

THE NEW CALLIÖPE

For Members of Clowns of America International

Volume 40 • Number 3



BILL
“DABBLES”
LEBLANC

Your COAI Officers

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE



President
Adam Schill
2219 Jolinda Ct.
Columbus, IN 47203
812-525-7429
adam@bigtopproductionsllc.com



Vice President
Dan Langwell
10550 Star Avenue
Osceola, IN 46561
(574) 904-9643
fitzwilly.coai@gmail.com



Secretary
Beth "Pickles" Cedarholm
1450 River Ridge Rd.
River Falls, WI, 54022
715-426-0774
clownypickles@gmail.com



Treasurer
Jerry "Bogo" Gill
321-610-3193
1492 Goldrush Ave
Melbourne, FL 32940
jerryngill@cfl.rr.com3

DIRECTORS



Alley Region Support
Gloria Sterrett
401 N. Washington St.
Delphi, IN 46923
765-564-9604
heysedbyccmdolli@yahoo.com



Conventions
Kynisha Ducre
Bay Area, California
clowninaroundtown@gmail.com



Education
Jim Donoughe
1140 Linwood Ave
Niagara Falls, NY 14305
MrJim67@aol.com
Cell 716-471-3684



Junior Joeks
Regina Wollrabe
503-807-2584
coaijrjoeks@gmail.com



Membership
Keshia Beckley
Post Office Box 6051
Fredericksburg, VA 22403
571-982-0875
ladylolafp@yahoo.com

REGIONAL VICE PRESIDENTS



Northeast
Connie Morrow
98 Woodward Drive
West Seneca, NY 14224
716-675-6892
punkin@punkintheclown.com



North Central
Sara "Special K'z" Kreutz
P.O. Box 454 Holstein, IA, 51025
712-369-0809
sarakreutz@yahoo.com



Northwest
Alyse Axford
116-A Sudden Valley Drive
Bellingham, WA 98229-7751
360-647-9229
sales@zigzag-ragz.com



Mideast
Bobby Semon
308 Harrier St.
Virginia Beach, VA 23462
757-424-1288
bobby@bobbytheclown.com



Midwest
Patti Ummel
225 John Drive
Bartlett, IL 60103
630-817-2019



South Central
Matty Spraggins
1668 Chesterwood Drive
Rockwall, Tx 75032
972-746-8455
magicalmattyfun@gmail.com



Southeast
Kent Sheets
4375 St. Clair Ave. West
North Fort Myers, FL 33903
239-565-7790
sheetskent@aol.com



Southwest
Sarah Smith
3175 North Price Rd. Apt 1247
Chandler, AZ 85224
719-334-2793
pcsarahjane@yahoo.com



Canada
Dale McKenzie
867 Raynard Crescent SE
Calgary, AB T2A 1X6
403-273-9047 (H)
403-606-7750 (C)
funehappenings@shaw.ca



Latin Countries
Angel "Jobolin" Morales
24 RR5 Jaradines De Caparra
Bayamon, Puerto Rico 00959
787-565-3205
jobolin2008@aol.com



International
Chia-chiao Lin
No.935, Fuke Rd., Xitun Dist.
Taichung
Taiwan
Linchiachiao@gmail.com

STANDING COMMITTEES

Audio Visual: Marilyn Barrett, 407-844-2862 • klownkop@prodigy.net.

Awards Advisory Council (AAC): Teresa Gretton (Chair), 301-843-8212 • tgretton@verizon.net. Bob Gretton, Angel Ocasio, Mike Cox.

Budget: Adam Schill, 812-525-7429. Jerry Gill. Sammy Smith.

Bylaws and Rules: Ted White (Chair) • twaddles2014@hotmail.com • Cleon Babcock, Dale McKenzie.

Clown Week: Teresa Gretton • 301-843-8212 • tgretton@comcast.net.

Competition: Shirley Lee, John Kral, Paula Le Blanc, Bob Gretton, Ann Sanders.

Ethics and Grievance: Paul Kleinberger (Chair), 518-438-0775 • fuddiduddy@aol.com.

Finance: Adam Schill, 812-525-7429. • adam@bigtopproductionsllc.com. Jerry Gill. Alyse Axford, Angel Morales, Sammy Smith, Regina Wollrabe.

Good Cheer: Bonnie Corcia • bonkygbird@gmail.com • 732-718-5840

Historian: Teresa Gretton, 301-843-8212 • tgretton@comcast.net.

International Ambassador Program: Bob Gretton, 301-843-8212 • bunkytclown@comcast.net.

Junior Joeks: Regina Wollrabe (Director), 503.807.2584, coaijrjoeks@gmail.com. Sara Kreutz, Bobby Semon, Beth Cedarholm, Dale McKenzie, Keshia Beckley, Jim Donoughe

Membership: Teresa Gretton (Chair), 301-843-8212 • gretton@verizon.net. Bob Gretton.

Parliamentary Procedure Advisor: Cleon Babcock, 515-314-2967 • ccbabcock@aol.com.

Public Relations: Bonnie Love, 619-282-9668 • bonbonsandiego@yahoo.com.

Scholarship: Jim Donoughe (Chair), 716-471-3684 • MrJim67@aol.com



May / June 2023
Volume 40 • Number 3

Published by
Clowns of America International

The mission of Clowns of America International is to organize all members desiring to pursue the honorable profession or art of clowning, the dedication toward its advancement, and the education of its members.

COAI Business Office
Post Office Box 122
Eustis, Florida 32727

Telephone:
1-352-357-1676

Hours: Monday–Friday
9:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. (EST)
E-mail: coaioffice@aol.com
Website: www.mycoai.com

Magazine Production
SPS Publications, Inc.

Editorial Assistants
Rose Cardenas
Lauren Jurgensen

Graphic Design
Jessica Friend

Creative Consultant
Regina “Cha Cha” Wollrabe

Send articles for consideration to
thenewcalliope@gmail.com.
Send ads and advertising inquiries to
advertising@mycoai.com.

The New Calliope (ISSN 1072-1045) is published bi-monthly (January/February, March/April, May/June, July/August, September/October, November/December) by COAI, 800 South Ave., Eustis, Florida 32726. Periodicals Postage Paid at Eustis, Florida, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: *The New Calliope*, COAI Business Office Manager • Post Office Box 122, Eustis, Florida 32727.

The New Calliope articles are protected by U.S. copyright and international treaties and may not be copied without the express permission of Clowns of America International, which reserves all rights. Re-use of any of *The New Calliope* editorial content and graphics online, in print, or any other medium for any purpose is strictly prohibited.

© 2023 COAI

Clowns of America International, Inc.

COVER PHOTO: MERILYN BARRETT

THE NEW CALLIOPE

OUR COVER

- 4** Lifetime Achievement Award: Bill “Dabbles” LeBlanc
Rose Cardenas

HOW-TO

- 16** 33 Things Children Enjoy David Ginn
14 Vent Figures Richard “Design-O” Smith
30 Rebo’s Clown Bits: Man Eating Chicken Bev “Rebo” Bergeron

INSPIRATION AND HUMOR

- 9** 25 Years Ago in *The New Calliope*
Regina “Cha Cha” Hernandez
10 What I’ve Learned from Clowning Connie “Punkin” Morrow
12 The Producer Ron Severini
24 What Could Possibly Go Wrong? Beth “Pickles” Cedarholm
29 The Kidshow Way: Comedy Skip Way
29 Cartoon Jonny Hawkins
31 Clown Comics Ann “Tuttles” Sanders

OFFICIAL BUSINESS

- 8** From the Education Director:
Excellence in Clowning Award Jim “Donuts” Donoughe
8 Leave a Legacy
30 Membership Rates

NEWS

- 9** 2024 COAI Convention Notice
29 Welcome, New Members!

MISCELLANEOUS

- 2** Officers, Directors, and Committees
10 Our Good Cheer List



Permanent Membership Cards

Membership cards sent out by the COAI Business Office are intended to be permanent, so no expiration date is included. Your card is valid only as long as you are a current member. In years past, a new membership card was generated and mailed each year. During the pandemic, the COAI Board of Directors voted to discontinue that practice as a cost-saving measure. If your card is damaged or lost, you may still request a replacement.

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

BILL “DABBLES” LEBLANC

By Rose Cardenas

Bill LeBlanc, recently named by COAI as a recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award—has been a fixture in the clowning arts since 1993. Bill’s wife Paula, a teacher, became involved in clowning after their daughter’s birthday party with a hired clown. After tagging along to numerous clowning events, Bill decided to join her. He began attending conventions and then took classes and joined Alley 159, the South Shore Joeys, of which he remains a member today. In fact, nomination for his Lifetime Achievement Award came from the president of South Shore Joeys, Maureen Yalenezian.

“Dabbles,” Bill’s clown persona, began as a tramp clown but has evolved into a light auguste as the years have gone by. However, Bill’s most well-known involvement in clowning has been his custom-made foam props. He began the construction of these props around 1996, first for himself and then branching out and creating numerous styles for others. His creations include hammers, dominoes, cameras, pizzas, turkey sandwiches, fire hydrants—even a foam wedding cake.

Bill’s clowning centered on working events, such as birthday parties and charity events. He is skilled in walking on stilts and balloon sculptures. One of Bill’s suggestions for clowning is “always carry balloons.” He uses balloons to create connections and brighten peoples’ days, whether it be at a clown event or just simply an evening out at a restaurant or a layover at an airport. He tells the story of making a balloon bracelet for his server in a restaurant one evening, and before they finished their meal, every server in the restaurant had requested and received one of his special bracelets. Bill says these moments “take their minds off what’s going on in their lives and give them a smile.” He notes that a clown should have the mindset that one is “always a clown, even in plain clothes.”

