

# Over Here and Over There! Send the word to be aware! For the Clowns are Coming, the Clowns are Coming . . .

“Shobi Dobi” Shobhana Schwebke

The world is losing its sense of humor and a mighty army of clowns is forming, Bearing their weapons of silly stethoscopes, bubbles, balloons and nonsense. What are they doing on the battle fields, in the hospitals, in remote villages of the world? All around the world clowns are emerging to serve the wounded human spirit.

By some estimates there are 25,000 clowns in the USA alone! So where is this mighty army of clowns? Organizing clowns is like herding cats. Don't try to get us to line up in a single line to be counted. Our very existence depends on our resourceful intuition and our tricksters' tales. We don't march in formation waving banners or shouting slogans in front of TV cameras.

We fly with the Red Cross to disaster areas, perform in remote villages in foreign countries, dance with the police, hold hands, listen to the tearful and pass out cheer. And in our spare time we go to the nursing homes, homeless shelters, relief centers, hospices, wherever there is a need for heart.

Exposed to all the *slings and arrows of outrageous fortune*, we may trip and fall, but we always pick ourselves up only to forget we have fallen at all. We live in the moment with our hearts open. We have learned that little can strike the power of love that comes through our silliness. Citizens, patients, children, soldiers all fall victim to our play.

We are only ordinary clowns playing in an extraordinary world full of the human spirit. We see the spirit everywhere, grab onto it, and make it dance with us. We can be gentle or bold. We slide as a chamaeleon into a situation and bring our light and hope. Sometimes there is too much grief to play, so we hug and hold and cry. There is so much to do and so many to visit. A big job, you say? That is why we wear such big shoes, we say!



Patch Adams (the one with the duck hat) arrives in Kabul, Afghanistan as part of a patchwork for peace sponsor by the City of Rome with 10 tons of medical supplies and 21 international clowns. (Photos by Gerald Tooth, Australian Broadcasting Corp. Background Briefing)

# Ambassador Clowning

by Shobhana Schwebke a.k.a. Shobi Dobi, the Clown

Text Reprinted from the AATH Newsletter



Clowns on Tian'anmen Square Beijing on Patch Adams' People to People Delegation to China

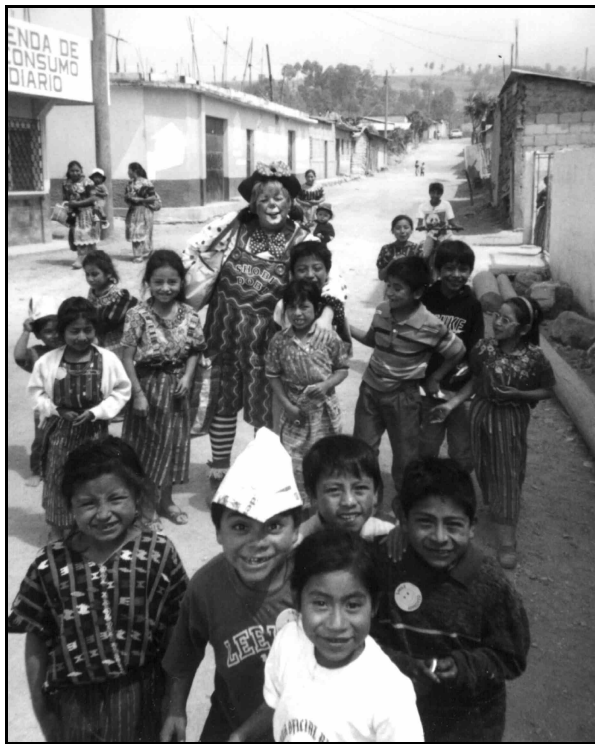
Of the four clown ambassador trips I have taken in the past five years, the first trip to India was probably the most adventurous. I went on this trip as the only clown to The Prasad Eye Camp 50 miles north of Mumbai (Bombay). The eye camp did micro eye surgery to restore the vision of those who could not otherwise afford it. Some of these people walked barefoot for days to the camp. I was there to soften the bridge between their world and the impact of the high-tech medical procedures.

In India demons have painted faces, so even though I wore "soft" makeup, some people were frightened of me. As an experienced hospital clown, I approached the people with caution, meekly lifting my clown hat, "Meera nome Shobi Dobi hey?" In the local dialect - "My name is Shobi Dobi." Well, as chance would have it, a "dhobi" in Hindi is the person in the village who does the laundry and "shobi" means elegantly beautiful. So here was a middle-aged western woman dressed in rainbow stripes and polka dots blowing soap bubbles calling herself a beautiful washerwoman. The villagers could not contain themselves, they giggled and they played -- they played like everyone else in the world plays. It's that connection to the inner light - that spark that happens when people go into their inner child.

