonose entertain school children of workers and evacutees at Grossmont Hospital.

Camping out at the “Q”



Enter Antolin Rodriguez a.k.a. Solecito, the Singing Clown.

When Antolin heard on TV a request for help from teachers who could bring activities for children at the Q (Qualcomm Stadium is now known locally as the “Q”), he got on the San Diego trolley with his guitar and clowning at the “Q” from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. on Tuesday. He went back Wednesday at 11 a.m. and slept overnight in the stadium, leaving on Thursday afternoon.

From Solecito: “Early in my life I became discontented and unhappy and I looked back at my life asking what was it in my childhood that made me happy?” It was helping other people. So I began doing volunteer service. After surviving a life-threatening illness in 1996, I intensified my commitment to the community. I became dedicated to the world of children.



As the strong Santa Ana winds blew embers every-which-way, they landed on rooftops at random setting off new fires and sending people set off to evacuation centers. The Red Cross alone had 40 evacuation centers and shelters, provided 362,008 meals and sheltered 30,888 evacuees with 4,960 volunteers working. This does not include all agencies as the Salvation Army, the city’s schools and stadium, and local church groups (not affiliated with the Red Cross) and then there was the offerings of so many restaurants, and beverage businesses.

By 5 pm 10,000 evacuees found refuge at Qualcomm Stadium, home of the San Diego Chargers Football Team. The next day there were more than 12,000 spending the night. Arriving with them were over 1000 volunteers. Jill Schenk, a volunteer, commented “It’s bizarre, there’s acupuncture, massage, reflexology, yoga, Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, crisis counseling - you name it.” Guitarists jammed, a dog rode around on a motorcycle followed by a group of squealing, gleeful children, and a man in a clown suit strolled the grounds while strumming a guitar. (that’s our Solecito picture on this page!).

As night fell the outside scene turned to masses of wandering people donning white particle masks, pitching tents, gathering various supplies from aid stations, and walking dogs, while quietly consumed by a hollow silence infrequently interrupted by a jolting PA system announcing “Coffee!” or “Pizza over here!”

In the shaded upper regions of the stadium stands, families sat together nibbling on pizza, watching the numerous television screens blaring news – all waiting to see if their homes had burned.

Helping Others Sleep at the Q

Solecito shares, "There was a level in the stadium upstairs where that was closed off and more protected from the elements. They took most of the elderly that came from nursing home to this place. When I went there, it made them so happy. This one woman asked me to come closer and she gave me a kiss (photo to the right). It was so sweet."



Laughter Yoga International Movement from Dr. Kataria, and in 2006 I became a Certified Laughter Yoga Teacher. Now, when I am out of my clown outfit, I continue my mission – a healthier world through joy and laughter. (Antolin holds free Yoga Laughter classes every Saturday and Sunday at 8am in Balboa Park, San Diego and Sunday afternoon in Tijuana, Mexico at the USA/Mexican border.)

"All of this leads to my understanding that the greatest thing I could do for children was to make adults become aware of their inner child. This inspired me to write songs. Today I have finished 100th song - all about finding one's inner child."

"Although I write my own songs, while singing at the Q, I found that I didn't sing them much. People were still dealing with the possibility of losing their homes, so I felt happier singing songs that people were familiar with and could relate to. I didn't want them to listen too hard to new words. I sang "It's a Small World After All," a lot and some very familiar songs in Spanish. This made people more comfortable."

Solecito continues: "It was a spiritual calling for me to work in the orphanages. I did anything to serve - washed dishes, mopped floors and the like, but I also took the time between to play games with the children. Those moments with the children inspired me to discover my own inner child and eventually become a clown.

"In the beginning I wasn't clowning, I began volunteering at Hospital Infantil de las Californias in Tijuana, as 'Sonrisas,' their official mascot - a giant dog. I made their mascot come to life. It was inspiring – so many children hugging me. Seeing how children became excited when they saw *Sonrisas* arrive– it made my soul so rich, that. I didn't want to wait for a hospital event to be the mascot so I decided to clown again. I studied clowning in San Diego and completed a CNA (Certified Nurses Aid) certification, which I felt would help me understand the emotional milieu of the hospitalized patient. My philosophy as a clown is to be a messenger of the healthy benefits of joy and laughter.