After Bill attended his first COAI Convention in Puerto Rico in 1996, he has not missed a single one. Conventions were not only a connection to other clowns but a way for Bill to learn and grow his skills. He attends many regional conventions in addition to the annual COAI convention and, over the years, he’s been involved as a competitor, judge, lecturer, and Director of Competitions.

A highlight of Bill’s clowning career has been his opportunity to teach at the Advanced Studies and American Clown Academy. He recognizes the role these courses played in growing his own skills and appreciates the chance to participate in others’ lives in the same way. At times, Bill’s teaching is an open “prop shop” where he works alongside others to experiment and create new props.

In his work life, Bill was an engineer for thirty years, working in construction administration. His degrees in architectural engineering and mechanical structural engineering gave him the background he later used in his prop construction. In addition,

Bill used his ability to focus on details to enable him to be a good competitor and judge for clown competitions. Clowning also gave him the opportunity to let the world of detail go as he entered a totally different sphere of his life. “It gave me an outlet,” he says. “As an engineer, you’re supposed to be logical. Clowning gave me a chance to goof off and relax.”

In addition, Bill has been involved in conventions, events, and leadership at the local and international level for many years. He served as the president of the South Shore Joeys for two years and Sargent at Arms for seven. He frequently lectures for his Alley and others. He has also written articles on foam props and balloon sculpting.

Bill has served as the Regional VP for the Northeast and on the competition



Bill “Dabbles” LeBlanc, recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award.



Above: Early days of Dabble. Right: Showtime at the Monroe County Fine Arts Center in Forsythe, Georgia, with the American Clown Academy.

team for COAI for more than fifteen years. He was also the Director of Competition for six years. This area in clowning fit Bill well with his background in engineering. He says that competition rules are similar to engineering specifications. However, he believes that competition rules have to be written leaving enough gray areas to allow clowning to evolve.

Bill recognizes that convention competitions have changed dramatically over these years. In fact, he believes that the

inclusion of competition at the convention should be reconsidered entirely. Years ago, when he was first starting out in competition, he competed in tramp and single skit. Many clowns were competing in every division. Now, fewer clowns compete in each division, but more want the awards of winning.

The lower number of competitors is perhaps a sign of the larger issue of decreased membership in local clown alleys and lower attendance at conventions, a fact that has been widely discussed. Bill



says, "9/11 and Covid changed everyone's mindsets and affected clowning." The response to these changes includes political and social limitations. Bill says, "You can't do a pants drop now, but back then that was funny." In addition, some clowning skills, such as balloon creations and face painting, have become more specific. They have developed their own conventions, schools, and competitions beyond the clowning arts.

The average age of clowns is now over sixty-five, and it has been difficult to attract younger people to the art. Bill believes that young people should be encouraged by guiding their entrepreneurial skills, as their business needs are their main focus. In addition, some have taken clowning into a simpler direction with far less makeup and extravagant costumes. If makeup is not involved, preparation for jobs is a lot easier. Bill conveys that the need for that extravagance has decreased because venues have changed. Years ago, clowns performed far from the audience, and the makeup and costumes were needed to be seen and carry the desired effect. Now, most clowns perform close to their spectators.

Bill is looking forward to his years ahead in clowning and being a part of taking clowning in a positive direction. However, his most important goal is to entertain. He says, "You need to be funny and entertaining. That's what it's all about." **TNC**



Left: Bill "Dabbles" LeBlanc makes a point. PHOTO BY MERILYN BARRETT Right: Bill and Paula LeBlanc.

TIMELINE OF CLOWNING ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Bill “Dabbles” LeBlanc

MEMBERSHIPS

1993—Present, COAI (Attended all COAI Conventions held from 1996 to 2022)
 1993—Present, South Shore Joeys Alley 159A
 1996—Present, EBBA (East Bridgewater Business Association)
 2000 to 2010, 2019—Present, WCA
 2010, 2012, 2017—SECA
 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015—MACA

LEADERSHIP

COAI:

COAI Northeast Ambassador, Massachusetts—1999 to 2004
 COAI Competition Judge—2002 to 2004
 COAI Northeast Regional Vice President—2006 to 2020
 COAI Competition Team—2006 to 2020, 2022
 COAI Competition Co-Director—2006 to 2016
 COAI Competition Chair—2017 to 2020, 2022
 COAI Mentor Program, Present—2015

Alley and MACA:

South Shore Joeys Alley 159A—Sergeant at Arms, 1996 to 2000 and 2002 to 2005
 South Shore Joeys Alley 159A—President, 2000 to 2002
 MACA Competition Team—2013 to 2015

PUBLICATIONS: *THE NEW CALLIOPE*

“Let’s Go Fishing”—Published in the March/April 2010 issue
 “Recipe For a Turkey Sandwich”—Published in the March/April 2012 issue

TEACHING

Conventions:

Taught the Make-and-Take Foam Prop Workshop—2009, 2010, and 2015 COAI Conventions

Alley Workshops:

Electric City Alley 285—September 2023, September 2008, and September 2018
 Granite State Clowns, Alley 190—November 2005 and March 2014
 Greater Boston Clowns, Alley 54—April 2007
 Good News Clowns of Centerbrook, Connecticut—October 2009

Additional Teaching Positions:

Advanced Studies Staff: Prop Shop Instructor and Vendor (Fincastle, Virginia)—2008
 Northeast Face Painting and Balloon Convention: Balloon-Twisting Instructor—February 2009
 Kapitol Klowns: Prop Class and Vendor Table—October 2013
 Prop Lecturer and Vendor Table (Circus Magic, Virginia)—2014 to 2016
 Junior Joey Balloon Instruction—2014
 American Clown Academy: 2.0 Prop Construction Shop and Vendor Table (Forsyth, Georgia)—2019

AWARDS

Northeast Clown Convention—Tramp Makeup (Second Place, 1995)
 COAI Convention—Single Paradeability (Silver Medal, 2000)
 COAI Convention—Tramp Makeup (First Place, 2001)
 COAI Convention—Single Skit (First Place, 2003)
 MACA Convention—Group Skit (First Place, 2012)

EDUCATION

TNT for Jesus—2002
 Advanced Studies in the Art of Clowning—1999 and 2006
 Clown City Jamboree in Mystic, Connecticut—2003 to 2005, 2010 to 2014
 ClownFest in Seaside Heights, New Jersey—2002 to 2007
 Northeast Clown Convention—1994 to 2000
 Twist and Shout Balloon Convention—2002, 2004, 2006, 2011
 MACA Convention—2009 to 2015
 Circus Clown Summit in Springfield, Massachusetts—2015



Two examples of Bill's foam props: ice cream cone (left) and propane tank (right).

WHAT THEY'RE SAYING

ABOUT BILL LEBLANC



At COAI competitions, Bill led the charge to streamline how competitions should be held, scores tabulated, and awards given. His expertise was invaluable. Bill is a hard worker and devoted member of COAI. He loves clowning and can often be found performing with his Alley as well as family members. He has often done things in the background. It is time his accomplishments are brought to the forefront.

—John Kral

I can attest to the many long and often thankless hours [Bill] has spent with the Competition Committee. In 2022, just weeks before the Atlanta, Georgia convention, he once again stepped into the role of Chairman. While all the conventions presented challenges, none were greater than the Atlanta convention. Under normal conditions, preparation for competition took months. For Atlanta, Bill had mere weeks. Assuming a near-impossible task, he worked tirelessly without the support of a committee (except for his wife Paula), conducting classes for both judges and competitors, overseeing the various competitions to ensure they were conducted in accordance with the rules, and ensuring competitors were treated fairly and had an enjoyable experience. I ask that the upmost consideration be given to Bill's nomination. I am confident he exceeds the requirements.

—Ann "Tuttles" Sanders



Top: Dabbles at work making balloons and spreading smiles.

Bottom: Bill at the 2013 COAI Convention in Richmond, Virginia, with Jeanne Woska (left) and Margo "Petunia" Horvath (right).

As a member of the South Shore Joys, Bill is my go-to person. He has stepped up to conduct alley workshops in props and balloons every year. He has participated in Clowning 101 to assist new clowns and teach clowning concepts and make-up. Bill always tells me 'Whatever you need, just call.' He shares info from COAI Conventions and other clown events so our alley is up on the latest news, tools, and rules. I wholeheartedly nominate Bill 'Dabbles' LeBlanc for the Clowns of America International 2023 Lifetime Achievement Award. The committee knows his achievements and selflessness [at the] conventions. This is just a brief history of the man I know. Someone who steps in when no one else will, someone whose passion for clowning shines through when he stands before you, explaining and teaching this art we all love.

—Maureen Yalenezian

President, South Shore Joys, Alley #159A



Clowning around at a COAI Convention. Left to right: John Kral, Cindy Kella, Walt and Shirley Lee, Tim Laynor, Ann Sanders, Bill and Paula LeBlanc.

PHOTO BY MERILYN BARRETT

I first met Bill about thirty years ago. One of the things I like about him is that he has always been low key. When everyone else got nervous (or worried or upset) about competing or entertaining at conventions, he would calm them down. When things got rough, Bill would just sit down, take out his pipe, and relax. This was the secret to his calm personality, in-clown or out. As he grew his skills and improved his makeup over the years, his personality has stayed the same. Bill is selfless and not egotistical, just a great clown who has good rapport with others. When someone asks how to do things, he never hesitates to take the time to help a fellow Joey and always shares his knowledge and skills. Bill is the man behind the curtain who kept convention competitions running smoothly.

—Marie "Mischief the Clown" Beck



From the Education Director

By Jim Donoughe

The Excellence in Clowning Award

This award shows how hard you work to spread smiles and keep on learning. Did you know that you may already be eligible for Excellence in Clowning? It's a volunteering, humanitarian, and educational service-type award that rewards you for what you naturally do as a clown in your own community, in our organization, and within the clowning world at large.