The community and spirit were awesome. Once people came to take me to visit a woman in the triage tent who was going to be sent home as blind as she arrived. Her glaucoma was too advanced. There she was blinded in sight and me blinded in language. Being in the clown moment, I never thought about this, but just knelt down to her. Her village friends gathered around talking to her and maybe explaining, in the local dialect, my appearance. I put her hands on my little bird puppet "Birdie Bird" She took him to her forehead (in Hinduism this is a kind of worship) and said "Ah Chota Garuda" Chota means "little" and Garuda is the large bird that carries the Hindu god Vishnu. So in essence she was calling Birdie "Little vehicle of grace." I was so touched. She was just so grateful that someone was paying attention to her - that was the quality of her humility. It was awesome that as a clown and a foreigner, I could touch her in that spot. So in the village and camp Birdie became Chota Garuda for the remainder of the time. It was a sweet beautiful connection and a way for the Indian people to connect to their benefactors. They would play and touch the feet of my puppets -- which is a display of respect and honor. We would all laugh. But there is a little bit of truth in all jest. I felt the waves of their gratitude. The clown had become a tangible heart level way for

the people to express their gratitude. I became the heart to heart connection between the doctors and the community. Awesome!

I went from India to Russia in eight hours. It was from warm colorful wide-open India to freezing cold Russia. But it didn't take us long to melt and touch peoples' hearts. In Russia I was with 12 clowns. This was a different experience and needless to say a lot less responsibility, but still very heartfelt and personal. Once while speaking to two Russian doctors who spoke a little English and I spoke of course no Russian, they asked "Why are you coming to Russia to clown? We have clowns in Russia." I explained "We are not here to perform, but to connect to the people in hospitals and orphanages." "But why?" they kept asking, and I kept trying to explain to explain about caring for patients, and about health and humor. But they kept asking "Why?" Then they finally said "Why to Russia?" I thought a moment and finally said "Because we know you are having problems and we want you to know we care." Their eyes filled with tears and we all hugged. That's the basis of a clown ambassadorship. We want to show people we care.



In Guatemala I went with a dentist, a priest and three clowns. I will never forget the look in the eyes of the women watching me, a female clown, working side by side with a priest and a dentist. While the dentist set up and the priest did confessions, I entertained the anxious people waiting in long lines. When the priest finished saying mass and the dentist was ready, I became a dental assistant and the priest helped wash instruments. There we were side by side in a community where women do not have equal status.

The trip with Patch Adams to China changed my whole way of clowning. With 44 other clowns I became more courageous. What I did in the other countries was really one-on-one hospital clowning. In China it could be symbolized by my running into a crowd of people with my arms open and hugging as many people as I could. People would squeal with delight. A sort of tag would start to play leaving everyone laughing. After our first day we

were on national Chinese television and in the newspapers, so people knew who we were. People would see our bus and wave. Kids would jump up and down with excitement. There we were at all the monuments playing -- silly wonderful Americans. Everywhere we went, people would point, smile, wave, throw us kisses and give us "thumbs up."

Our clowning was not about entertaining, doing tricks or giving things away. As a matter of fact when ever we did that the connection would stop. Patch said "you stop connecting and become vendors." One time we were let loose in a school. We all went into different class rooms and just did silly lessons or sang songs, or blew bubbles. One of the clowns started giving out autographs, then all the kids wanted to have autographs and the fun stopped and the lines formed and that connection stopped. It became a linear connection. We were on top giving down. It became narrow and more patronizing. With the horizontal kind of joy we were spreading, our joy went into infinite directions. The horizontal was equal vision and we were like a huge tidal wave of spirit and joy.

The wave of joy for the clown is play. As wit is the humor language of the mind, joy is the language of the heart. And that play is in Clown's innocent vulnerable character that exudes unconditional love. Unconditional because Clown has equal vision. Everyone, everything falls prey to Clown's exploration regardless of size rank, profession or age. Unconditional because Clown doesn't ask for anything except maybe to participate in play. Clowns draw out the children in all of us. However, if you don't want to play Clown moves on to the next moment. It is this pull into equal vision and the moment that makes Clown so valuable as an Ambassador.

The further we get from our hearts the more complicated our desires and needs. Our minds separate us with their desires and needs. When we play together with our inner child, we become equal, less complicated. As an ambassador clown you see peoples' hearts and souls. When people are joyful, you see such beauty in the human spirit. It is so sweet, the light that shines in the human heart.