Antolin Rodriguez a.k.a. *Solecito* is a Mexican National, who has been living in San Ysidro for years. He has a small jewelry business in downtown San Diego, and has permanent USA residency status. Antolin is a full time student at San Diego Community College studying digital music technology. He recently outran the entire 20-year-old college cross country team in the last season of intercollegiate athletics. With his big clown heart pounding in his chest, he was probably laughing all the way to the finish line!

In 2004 he joined the San Diego All Stars (COAI), and in March 2007, he joined the Mexican clown group "*Risaterapia*" (www.risaterapia.org), which had just come to Tijuana from 10 other Mexican states. In Mexico they are called "*Medico de la Risa*" ("Doctors of Laughter")



From *Pokonose, the Clown* (William Pogue) of La Mesa CA pictured above with children at Grossmont Hospital.

“Solecito had been a clown volunteer at Grossmont/Sharp hospital for three years. He had received the "Star Volunteer 2005" trophy at the annual volunteer luncheon. About 2 years ago, while in Washington D.C., he called me, on the telephone, and said he had the symptoms of intestinal obstruction. Very sick, and wanting to be home, Rodriguez flew back to San Diego. His folks, residents of Tijuana, persuaded him to seek help from a friend, an excellent and well-known surgeon in Tijuana, so that he could be close to his family. After nine days and two surgeries, Solecito was still not doing well.



Above Tango (Leah Estrin) at Grossmont Hospital.

“Solecito knew that I had worked in Grossmont hospital for 32 years and that I knew the people there. He asked me to help him find a way to be accepted into the facilities. I called a friend, Dr. Mike Musicant, a surgeon, and we got him admitted. Although Dr. Musicant would receive pennies for his care, he accepted Solecito readily. Dr. Musicant brought him back to health in 30 days.”

“Since that time, Solecito has had unwavering gratitude for Grossmont Hospital: if it sends out a plea for help, he is always there. Whether it is by bicycle or trolley, he appears in a full clown costume with his guitar.”

Beside days at the Q, Solecito took the trolley to Casa Familiar, a designated fire evacuee center in San Ysidro on the Mexican/USA border, and assisted his friends from the "Izcalli" group to load a couple of trucks with donations which were transported to designated evacuee sites. He rode with the trucks and clowned for children at these sites while the trucks were unloaded.

As Antolin currently does not have a car, he hitched a 40-mile ride north to Rancho Bernardo, which was hit hard by the fires. He took donations for evacuees and fire victims, and performed at the Recreation Center for the children of evacuees.

He went to an Escondido parking lot, which was then being used as a distribution center for supplies to fire victims. This time he was a clown for 43 added hours. Friday: Came to Grossmont Hospital (La Mesa, CA) by Trolley. This amounted to over 46 hours of entertainment

The San Diego All Stars also hit the streets to help fire victims.

This is the list of clown appearances from Bonita "*BonBon*" Love.

Clowns who went to clown at Qualcomm stadium were: Jackie "Cali" Caprio, Daniel "Uncle Rusty" Wheeler, Honey "Honey Bee" Mark, and Ingrid "Jingles" Pelton.

Candy "Butterscotch" Will who along with her daughter Chrissy "Beary" Will and friend Pat "Peppermint Patti" Prickett went to El Toro High school. Chula Vista was visited by Ana "Ana Banana" Hernandez. John "Whistle Stop" Lorne was at the Del Mar fairgrounds and Maureen "Cricket" Minder was at Dewey Child Development Center.

Sending Smiles to Our Own Clowns

Sam "Grandpa D Clown" and Pam "Grammy Pammy" had been clowning at local shelter when they found out their own home was burning. They lost everything. The only things they now had to call their own were their clown clothes they were wearing, some balloons, and small magic they had to entertain others. They lost over 40 years of accumulated stage and production magic.

Shobi emailed hospital clowns all over the world to send supportive messages, and you did! Sam and Pam were thrilled as they received supportive messages from clowns everywhere, even South Africa! Of course Shobi also sent them a box of red noses. Pam said later in a note that "We lost everything but our clown hearts are still going strong!"

At the MidAtlantic Clown Association (M.A.C.A.), Maryann "Polka" Becker made a Ginger Bread House to auction off and other clown vendors donated clown items to the auction. This was truly a demonstration of the RNR spirit in action "Sending smiles to the Rescue"

Looking for someplace to help?

Dialing 2-1-1 from your phone, in most areas of the USA will connect you with volunteer opportunities and community services.



If you do find information in your area, where other red nose responder clowns could participate please email: volunteer@rednoseresponse.org.