We all volunteer our time as clowns for various events, and we keep track of those hours. Those hours can add up fast between parades, charity events, and wherever else you volunteer. You can't claim hours for work that you were hired to do, however — that's not volunteering.

Keep track of the hours you put into clown education, as well. Conventions are a great place to earn several hours toward education. They can be earned at any convention, including regional conventions and one-day seminars.

Some conventions present awards to people for competitions, whether it be for makeup, costumes, skits, or something else. Try out for those competitions! Put your skills to the test amongst your peers. Don't forget to take some pictures, too.

Keep track of any awards that you win. These can show that people like your clown skills and the look of your clown character.

You will need to write a resume that contains the following information and details:

Service to Clowning: Two hundred hours. (Do you teach clown classes at conventions, or at your alley?)

Service to the Community: Two hundred hours. (Time spent volunteering.)

Acquired Educational Background in Clowning: One hundred hours. (What classes or seminars did you attend? One convention alone can earn you at least thirty hours in a week, maybe more.)

Clown Appearance: Evidence of exceptional makeup and costume. (Provide photos.)

Clown Performance: Proof of three awards. Best Makeup, Best Balloon, Best Face Paint, winning a Charlie Award, or COTY. These must be real awards from real groups. Sorry, you can't claim an award that your family or friends gave you, like Best Uncle or Best Dad Joke.

Irrefutable evidence of a "Clown Heart": Portfolio must be unanimously approved by the COAI Board.



The Excellence in Clowning medallion.

This can be a PowerPoint presentation, a Word document, or a real old-fashioned scrapbook that includes your clown resume and photographic proof. Make sure it's well organized and supports the information from each category of your resume.

Now, show us your excellence—I know you have it in you! Full details and requirements can be found at: mycoai.com/excellence-in-clowning/

I would hope that of all the awards you could go for, this one is at the top, because of the work that you do in the name of clowning. This is the award that I cherish the most. Without it, I couldn't have dreamed of reaching where I am today as a clown. The hard work I put into clowning led me on the path to many opportunities, as well as to being selected for my other awards. **TNC**

LEAVE A LEGACY

You may now help COAI continue its mission of sending Ambassadors of Joy into the world by remembering Clowns of America International with a financial gift in your will—or by making a **Living Legacy Gift** right now. Your name will be included on a special **Legacy Roll of Honor** published annually in *The New Calliope*.




To discuss a Legacy or Living Legacy donation, contact the COAI Business Office at **1-352-357-1676**

25 Years go

By Lauren Jurgensen

Recognize any of the faces from the May/June 1998 cover of *The New Calliope*? More than twenty joeys—each one a competitor in the various makeup competitions at the March 1998 COAI International Convention in St. Louis, Missouri—graced the cover. Check out the vault at www.mycoai.com to see if you know one of the cover models. Flip to page 21 to peruse a vibrant gallery of that year’s first, second, and third-place winners in every makeup category, or turn to page 19 to learn who won the other categories.

The issue is jam-packed with highlights and memories from the 1998 convention. Former COAI president Brenda “Flower” Marshall remarked on how busy, but productive, the convention managed to be. “Hashing out the business of this organization is very time-consuming and sometimes tedious,” she wrote. “It always amazes me that people from all over with different perspectives can come together and accomplish so much.” On page 10, you’ll find Cal Olson’s detailed minutes from the annual General Membership and spring COAI Board of Directors meetings that coincided with the convention.

COAI Director Dan “Dano” Lake published a handy guide for alleys interested in hosting future conventions. “Think lo-o-o-ng [term],” he wrote on page 16. “Convention planning has to start a couple of years in advance. The St. Louis joeys made our convention pitch [two years earlier] at the 1996 convention in Puerto Rico.” Host alleys should also assemble a strong committee led by a strong committee chair, said Dan, with members who not only trust each other but also work well together. Dan included several useful tips for how a host alley can manage hotel-related matters, monitoring budgets, and managing sub-committees, lecturers, and dealers.

David “Mr. Rainbow” Bartlett offered a positive outlook on clown education in spite of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus then-recent closure of the famous Clown College. In his article “Moving On,” which you can find on page 32, he wrote that “there is no lack of places to go to learn whatever you want to know ... Advanced Studies, Mooseburger U, LaughMakers Conferences, and Clown Camp [have become] superior educational experiences in preparing students for the future of clowning.”



The New Calliope is never without fresh tips for improving the creativity and success of one’s skits. On page 34, Puerto Rico’s Ellas “Blony” Miranda urged fellow joeys to remember that “simple ideas get the best results.” In other words, draw inspiration from the world around you. “Watch people when you go shopping, go to the movies, or when you’re doing your everyday things. Look at your personal experiences, or those of friends. Just imagine what a clown would do in the different situations you observe.”

Page 36 features Lee “Juggles” Mullally’s step-by-step guide to creating your own parade board. Meanwhile, Karen “Peppermint” Reinholt shares her sage advice for navigating the awkward situation of having to suddenly cancel a birthday party appearance.

We hope you’ll visit the vault to enjoy these classic issues of *The New Calliope*—whether that’s to discover something new or take a stroll down memory lane.

TNC

REGISTER TODAY FOR
COAI'S 40TH ANNIVERSARY CONVENTION

Niagara Falls, New York www.coaicongvention.com May 13–17, 2024

Vent Figures

By Richard “Design-O” Smith

After a couple of my friends asked me why I started restoring ventriloquist figures, I decided to share my story.

To begin, I want to mention that ventriloquist figures are known as dummies or dolls. A person’s preferred term tends to depend on who they are in the ventriloquist world.

When I was still a child, my oldest brother decided to become a ventriloquist magician. His fascination began when he met a man who had a ventriloquist doll, after which he saved up to purchase his first doll. It wasn’t long before he upgraded to a more expensive one.

I have only vague memories of my brother’s doll. Unlike my brother, I wasn’t as interested in *using* ventriloquist dolls, but I did like the idea of giving them character and background stories. As an adult, I was online one day when I came across a woman who was selling a ventriloquist head. The head was in rough condition and missing one of its ears. Although the doll’s mechanisms were still working, they were crudely made. Its eyes were also rather tiny.

I decided to take a chance and buy it anyway. The woman was only selling the head, so this was not a complete ventriloquist doll. I have seen many dolls in my life but this one is unusually heavy and made from some sort of plastic. When it arrived, it did not have a ball at the bottom of its neck where the stick comes out. It was cut straight across and still had a stick in the middle. Inside of the head, the strings were arranged at different angles to control its movements. It also had side-to-side eye movement. You could move its mouth, but that was about it.

I decided I would restore the doll and give it new life. My first step was to remove the doll’s wig so that I could observe the shape of its head. Then I removed the head plate to take a closer look at its mechanisms. Next, I removed the little guy’s only ear so that I could carve two new ears for him. It took three attempts to finally get them to a nice shape.

The doll’s eyes were not working well when it arrived. In order to open them up, I carved around its eyes – made from wooden balls – which better exposed them. I repainted the white of the eyes, restored the blue irises, and added black pupils with a white highlight to give them a little more movement. Next, I sanded down the complete face and painted it the same way one would apply clown makeup. I started by giving it a white, auguste skin color, as well as a red-and-black outline. Finally, I worked on restringing the inside of the head until I got the controls in pretty good shape.

Because this little guy did not come with his original body, I had to search the internet for someone who could create one. I found a wood carver in Bavaria who was able to create wooden hands and a body for him. He constructed the body using what you could describe as a dowel and a wooden cage. It has a top shoulder piece outside boards, and there are dowels on the inside to give its body a flat shape on the bottom. This allows the dummy to sit on a platform.

Next, I covered the doll’s body with long strips of fabric and filled them with padding. The hands are attached to the arms, which are then stapled onto the doll’s shoulders. The legs are made using the same strips of fabric, and form the shape of a foot at



the bottom. I filled the legs and feet with padding and stapled them to the front of the body. I also had the wood carver carve the hands to give them the “open” expression that I desired. Each one of the fingers is separate. They have actual fingernails and all kinds of indents to make them look real. They’re also not painted, so that you can paint them whatever color you want once you receive them.

It took several weeks for the hands to be carved and shipped to the United States. When you order a custom body for a ventriloquist doll head, you need to know the exact size of the head in order to determine the proper body size. For this particular doll, the appropriate body size would need to be between a 3T and a 4T. I asked the wood carver to make the legs a little “full,” so that they would be the right scale for the size of the head. The gentleman did a great job creating the little guy.

I also gave the doll a professional clown nose. I had to cover the nose with cement to harden it and give it a particular shape. This involved using my Dremel tool to sand the cement-covered nose until it fit the face, after which I painted it and gave it some highlights.

I was finally ready to pick the doll’s hair style. I considered a variety of wigs in a variety of colors, and I photographed



him wearing each one. Then I shared the photos with my friends and asked them to tell me which one they liked best. Everyone liked the yellow wig. The yellow wig had to be custom created to fit the little guy, because wigs are really made for adult-size heads.

Let's talk about how I chose a costume for the doll. I wanted to give him a background story, in which he started out as a ventriloquist figure who had very little "life" left. He spent the last few years of his life wanting to be happy and to put smiles on the faces of children and adults alike. He had always dreamed of becoming a clown. Fortunately, this doll was sent to the right house (mine).

And that's how a little head, who had very little life remaining, managed to become a little boy clown. I named him LittleDesigno. He loves his best friend Greenie, an alien who came to this planet because his own planet had run out of their staple food (marshmallows). Given their friendship, I decided that LittleDesigno should have

a robot-themed costume. He will also have his own little doll character—a robot—in the future, so that they can go on adventures together. I haven't created his doll robot yet, but I've decided that it will wear a Chinese-style costume.