The clown brightens that light. There is a Chinese Proverb:

*"If there is light in the soul, there will be beauty in the person. If there is beauty in the person, there will be harmony in the house. If there is harmony in the house, there will be order in the nation. If there is order in the nation, there will be peace in the world."*



## Hugs, Unabashed Hugs, Outrageous Hugs, Free Hugs, and More Hugs

The Chinese people would gather around and after a few seconds of bewilderment, break out into laughter. After the first day we were on national Chinese TV, so people saw us and waved Little kids would jump up and down with excitement. We would run into a crowd and just hug people. And the Chinese People returned our hugs. We got thumbs up everywhere we went. Shobi has never felt this free clowning before. It is definitely a result of being with 44 clowns. We would come in a wave of bright colors joy and foolishness.



## Play, Outrages Play, with Everyone Everywhere

We would greet everyone alike with clown "equal vision." It didn't make any difference if they were street cleaners, cooks, cops, or businessmen. Restaurants were especially fun. At the right Bart Marcy "Dooney" from Tucson plays with kitchen staff. Above is Arne Swenson from Scottsdale, Arizona in Tian'anmen Square.



Photo by Bart M



*Happy* Thelma Miller of Old Tappan, New Jersey reported that while walking up the 327 steps of at the Mausoleum of Dr. Sun Yatsen, she was miming that she was having a tough time going up. "This couple looked at me. Each one grabbed an arm and pulled me up. Then, about half way up, they got another couple to pull me up the rest of the way. " That seemed to be the attitude of the people -- cooperation, mutual support and understanding..

At the Mausoleum (see photo at left), Shobi was doing this "down the stairs" dance all by herself. A group of around 30 Chinese tourists were coming up the stairs. Shobi stopped and took a deep bow "Ni Hao" (Hello) and then tried to remember how to say "I love you" in Chinese. "Woo. . ah. . . woo" and without skipping a beat the entire tourist group said "Wo Ai Ni!" (I love you). I was completely blown away!

At all the sites we visited we would see the "other" tourists. They would file off and on their buses and listen to their guides -- something we often did not do. They had little contact with anyone but themselves. Often they would stand around and watch us. Of course nobody stood around watching us for too long before we engaged them in some sort of play. Just because they were American or Japanese tourists didn't mean they were exempt from our frolic and foolishness.

We were not watching China, we were engaged in China. You can't imagine the hundreds of people we 44 clowns connected with, and all the hundreds of pictures that we had taken with families, children and friends.



Photo by Bart Marcy

# Stop the Bus! Clowns off!

Our guides quickly discovered that it took us forever to get from one place to another. A simple five minute walk from the bus to the hospital would take an hour! So our schedules were rewritten. We never did get to the Forbidden City, but it didn't matter. The "sights" became like a movie being played in the background. We'd catch a glimpse of it every now and then, we were too busy clowning around. Everywhere we went, we stopped to play with people. That included anyone in a uniform. Many ended with painted red noses. We were warned not to approach the police, but that warning proved unnecessary. They played the most!

All the Chinese workers seem to stand in front of their business establishments for "inspection" before the doors open. When we saw the firemen standing for inspection, it was just too much to resist. "Stop the Bus!" We all got out. Sometimes when stuck in traffic just five or six clowns would get off to shake hands and give hugs!

### *A Little Divine Intervention*

Clem T John Kapferer "The event I will always remember is the stop along the road to the Great Wall when our bus broke down. I remember someone yelling "Hey Clem "T" there are some kids out there playing in the field" That was all it took for me to get out of the bus and start the ball rolling with the local population. Then I went up on the bridge and got the people to come down to see all of us clowns. We probably had over 300 local people gathering around us before it all ended."

From Arne Swenson of Scottsdale AZ: "Soon there was a full-scale carnival in progress, perhaps a hundred people in all. As we drove away on the new bus we reflected on what the Chinese will remember of this event. Perhaps they will tell their grandchildren about the crazy bus full of colorful creatures that passed through one day and stopped to host a "Happening". Patch said it best... "The day the Circus came to Town".

### ♪♪♪ Study War No More ♪♪♪

At one school we were persuaded to all get on stage and sing. After a rousing round of "Old Mac Donald" complete with sound effects and "Twinkle, Twinkle," we sang "Down by the Riverside." Before we realized it the children sang with us over and over again the chorus, "I ain't gonna study war no more, study war no more." With the energy of 40 odd clowns, we spilled off the stage.

Beach Clown got down and asked a child to dance. I went over and asked one of the teachers to dance, except it turned out to be the principal. Well that did it, the whole place went wild. Everyone was up and dancing. We started doing congo line dances around the room. "Study war no more." will be imbedded in their memories forever.



Patch took over the firemen's inspection with Warner Gehner and his puppet (far left) also in the line up.