For LittleDesigno's costume, I started by giving him a shirt and a pair of socks. The next step was to create custom-made clown shoes. (I wanted to make sure that they were actual clown shoes, not regular shoes, because if you show up to a kid's party with a clown doll that isn't wearing clown shoes, the kids will say it's not a real clown!) I also knew that his outfit would need to be simple and not too complicated—something that a boy would want to wear. I gave him a pair of cuffed pants with a robot-patterned fabric trim down the sides. He has a simple vest with two star-adorned pockets and a yellow-and-silver trim, as well as two cuffs on the end of his sleeves to tie it all together.

LittleDesigno also needed a hat. Since all boys like to wear baseball hats, he has

one oversize-brim hat and one short-brim hat. He also needed a "fancy hat," as LittleDesigno puts it himself. I gave him a miniature hat that has a picture of his alien friend attached on the side. I felt that this detail would give his character a little bit of whimsy.

So, while I was working on all of this, LittleDesigno kept asking me, "Am I going to be alone? Am I going to be the only one?" I thought to myself, "You know what? He needs a little sister." Thankfully, I already had a character in mind named Penelope. Penelope is a little girl clown that was created for a young girl who was undergoing treatment for cancer. Well, wouldn't it be nice if I made Penelope into a ventriloquist doll so that she could give LittleDesigno some company?

I went online and found a brand-new ventriloquist head to create Penelope. It did not come with a body, so I would have to figure out how to make all the mechanisms work that go inside the

Continued on page 27

THE PRODUCER

Irvin Feld

BY RON SEVERINI

He had very limited eyesight but was an amazing visionary. He was a dream maker, natural motivator, and an unbelievably persuasive salesman. He was a consummate entertainment impresario and a theatrical giant in the world of show business. I thought he was a genius!

For many years, I reported directly to the owner and producer of Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey Circus, Mr. Irvin Feld. He was my boss. He was my mentor. He was like a father to me.

In April 1972, I was scheduled to appear in a live interview on *Good Morning America* in mid-town Manhattan. The limo was scheduled to meet me at the train yard at 33rd Street and 12th Avenue where the entire Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey Circus train was located. Mr. Irvin Feld, the producer of “THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH,” was also scheduled to appear. I was included in the interview because I was from New Jersey. The promotional angle was: “Hometown Jersey boy runs away from home, joins the circus, and makes good as a circus clown in the Big Apple.”

What we were really there to do was promote the opening of “THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH,” which would be at Madison Square Garden for a full two months.

It was a cold, damp, dreary day in New York City. After the limo picked me up, the driver drove me to the St. Moritz Hotel to pick up Mr. Feld. We were then driven to the ABC television studio. Upon arrival, we did the usual backstage introductions. The show’s director escorted us to a nice, but small, green dressing room. They applied makeup on Mr. Feld. I was already in my full clown makeup and costume. They put on our microphones and we were ready. The interview went great!

After the show, the segment producer asked if we could stay longer to tape additional segments for future promotional spots. Naturally, Mr. Feld agreed since it was national television exposure—but they soon informed us that we would need to wait three hours until the studio was available. Since the weather was terrible, we decided to wait inside our tiny green room. They brought us sandwiches, hot coffee, and donuts. There the two of us sat for three full hours, face to face, alone, together.

So, I decided to ask Mr. Feld if he would tell me about his show business career to date. For the next three hours, I listened to one amazing true story after another, with each episode more unbelievable than the last. I shall paraphrase below.

Mr. Feld said he was born in Hagerstown, Maryland to Russian immigrant parents. They operated a small clothing and home furnishing store. I chimed in that my parents also owned a small, local mom-and-pop grocery store in New Jersey, where I grew up and learned how to handle business with family-type customers. He stated he also spent much of his childhood in their family store, but didn’t like it. By age thirteen, he

was peddling goods door to door. After graduating high school, Mr. Feld became a full-time door-to-door salesman of all-purpose medical remedies. He said it was during that time when he attended and fell in love with his first circus. When he was an older teen in the 1930s, he actually started selling snake oil from a card table at various carnivals. He bragged that he bought each bottle for a nickel and sold each bottle for a dollar.

In the 1940s, after saving enough money, he and his brother Israel Feld operated their own drugstore in Washington, DC. Business was booming. They soon owned a chain of Super Cut Rate drug stores. They branched out, added a rock ‘n roll record section to every store, and eventually created several Super Music City record stores. During this period, he gained a stronger, inner confidence to predict which musical acts would sell best. I remember him boasting that he had a natural gift for picking performers who would later become big stars. As he shared this, his voice became more commanding and his demeanor more excited. I could feel the enormous sense of pride and confidence in his voice; I could tell he loved that time in his career. He was a great salesman and he was telling me his life story, but at the same time he was really selling me Irvin Feld.

He then explained it was a logical progression to start producing records and eventually booking the musical acts they were recording. As the Feld Brothers’ acts received more notoriety, their talent



Irvin Feld and Ron Severini at Ringling's Clown College. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

booking business expanded and needed much larger venues for the bigger crowds of fans. The US population was growing, the baby boomers were coming of age, and major cities across the country were constructing bigger indoor arenas to house additional touring entertainment

events. His timing was perfect. Rock 'n' roll music was exploding.

They promoted some of the top national tours: Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis, Bill Haley and the Comets, Bo Diddley, Fats Domino, The Everly Brothers, Dion and the Belmonts, and many other early

rock 'n' roll pioneers. He reminisced and shared a couple of personal stories of booking early Elvis Presley appearances with Colonel Tom Parker. Then, with a tear in his eye, he recalled details of the first tragedy in the history of rock 'n' roll. In early 1959, three of the biggest stars—*Buddy Holly*, *Ritchie Valens*, and *J.P. Richardson* (known as the *Big Bopper*)—were all killed in a plane crash near Clear Lake, Iowa. Unfortunately, this had been one of Mr. Feld's rock 'n' roll tours.

On a more positive note, he proudly shared his experience of finding a young fifteen-year-old singer in Canada by the



Ticket from the Feld brothers' Washington, D.C. concert of the Beatles.

INSPIRATION AND HUMOR

name of Paul Anka. Mr. Feld personally managed Paul's career and helped catapult him to super stardom. As an aside, he threw in this little mention of booking The Beatles at the District of Columbia Stadium (now RFK Stadium).

If that wasn't enough on their spinning turntables, during the 1950s and 1960s, the Feld brothers were booking most of the indoor arena engagements for Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. He pointed out the challenges of running such a massive operation and explained that the expenses to run and tour the world's largest circus were increasing every day. Payroll was ballooning for the army of roustabouts needed to set up and tear down the gargantuan canvas tent, city after city. Moving, feeding, and housing crews of hundreds of working men and hundreds of performers were losing the circus money. The circus was going deeper into debt, until eventually, the debt balloon burst. Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus played its last show under the canvas big top in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on July 16, 1956.

During that time, Mr. Feld kept trying to buy the Ringling Circus, but John Ringling North (then the current owner) refused to sell. However, with the circus in mammoth debt, Irvin and Israel, along with a business financial partner, Judge Roy Hofheinz (operator of the Houston Astrodome), ultimately arranged to purchase the Ringling circus from its owner. In grandiose fashion, Mr. Irvin Feld, Mr. Israel Feld, Judge Roy Hofheinz, and John Ringling North all flew to the Coliseum in Rome, Italy. The deal was signed on December 11, 1967,



Irvin Feld, Israel Feld, Judge Roy Hofheinz, and John Ringling North all flew to the Coliseum in Rome, Italy, to sign the contract for the Felds' acquisition of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus on December 11, 1967. PHOTO CREDIT: ISTOCK/KBARZYCKI

and for the first time within Ringling's hundred-year history, "The Greatest Show on Earth" was no longer owned by anyone connected with the Ringling family. Now, Mr. Feld was holding the steering wheel and the purse strings. He said it was one of the happiest days of his life.

He had to move fast and make the show profitable. First, he decided to strip away the tawdry freak show and sideshow. Next, he needed a star attraction. He found a German animal trainer by the name of Gunther Gebel-Williams, but Gunther was already working in the Williams Circus. So, what did Mr. Feld do? He acquired the entire Williams Circus and brought it all over to America from Germany!

To make the circus more youthful, he cut the forty-six-year-old average age in half, down to twenty-three. He traveled throughout Europe to find and contract young new acts. He quickly expanded and created a complete and separate second circus unit. One was named the "red unit" and the other was named the "blue

unit," each offering a completely different show. Each unit went on separate tours for a two-year period before returning to the winter quarters in Venice, Florida to create a brand-new show. This helped amortize annual expenses over a two-year period instead of a one-year tour. As a result, neither of the two units would be scheduled to return back to the same city with the same show within each two-year period; thus, each city would always see a brand-new circus edition.

And then he added, "When I purchased the circus, there were only thirteen remaining clowns and their average age was sixty-five. We knew they could fall down but we didn't know if they could get back up again. Since I now had two complete touring circuses, I needed more clowns, so I created Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Clown College in Venice, Florida! And that is how you got here, Ron!"

All I could say was "Wow!"

Pause, pause, pause—catch my breath! Breathe ...



I knew I was with a very powerful man in the entertainment industry. Show business was the business I had been in for the past eight years of my twenty-year life. It was what I loved and what I planned to do for the rest of my life. I leaned forward and looked Mr. Feld straight in the eye (just like my father instructed me to do if opportunity ever knocked for me), and said, "Mr. Feld, I'm a young guy. I'm a hard-working guy. I am a talented guy, and I know I am a very creative guy. If you give me 'opportunity' to grow and mentor me, I promise I will be a very faithful soldier to you, and I will stick with you for decades to come. Just believe in me, teach me, and give me the opportunity to learn and grow!"

And you know what? He did just that—and so did I!

In seven quick years, I went from being a student clown, to a new clown, to a professional clown. He then promoted me to Assistant Boss Clown, and then to Boss Clown. Next, he promoted me to Assistant Director of the Clown College, and eventually believed in me enough to promote me again when I was twenty-seven. I became the very first former graduate of the school to become the Dean and Director of the world-famous Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Clown College. I eventually invested a total of twenty years of my life with "THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH!"

I was the Dean of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Clown College for seven full years. Mr. Feld took tremendous interest in every facet of Clown College. It was his baby. Sometimes he would call me from whatever part of the world he was in, even if it was 3:00 a.m. my time. We'd speak for hours about every applicant he was interested in before we accepted anyone into his school. (You need to keep in mind that we only accepted and enrolled a maximum of sixty students a year from over six thousand annual applicants.) His attention to detail was impeccable. I always had to have the answers to every question he

would ask, and anticipate his questions before he asked them.

He would come down to Venice, Florida (the winter quarters of RBBB Circus and Clown College), so that he could be there for every opening day of every annual new school year. I would schedule a one-on-one private interview with each student for him to personally interview. Unfortunately, the day before the start of the 1984 Clown College, he had a stroke in the car and passed away that evening. That next day, I had to start the opening of the Clown College with sixty students ready to begin training. I had to smile on the outside, but I was crying on the inside. Privately, I cried for a long time.

I miss him dearly. He was like a father to me. He believed in me. He always did everything he said he would do. Sometimes we would talk for hours on the phone about clowning and Clown College and how and why things were the way they were, and how he envisioned them to be in the future. Yes, he was tough; yes, he was shrewd, but he was always fair and always honest. He was a workaholic; he was a perfectionist; he demanded that I pay enormous attention to every little detail; he tested me; he pushed me; he scolded me. Any day could have been my last. He knew how to encourage and motivate. He showed me what greatness looked like. He explained how vital it was to be prepared for anything in the circus. He taught me the importance of being able to see into the future and instinctively sense when something was going to happen before it actually did happen. He inspired me to reach higher than I ever envisioned I could reach—and I loved it all!

I was fortunate and honored to have worked so closely with him on a daily basis. I was a lucky young man to have had such a dynamic and inspiring mentor so early in my career. He was a dream-maker to so many artists, and he certainly made my dreams come true! "I got to tell you," as Mr. Irvin Feld used to

say, "those were the happiest and most exciting days of my life!"

Here are a few other choice quotations I remember hearing Mr. Irvin Feld say:

"Ron, always remember that it is Show Business, and 'show' always comes first!"

"Ron, remember—you don't work for me, you work with me!"

"Ron, I want to ask you—can you handle this particular job? Because, if you can't, I will get somebody else that can!" (To which I would always say: "Yes sir! Absolutely! I can handle it!")

"I don't care how much it costs. Find me funny clowns! However, remember, anyone can create anything with an unlimited amount of money. A true artistic genius can create a masterpiece on a dime!"

"You don't have a budget! Spend whatever it costs to get me the funniest clowns in the world for my circus—but not one dollar more!"

"What do you know? I want to know everything new that you know since the last time we talked!"

"If it's not absolutely necessary, then don't do it!"

"I don't care about that—are they funny?"

"I'm busier than a one-armed wallpaper hanger!"

"It's the best thing since sliced bread!"

"It's the worst thing I've ever seen in my life!"

"Every show that I do has got to be the talk of the town!"

"Ron, always remember, this ain't the best show around. This is The Greatest Show on Earth!"

"Now, let's get to work!"

Ron Severini is the author of Ringling Remembered: Through the Eyes of a Circus Clown, from which this story is excerpted, with additional photos from Mr. Severini's collection. You can find his book on Amazon. For more stories, visit his blog at www.theSeveriniCompany.com.

33 Things Children Enjoy

By David Ginn

The key to entertaining kids is to understand what they like, what makes them laugh, and what holds their interest.

With that in mind, allow me to share with you seven more things that children enjoy at my comedy magic shows, and hopefully in yours – magic, clowning, or otherwise.

The more you include these elements in your show, the more that children will enjoy the show and *you*. Keep in mind that children enjoying you, and having fun themselves, go hand in hand. At the same time that you're entertaining everyone in the room (including yourself!), you can convince more people to employ you for their parties and events at schools, libraries, church pre-schools, picnics, and other kid-related or family functions.

Study this list to see how it applies to you and your performance. Without further ado, here are my next seven tips for entertaining children, in no particular order.

19. Big Objects. Children love oversized objects. I use giant combs, toothbrushes, scissors, sunglasses, and even a giant diaper pin in my shows. My clown friend John Guthrie in Colorado uses a six-foot toothbrush in a dental health program, hiding it inside of a ski bag (a normal thing for Colorado) to carry it into the school. Kids love it when he pulls it out and asks a small child to try waving it like a magic wand. Not only that, but they remember what he tells them to do – brush their teeth!

Magician Dennis Dowhy shared the following website with me, which is packed with giant props that clowns and magicians can use in their shows. Check it out at www.greatbigstuff.com. You will see oversized ketchup bottles, Coke cans, gadgets, toys, all sorts of stuff. Let your imagination run wild, but be sure to pose this question for every prop: How can I use it in my show to entertain or educate children?

20. Mishearing. One of my favorite techniques. Whatever a kid tells me in one ear (my ear) comes out of my mouth different. I ask a kid how many jellybeans he took out of a can I offered him during my Snake Can routine. He says "None." Out of my mouth immediately comes: "Nine? You ate *nine*!" The words "not any" always become "*Twenty*!" I continue to look for ways to purposefully use mishearing on for laughs. It's another version of making a mistake, but specifically using words. When you ask the kids to shout magic words and they say "Abracadabra," you can quickly reply, "*Have a banana?*" Are you trying to make a monkey out of me?" Or as Steve Taylor says when



Istock: Alex_Bond

they shout Hocus Pocus, "What? *Hokapuntas*? Yes, I saw that Disney movie about the Indian girl Hicapuntas!" Keep the "mishearing" technique in your mind, ready for use if you ad-lib in your show. Being aware of it can help you think, work, and be funny on your feet.

21. Color-Fill Your Magic. The most boring magic act I ever witnessed was performed in black and white. Every prop, costume, table, silk, box, animal – in a live show at a convention – was *all* black and white. I hated it! Children love *color*. Color is creative and warm and wonderful and *fun*. Fill your magic act or clown show with colorful props!

22. Music Makes for Fun. These days, children are surrounded by music day and night. I often use music that the kids have heard on radio and TV in my live shows at schools and libraries, because they are already familiar with that music. It becomes a *plus* for me and my show, and makes the kids have a happier time. I even encourage them to clap their hands in rhythm with the music during certain tricks, which sometimes misdirects them from what I am really doing. Hmm, that sounds like a future line of investigation. Three hints of warning: **(1)** Don't use music with questionable lyrics in your shows, and if you're in doubt, check it out with someone who knows. All it takes to hurt your bookings is one teacher, parent, or librarian complaining about what music you used. **(2)** Don't play your music too loud for the room you're working. If you see kids with hands over their ears, or teachers wincing, turn down the volume. **(3)** Don't play music at the same time that you're talking. I personally cannot stand

it when performers talk while music is playing in the background. My ear is distracted by the music, even when I want to hear what the performer is saying. My rule is that if I'm talking, the music is not playing, and if music is playing, I'm not talking. Personally, I use some type of music near the beginning of every school and library show, and I almost always close with a musical number – that is, magic performed to music. I do not always use music in pre-school shows. It depends on what tricks and routines I am doing in that situation.

One last note about music: Magicians and clowns are constantly wondering about music copyrights and licensing. According to Toby Travis' book *The Professional Amateur*, if you are working schools and churches (and I would have to think libraries fit into this category), you are exempt from fees due to the educational nature of the situation, as long as the show is sponsored by the school, church, or (I believe) library. Home parties may also be exempt, but Toby says this is currently a gray area. My response to this is, "Who's going to police home birthday parties?" On the other hand, if you are working a theatre or other public venue, it is usually the promoter's responsibility to obtain a license for the use of the music in that place. Beyond this, if you are performing in comedy clubs, banquets, restaurants, corporate functions, fundraisers, or civic events, you must obtain a music license from ASCAP (714-586-1632) or BMI (310-659-9109). Of course, a sure way around all of this is to use some of the copyright-free music available in the magic and clown markets.

23. Embellish Your Routines. Take basic tricks and expand them using accessory props, costuming, jokes, and audience helpers. In my *Magic and Monsters for Kids I Love* book (and you can see this on my video *Live Kidbiz 4: Storytelling with Magic*) I spend nearly

twelve minutes doing a girl-in-guillotine routine which could last one minute. However, I add to it with a very strange conehead assistant, a towel, a pillow, a bucket, a chopped-off head (it's funny!), and a lot of corny lines that family audiences really like! In the 1980s when I performed my full evening show across the southeastern United States, this routine was one of the highlights. Another routine in the show (you can find this one in *School Show Presentation*) was, in essence, a wristwatch that vanished and reappeared elsewhere. The basic prop was a Tote Bag Change Bag, but I embellished the routine with six kids on stage, six comedy hats, a nest of cans, a spring snake jumping out of a peanut butter jar, and myself accidentally breaking an audience member's watch – plus lots of corny comedy. The audience member, by the way, did eventually get his watch back, but only after ten minutes of clean comedy. For the most part in my career, you will never read about me or see me doing "just the trick" as it came out of the cereal box. I must add to it, fix it, change it, blow it up, make it more than it is—adding my personality stamp. Embellish your tricks and make them full-fledged routines.