South African Joy Karkeek connecting with an Afghan Woman

***Please come every day . . .***

Ginevra Sanguigno (from Italy) was invited into a house by some Afghani women: *“Yes. They invite us, but the big point is we are here, we are not journalists, we are not doctors in the traditional sense, we are clowns, and this is one point that’s very, very strange, they don’t know us, but they see us -- very colorful. They see us sing songs, and very friendly and soft and sweet with the children. And they suffer so much. And they are happy just to be near to us because they feel from us some life – life, after so much suffering.*”

*“So we went there. We sang songs and the women just hugged and hugged and hugged us and touch our hands and they don’t know, clown, no clown, don’t know, because they don’t know, no television, but they see us and they feel alive, life. In a country where so much is death present still. So I understand. And what happens. Yes, we sing some, we dance, and they said, ‘Please, come here every day’, because I know we will heal in this way their sufferings. You are sick not only because you have a leg broken, it is one’s sufferings more, more deep, and this is very difficult to heal.”*

***. . . . You have given us our laughter back!***

Jean-Paul Bell, a clown from Australia, directs the Humor Foundation which supports clowns in Australian hospitals.

Jean-Paul Bell: *“ . . .when you talk to the people, or the translators, they just are absolutely overjoyed . . . one particular thing that just brought tears to my eyes . . . somebody had said that it reminds them of what it was like 30 years ago, that they laughed, they laughed like they did 30 years ago . . . it just is too much that these people have been treated like that, for the clown to be able to lift that veil, which is really our job . . . people come in, they bomb, they shoot and now an uneasy peace is created, and now we come in and people say, ‘We now have a form of peace, but you have given us our laughter back.’ That is the greatest gift that I possibly could be able to give in my entire performing life. It just makes me feel so valued.”*



Reaction to the clowns at an Afghan Girls School



Italian clown Ginevra Sanguigno sits at a bedside next to a mother in a black burqa and begins to comfort her three-year-old son. Can you see the smile in the Afghan mother’s eyes.

Holly Adams (from Amsterdam) *“I went into this room and it’s filled with beds and every bed has two children, and a variety of ages and states of consciousness, and definitely the states of consciousness had as much to do with starvation as they had to do with disease, perhaps more so. Mothers were everywhere, and it was very silent . . . so I brought a puppet and I had her look in the door first, . . . sneak in and start to sing, and then I poked my big red nose in. . . . I started with really soft, gentle clowning, more just trying to make the connection and find some common joy, finding some love to share . . . the puppet is singing and reaching out and touching the children, and I’m talking like a two year old, and their eyes . . . they’re like glazed over . . . and they reach out . . . to touch this puppet. Because the puppet is singing to them ‘dites á moi’ (in French). And then they started to giggle . . . It was absolutely phenomenal”*

*Clown National Guard: Clowns go to Ground Zero in New York City after 9/11.*



*Photo by Mike Paugh*

*We Caring Clowns go not to mock tragedy, but to caress it with our compassion,  
We march straight into the battlefields of grief,  
Armed with unconditional love, and our joyful silliness,  
We bring a reminder of the resilience and brilliance of the human spirit.  
Gently tickling the heart and gathering forces in play, we give fear a hearty shove.  
Ah, Maybe the trickster Coyote has a soft belly after all.*

*– Shobi Dobi*

Maureen "Ouchie" Mould from Yakima, Washington

“. . . a lady approached us and introduced herself as a reporter from the Los Angeles Times and asked if she could interview us. She asked me ‘Why are you clowning here at Ground Zero?’ I, in turn said: ‘Why do you think we’re here?’ She replied, ‘I’m interviewing you, remember!’ Just then a woman walked by and stopped in front of me ‘Excuse me for interrupting, but I want to thank you clowns for being here.’ The reporter turned to her and asked her what she thought of when she saw the clowns. Immediately the woman responded: ‘Happiness!’ She went on to tell us that she lived in the City and had lost two friends on September 11th. This was the first time she had mustered the emotional strength to come down to see the remains of the towers. ‘But when I saw clowns, happiness and hope came into my mind.’ I turned to the reporter and said: ‘There’s your answer.’

This type of encounter happened minute by minute with police officers, fire fighters, work crews and any type of folk who walked by. Again we gave out red noses and sang ‘Getting to ‘nose’ you, getting to ‘nose’ all about you’, accompanied by my clown trombone.



*There is a light in this world,  
a healing spirit more powerful  
than any darkness we may encounter.  
We sometimes lose sight of this force  
when there is suffering, too much pain.  
Then suddenly, the spirit will emerge  
through the lives of ordinary people  
who hear a call and answer  
in extraordinary ways.*

*~ Mother Teresa*