24. On Your Back! There is something *fun* and *special* and *exciting* about a vanished object appearing on an audience helper's back, or even on the magician's back. Thank you, Edwin Hooper of Supreme Magic fame, for teaching me this over thirty years ago. I will never stop using it! This technique is what inspired my "Card on Back" routine nearly three decades earlier. See the *Kidbiz* book for the whole routine. It still works! I've used this in Farmyard Frolics, Hoppy the Frog, Pet Store Pranks, Super Frog from Sammy Smith, and a dozen other ways. Two important hints: **(1)** Make it a point to change the tape after *every show*, or you'll be sorry. Used tape ends up falling off the kid's cloth shirt, or yours. I use several O-rings of duct tape now because it works better than masking tape (and



Istock: TopVectors

cellophane tape doesn't work at all). *Do not* use the hook-or-pin-on-back method. You might eventually stick the kid in the back, and then you have trouble! Use tape. **(2)** After the audience sees, let's say, the *frog* hanging on the boy's back – and you finally see it too (because you've looked every which way except there), purposely turn the kid with his back *toward* the crowd and let them *see you remove it*. This simply looks better instead of having him face the audience and you pulling it off his back without them seeing you remove it. Trust me on this one, just do it that way! In my *Hawaii* video, you can see a gecko lizard vanish from a box and reappear. Not in another box as planned, but on a boy's back. In that particular case, I "cheated" by attaching a plastic gecko lizard (from Woolworth's in Honolulu) to the back of a Hawaiian shirt using a Velcro tab. That allows me to remove the gecko at the end. Since I have both kids dress in Hawaiian shirts, I simply had one shirt over the other on a chair back, and the gecko is covered up. The vanish of a duplicate gecko was a simple matter of a turn-over pencil or cigar box. Watch the video now and see – it's on his back!

25. Tell Stories. Children love stories. Stories read, stories told, stories acted

HOW-TO

out. Magical stories are fun, and especially stories that involve animals. For years, I was using and telling stories in my magic shows without even realizing it. Why? Just because they were not of the “Once Upon a Time” variety. They were and still are woven into the tricks. How many of you saw me do the King Kong version of Forgetful Freddie years ago? It’s on *Live Kidbiz 4* if you wish to take a look. Here’s a trick that is little more than a vanishing head (metal or wood) which reappears when you pop a balloon. Yet *because* of the story I was able to “milk it” for five minutes! I even wrote a King Kong Rap to fit in with the patter. (Hey, it worked!) Oh, you wanna

hear it? Listen: “My name is King Kong, I am your man / I come from the jungle with a brand-new plan/ I step on your car, I step on your house / I squash you flat like a little mouse ...”

It went something like that (it’s been twenty years). Check out the video. Back to the point: One of the best ways to embellish and fill out your magic, comedy, or clown routines is to add stories. Steve Taylor took this same basic trick – “Forgetful Freddie” – and created the best version ever. It’s called Airhead Rudy, and the storyline is about a boy who didn’t read and lost his head because he wasn’t using his imagination and creativity. When he started reading

and learning, he got his head back. In this routine, kids enjoy the story and the magic fun, but they hear a solid message about the importance of reading in our lives. The story and point are so simple that kids “get it” and teachers appreciate it. Storytelling! Try it. As Fetaque Sanders said years ago, “Patter packs better than props!” But I say, “If we only used patter, we’d be comedians and not clowns or comedy magicians.”

But there is much to be said for both sides of this coin. Me? I’ll continue to embellish my magic with stories, both real and exaggerated. **TNC**

(To be continued)

The Home of Kidshow Magic
GinnMagicShop.com

Free Books
Free Reads



200 Free
Videos

All New Website!



SPSmagic.com
Big Laughs for Little People

DISCOVER MORE THAN
**100 PROPS, BOOKS,
AND AUDIO-VIDEO
PROGRAMS**
FOR
**KID-SHOW
AND FAMILY
ENTERTAINERS!**

spsmagic.com



MOOSEBURGER CAMP 2024
August 5th thru 11th 2024
with special guest Randy Christensen

- Polish your performances for skits.
- Laugh & learn with clowns like you!
- Build props for parades and walk-arounds.
- Sign up now and make month payments.

MOOSEBURGER.COM (320) 963 6277



CIRCUS JUVENTAS

TRAINING TOMORROW'S CIRCUS STARS

BY BETH CEDARHOLM

It's a typical Thursday evening at Circus Juventas, in St. Paul, Minnesota. Two porters grip a Russian bar while an acrobat flips into the air, then firmly lands back on the bar. Aerial silk artists fall from ropes suspended from the ceiling, gracefully unwinding themselves from pink and green silks, and bungee trapeze acrobats dangle from swing-like apparatuses. It feels like a rehearsal for a *real* circus, and it is. However, these diligent and skillful artists are all youth who belong to the largest circus arts training program in North America.

Circus Juventas was founded in 1994 by circus performers Dan and Betty Butler. Their mission is to train youth, as young as two years old, in an array of circus arts while in a non-competitive setting. Today the nonprofit program serves more than twenty-five hundred youth, ranging in age from two to eighteen, under a twenty-one-thousand-square-foot permanent big top. They are taught by a staff of more than thirty-five circus arts instructors, with many of those instructors boasting professional circus experience on their resumes.

Since the program's inception, many alumni have gone on to professional careers with Cirque du Soleil, Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey, The Wallenda Family, Bello Nock, The Royal Hanneford Circus, Cirque Mechanics, Cirque Eloize, and many other professional circus organizations. Circus Juventas, in collaboration

Top: Recent youth program graduate Zeke Pranis-Ricci performs in clown character while showing off his unicycle skills. Bottom: Fifteen-year-old Aidan Bowman, of River Falls, Wisconsin, pauses during rehearsal to smile for the camera.



INSPIRATION AND HUMOR

with Cirque Du Soleil, now offers a two-year professional program, as well. The program is geared toward circus-bound individuals and those who have aged out of the youth program, who aspire to take their talents to the professional level.

Aidan Bowman, a high school sophomore from River Falls, Wisconsin, has been training at Circus Juventas since he was two and a half years old. He has been told that he was a clumsy little kid, and by the time he was two and a half, his frequent falls had resulted in several facial stitches. “My parents realized that I was going to keep injuring myself if they didn’t do something to fix it,” says the fifteen-year-old, who is much more graceful now than he was during his toddler years. His parents learned about Circus Juventas from friends and enrolled him in an entry-level preschool class. “Here I am, almost thirteen years later, and I’m still doing it,” says Aidan.

Aidan rehearses six days a week, for a weekly total of eighteen hours. His training leaves little time for other activities. Aidan plays French horn in the high school band and helps out at home by doing laundry, yard work, and cooking. However, he devotes most of his time away from school to Circus Juventas. Aidan is busy this summer as he prepares for one of the highlights on the Circus Juventas calendar: the summer show, which features the school’s advanced students. This year’s summer show is called “Excalibur.” It has a medieval King Arthurian-theme, with chivalrous knights, jousting, a dragon, and even an archer who will use her feet to release a fire-lit bow & arrow. In the production, Aidan will entertain audiences with performances on the teeterboard and Russian bar, as well as part of a two-person horse puppet in a theatrical jousting scene.

While the spring show at Circus Juventas features all of the program’s



A Circus Juventas student prepares their next move while the rest of the team practices in front of the show’s medieval-themed set pieces.

students, the summer show is exclusively for the more advanced students. This is the first year that Aidan will be performing in the summer show.

The Russian bar, one of Aidan’s specialties, involves a gymnastics-style beam that is held by two porters, while an acrobat performs on the beam. Aidan’s role is to keep the bar under the gymnast’s feet, and to provide the power to propel the gymnast—or “flyer”—into the air. The teeterboard, which resembles a playground seesaw, propels acrobats into the air when another performer jumps on the opposite end. Aidan’s usual role is to act as a base, catching the acrobat who is propelled into the air. Aidan is also involved with hand-to-hand, in which he also serves as a base. “In hand-to-hand,” says Aidan, “I throw the other person around. They go off into a different position, and we do catch-and-release tricks.”

Rob Dawson, a Circus Juventas coach, manager, and director, whose experience includes twenty-one years of performing and coaching with Cirque du Soleil, praises the structure of the Circus Juventas program. “These kids train so hard,” he says. “They *really* want to get better—not necessarily because they want to be professionals, but because they want to get better roles in the shows they do. It’s fun to see the five-year-olds aspiring to be the twelve-year-olds, and the twelve-year-olds aspiring to be the eighteen-year-olds.”

“It’s a huge self-confidence booster and a great athletic experience for youth,” continues Dawson. “Being on stage is hard. I see the transformation from being super shy on the first day of class to seeing them performing in front of an audience of a thousand. It’s such a different way of building that confidence than traditional sports.”

Aidan is one of those teens who never felt he fit into traditional sports. He tried gymnastics, but his mother, Mel, says the environment wasn’t very welcoming. He tried swimming, which he enjoyed, but he didn’t have the competitive edge to fit in.

Aidan's father, Chad, says that one of the great things about circus performance is that performers are not vying against another team. "Everyone's helping everyone, and everyone's working at getting better." He adds that it's easy for students to find something that they want to do, because circus performance has so many options. "You can pick something new to do and progress, and if you really like it, you can continue to progress to a higher level. If you decide you don't like it, you can try something totally different." He adds that unlike the more sport-like gymnastics, which demands a certain body type, there is no "circus cookie-cutter body."

Dawson, who has been on staff at Circus Juventas for two-and-a-half years, says young students start at level 0. They work their way up to more challenging courses as they master skills. Safety is paramount, and while dangling from the ceiling from a bungee swing may look dangerous to an outsider, he notes that the coaching and rigging staff are top-notch. "Students have been watching the big students do these things for so long that it takes away their internal fear."

Zeke Pranis-Ricci, who just graduated from the youth program at Circus Juventas, was seven when he enrolled in summer camp at Circus Juventas after attending one of their summer shows. "It was amazing, and I loved it from the start," says the eighteen-year-old, who is a spring 2023 graduate of St. Paul Conservatory for the Arts. Now he plans to continue his pursuit of the circus arts through the professional program at Circus Juventas, and hopes to eventually go pro. Zeke says he is already "sort of" participating in the professional program. At the time of this interview, he was rehearsing for a June show at the Al. Ringling theater in Baraboo, Wisconsin, with other members of the Circus Juventas Professional Program. At the Baraboo show, Zeke said he would be performing a unicycle act in his clown character.

From the beginning, Zeke says that clowns—The Marx Brothers, Charlie Chaplin, Mr. Bean, and Buster Keaton, all of whom he watched religiously with his grandfather—have inspired his entertainment style. Now, as part of the school's Professional Program, he hopes to resurrect Circus Juventas' clowning program by teaching classes about circus clowning. While Circus Juventas has not offered clowning classes in recent years, past guest instructors have included Barry Lubin and Bello Nock.

Zeke says he has watched as circus clowning has shifted away from clowns with makeup and red noses toward "makeup-less comedians." He would like to see a return to more traditional circus clown acts that can entertain audiences while crews are setting up rigging, so that "audiences aren't bored out of their minds." He'd also like to see a return of the lost art of sorrowful Russian clowning, because "clowns are supposed to represent humanity, and while clowns can be very happy, they can also be sad." One thing is certain: When Zeke reintroduces clowning to students at Circus Juventas, "there will *definitely* be red noses."

As far as professional circus aspirations, Aidan (the fifteen-year-old student at Circus Juventas), says it's yet to be determined if he will attempt to make a career out of circus performing. He understands that circus performing isn't something that one can do forever, so he will definitely apply to colleges and get a college education at some point. But, if the possibility of going professional presents itself to him, he would jump at the chance. "If I'm getting really good at something, and the person I'm doing it with says 'let's go professional,' I probably wouldn't say 'no' to that."

For now, Aidan has two goals. The first goal is to have a successful summer show. The second goal is to continue getting better at what he does. "To keep yourself up there *with* the advanced kids, you need to keep improving with the advanced kids," he says. "I'll continue to work along

with them, getting better with them until I graduate. And at that point, it's kind of like ... we'll see what happens."

You can find more information about Circus Juventas at www.circusjuventas.org. **TNC**



Our Good Cheer List

Please take a moment to spread a few words of good cheer with a card or note to one of these members.

Ruth "Sweet Sue" Hoppe
Parkview Manor
516 13th St. Room 111
Wallman, IA 52366

Miriam "Senorita Soto" Kleinberger
2 Maple Lane North
Loudonville, NY 12211

Richard "Design-O" Smith
97 Grafton Street, Back Door
Shrewsbury, MA 01545-5646

Fran "Cuddles" Smith
St. Joseph's Manor
6448 Main St
Trumbull, CT 06611

Good Cheer Chair:

Bonnie Corcia
bonkygbird@gmail.com
732-718-5840

BUT I DON'T WANT TO CHANGE!

By Tricia “Pricilla Mooseburger” Manuel

I’ve had my share of changes in the past few years—and I went kicking and screaming into a lot of them! Moving Mooseburger Camp to a different location was a big change, but it was necessary to keep the camp affordable. Keep reading to learn how that worked out!

Whether we like it or not, change is inevitable. We have seen this happen in the clown world over the past few decades. When I got started in clowning in the early eighties, circus clowning was in its heyday. Hometown clowns could make a good living being a birthday party clown on the weekends. Company picnics were big business, as well. Clowns were covered from head to toe with no skin showing. Everyone wore a wig and clown shoes. There were countless vendors available for costumes, clown shoes, props, and magic. It was a clown paradise.

As the internet took over our lives, things began to change. I really don’t need to go into all of that, do I? Clowning took another hit when the media latched on to the scary clown phenomenon. Scary clowns became big business. The art of clowning began to change.

The changing of an art form. I tend to look forward. How can we work with what we have now? As clowns of the seventies and eighties started aging out of the shrinking birthday party market, I saw some interesting trends. Clowns now had more time for volunteer performing. We see teenagers and young adults dealing with self-imposed



clown phobias. Clowns who used to perform in schools are given the boot. Funny that it’s the adults who are “scared,” not the children.

Those of us who are too stubborn to quit have now moved over to care centers, and those people love us! Library shows are still popular. We do need to show the committee who hires that we are educational and friendly, but it can be done! The Red Nose Reader program, which you can learn about at www.red-nosereader.org, is steadily growing across the country and Canada.

The look of clowning is changing, too. For example, you can choose whether to wear a wig. You can still be a full white-face or just wear a red nose! That is a good thing. I like the diversity that has come with change, as well as the diversity in costuming. You can be all dolled up in polka dots and stripes, or you can be more theatrical. As clown educators and performers, we now have more tools in our toolbox.

In the past, you needed to do a twenty-five minute magic show and finish with balloons. Now you can do face painting, origami, bubble blowing, story time, puppets, and so much more! Clowns have their own Facebook Live performances! I love that. Mooseburger even has a monthly e-Alley to educate, entertain, and keep clowns connected. You can sign up at www.mooseburger.com.





Tricia Manuel and daughter Julia Swanson clowning around to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Moose Camp.

Here is the best part: the young people are starting to find us again! At this year's Mooseburger camp, we had twenty-four new people attend our Clowning 101 course. These folks were in their twenties on up! We had a "scare" clown who started out working in haunted houses, but wanted to learn more about the art of clowning. I asked them to come as students to the art of clowning, and it was an easy sell. "If you are really interested in clowning, come to camp," I told them. "We will teach you how to have fun all year round, not just scare people one month out of the year." They were amazing students! Some of our new clowns

had only put on makeup and costumes to post pictures on the internet. It had never occurred to them that they could actually perform. Their joy was palpable as they walked off stage after their All Star Clown Show performance. There is a world outside of the internet!

So, why all the Moose Camp references? Is this just a shameless plug for my camp? Not really. But one of the changes I didn't mention yet is the vanishing clown conventions. One year I was on the road for a hundred and eighty days as I traveled to clown festivals and conventions. Last year I only attended two. As a clown vendor and educator, it has

become harder to turn a profit. Of course we love what we do, but bills need to get paid. Expenses have gone up and returns have gone down. Mooseburger Camp is my main exposure to clowns from around the United States and Canada. I really get to know these folks better than I would at a convention, since I talk to each and every one of them for at least thirty minutes before they even arrive at camp. I get to ask people why they want to be a clown. No matter what, the answer is pretty much the same: they want to give back. They have always wanted to be a clown and now is their chance. They found out that there is more to it than the makeup, and they want to learn more. I think the future of clowning is bright!

Oh, and the changes at Moose Camp. I was fearful of the cabins versus individual rooms, but folks got to know each other quicker and built friendships faster. I was afraid of all the new teaching spaces, but all of them worked out even better than the old spaces. I was worried about moving the All Star Clown Show from a big-town Civic Center to a small-town high school auditorium, but the stage was a fabulous experience for my clownies, and the town folks showed up!

The campers had so much fun that they signed up in record numbers for next year's camp. That is a good sign for all of us in the clown world. My daughter loves to remind me that 98 percent of the things you worry about don't happen. I think we need to stop worrying about the changes in clowning and love where we are right now.

As Winnie the Pooh likes to say, "Today is my new favorite day [in clowning]!" **TNC**

Tricia Manuel is the unmistakable Pricilla Mooseburger. She is the founder of Pricilla Mooseburger Originals, Mooseburger Clown Arts Camp, and the nonprofit Red Nose Readers. Learn more at www.mooseburger.com



WHAT COULD POSSIBLY GO WRONG?

By Beth “Pickles” Cedarholm

ARTWORK: ISTOCK



The following are stories from COAI members about real-life clown blunders and tales of woe when gigs didn't go quite as expected. While these performers endured some impossibly bad situations, they soldiered on, gleaned some tidbit of wisdom from their negative experience, and becoming better—and wiser—entertainers.



Regina “Cha Cha” Wollrabe

I was working a company picnic one summer, and I had a piece of hard candy in my mouth. As I was clowning around and being funny, I took a breath and suddenly the candy was blocking my airway. I literally could not breathe. I knew that I was in trouble and tried to figure out how to tell somebody what was happening to me.

I pointed at myself, but people just started laughing. I even showed signs like an umpire (“Strike, you're out!”) while shaking my head (“No!”) to try to communicate that it wasn't funny and that I needed help.

There was more laughter. I stomped my big clown feet in a panic and paced a couple of steps, realizing that people thought I was just



Istock: Jirkaejc

being funny. Eventually, I put my hands under my sternum and did the Heimlich maneuver on myself. The candy came flying out of my mouth and landed on the lawn. Luckily, it didn't hit anyone.

What I learned from this experience is simple: Don't suck on candy when you're clowning. Because we are clowns, people may think that we're just putting on an act when, in reality, we're in trouble. It's best not to risk a choking incident.

Patricia “Priscilla Mooseburger” Manuel

I finally got the chance to be in the most iconic of circus clown gags: The Firehouse Gag! This gag dates back to when the circus was under the Big Top. A house is on fire and the clowns come to put it out. Clowns jump out of the burning building, and there's lots of great slapstick humor.

Being the low clown on the totem pole, I was often asked to stand in or substitute. When they cast who would perform in the Firehouse Gag, I didn't get a spot and felt really disappointed. I would have done anything to get in that routine—short of pulling the fire wagon around the track. So, when veteran clown Tammy Parish left the show to teach Clown College down in Florida, I was thrilled to learn I would get a shot!

The gag was really simple. Fireman Kenny Ahern (filling in for Jimmy Graham, who was also away and teaching at Clown College) would run out and stick his head through one of the firehouse windows. I followed behind him with a ladder on wheels. I pretended not to see him, then hooked the ladder to his shoulders as he stuck his head inside the house. When he pulled his head out of the house, his helmet was on fire. He would back up and run around while I was still on the ladder, dragging me behind him while I tried to blow out the fire. Then I would jump off of the ladder and enter the house for my next bit.

The next bit required me to quickly remove my fire hat and jacket while I was inside of the house. I was wearing a two-piece costume under my jacket. The top layer of the costume was a dress, and the bottom layer was clown underwear, tights, short bloomers, and a top. The dress was a tear-away with a strap hooked to the back. I had to climb on top of the house and then, once I was standing on the very skinny platform, I would stretch out my arms and prepare to jump onto a net that several clown firemen were holding. Before I jumped, the dress would rip away to show my clown underwear. I would make the appropriate scream, try to cover myself, and then jump onto the net. (I could also talk about how the clowns who were holding the net were used to five-foot-two Tammy versus five-foot-eight Tricia, and bounced me off the



ground as a result. Thanks, guys! But I digress.)



Istock: Trankvilizator

Kenny's job was to put Coleman fuel into the tube that was on top of the hat. Bill Machtel was inside the house, and his job was to light the tube on fire. Jimmy

Graham told Kenny to fill the tube. But what he neglected to tell him was to then empty it out, so that the wicks inside were wet but not too wet. Kenny was as excited as I was to be in the big number, so he filled the tube to the top and carefully put the hat on his head.

Here's what happened: When Kenny stuck his head inside the house, he spilled all the extra fuel. Bill didn't notice and lit the hat, which caught the inside of the house on fire. I dutifully did my part, carefully putting the ladder on Kenny's shoulders. When Kenny pulled his head out the *whole hat* was on fire! I grabbed it, pulled it off his head and dumped the rest of the fuel on my fire coat, catching it on fire. Then I ripped off my coat and dress and ran off in my clown underwear. Luckily, none of us were hurt, but Kenny *did* have the bangs of his wig burned off! Our guardian angels should get overtime pay!

No one seemed too concerned about us. Don't miss your next number, the show must go on!

Carol "Cookie" Meyer

This happened a few years ago. It was a beautiful October day, and I was driving through the awesome Florida countryside to perform at a little girl's first birthday party. I had booked the party about two weeks in advance, and I was supposed to perform a magic show and twist balloons. The theme was Minnie Mouse.

I reconfirmed with the child's father the day before, so everything was set. I



was feeling happy as I traveled past orange groves and swampland to reach the party.

Upon arriving, I discovered that the party was not at a private home like I thought, but at a Boy's and Girl's Club building with an adjacent parking lot.

I was early, so I put on my clown shoes and walked up the long sidewalk to enter through the front door. The receptionist told me that the party would take place in the large room on the left side of the building.

Returning to my car to unload my equipment, I was thinking about what I needed—magic tricks, balloons, pump, etc.—when I sensed someone watching me from behind. A man was standing there, looking at me in amazement. He said, "I can't believe you are here." He had tears in his eyes and looked very sad.

The man said that his family was having a memorial service for his brother who had passed away. He asked me if I would visit with the family.

I explained that I was there to perform at a child's birthday party, but he continued to beg me to visit with the family. He said that his brother loved clowns and had owned an extensive collection of clown memorabilia.

He begged me to visit with the family. Again, I explained that I was there for the birthday party, but I agreed to stop by for a few minutes. The memorial was located on the right side of the building.

You could have heard a pin drop when I entered the room. As he led me to the



Istock: Valent_ru

front, I said hello to the people who were standing by some tables. There was a large collection of clown memorabilia on those tables, which the family had carefully arranged. His brother's ashes, as well as a picture of his brother, was on a table in the center. The man was very proud to show me his brother's various clown figurines. He told me that he couldn't believe I was there, and that seeing me brought him peace.

It was a surreal experience. The people in the room were sad, yet smiling, when I left.

To this day, I don't know if I should have visited that memorial service or not. Who knows. But the man in the parking lot seemed to think so.

I walked down the long hall to the Minnie Mouse birthday party, where a family was celebrating their baby girl's first birthday.

That building held many people: people who were celebrating the start of a new life, and people who were saying goodbye to their brother.

I prayed for both families as I drove home. **TNC**

Do you want to share a tale of woe, a lesson learned, or another "What Could Possibly Go Wrong" story? Send it to Beth "Pickles" Cedarholm at clownypickles@gmail.com. All entries are subject to editing for clarity and length.

WHAT I'VE LEARNED FROM CLOWNING

By Connie "Punkin" Morrow

I started my clowning journey in 1996, and was excited to learn everything there was to know about clowning.

At the time, my sister was the manager at a large, well-known thrift store. We started out by doing some jobs for them. From there, we clowning at the local county fair, which eventually led to clown school. We learned so much from the school—balloons, face painting, makeup, magic, gags, costumes, the list goes on.

Soon, we were both cleared to do parties, where I learned so much more than just clowning. I also joined my local alley.

Traveling to events taught me how to navigate and find places in the area that I didn't frequent. Before I got a GPS, I had to rely on MapQuest and a paper map. Not only did I learn the basics of clowning, but I also learned the lay of the land. My first two clowning lessons.

One of my parties was for a young autistic girl. She didn't verbally communicate that much, but she was smart as a whip. I had just gotten a new "boombox" and wasn't sure how it worked. Did you know that little girl figured it out? I was amazed! When I left, she actually said, "Thank you, Punkin." Her mother looked at me with tears in her eyes. I couldn't see her very well because I had tears in my eyes, too. This led me to take a course about autism, which taught a lot, and I can now pretty much recognize the signs. That's the third thing I learned from clowning.

I was later asked to perform at a one-year-old's birthday. A few of my clown friends told me not to take the gig because a one-year-old can't do anything. But, after giving it some thought, I realized there would be older kids there, too. So, *I did it!* And I'm glad I did. But this gave me another idea, which I'll share with you in another article.

In 2012, I joined an organization where my husband was a member. It was called the Community Emergency Response Team. Our goal was to be helpful to first responders in the event of a disaster. I took a lot of FEMA tests and obtained several certifications. Especially in shelters and how to react to children who have gone through a disaster. I was also on CERT's Shelter Team, learned basic first aid and CPR, and learned how to use an AED. This was another lesson in clowning. If something ever happened, not only could I clown at the shelter, but I could now help as a CERT member.

I learned another lesson by working with children who have disabilities or cancer. That brought me to Camp Good Days and Special Times, an organization that hosts fun events for kids with cancer or who have a parent or sibling with cancer. They take day trips and do things that can give them happiness while taking their minds off their troubles. I became a counselor for them. Not only that, but I'm the clown for their Jr. Camp Days. Another lesson learned.

Working with the elderly at assisted living centers took things in a different direction. This was less about learning and more about seeing how the oldsters have fun, and don't think of themselves as old. As I grow older, I hope I can be like them! I



clown for them often and even did a Red Hat Society event once!

The nursing homes were another lesson. When I did my first one, I wasn't sure how to act. But then I thought about my mother, who was bedridden and living with us. What kinds of things did she like to do? I quickly acclimated myself to making the elderly laugh and have fun.

Our local librarian was a source of learning, too. Watching her tell stories taught me how to up my own storytelling game.

Everything I've described has been important to me and made me a better clown. But the most amazing thing I've learned is how clowns are like a family. My clown family was there for me when my mom passed, sending cards and emails to help me through the bad times. When my sister was ill with liver cancer, my clown friends sent her cards and were there for me when she passed. When Jim "Donuts" Donoughe had a vertigo attack at MACA, John Kral, Lorice Bolde, and I were all in the men's room with him—John putting cold compresses on his neck while Lorice and I found a wheelchair to take him to his room. I stayed with Jim in case he needed me, and Lorice and Tina Van Wormer brought me lunch because I hadn't eaten all day. Meanwhile, Alene Kraus brought him ginger ale and several of our clown family members came to our rooms to make sure he was okay.

The last few months, I've been dealing with breast cancer. I can't tell you the outpouring of love and prayers that have come from my clown family. So many people sent me cards and gifts and emails. Ann Sanders and Pam Bacher emailed me daily to see how I was doing.

I guess what I'm trying to say is that out of all the things I've learned through

clowning, the one big thing is that I have an actual family within the clown world. My real family is getting smaller, and I appreciate all the love my *new* family is showing me. I never knew that an organization could be a family until now. I'm not going to say that every single clown I've ever met is my friend. No, there are some who I don't see eye-to-eye with, and I pretty well keep my distance. But

at least 99 percent of them I *will* call my family. Sure, we argue from time to time. But isn't that what families do? They argue and then forgive each other, and they're back to normal.

When you get involved with things going on in your life, try to find the lesson you're learning that will help your clowning. **TNC**

Vent Figures *continued from page 20*

head. I had never done that before and it was quite a challenge. Every part of her head had to be researched online by watching YouTube (it's amazing what YouTube can teach you!). I started with the mouth and put the bar in place, then moved on to the wooden plate where the two eyeballs sit inside the head. The back of the eyes are attached to a plate that controls their movement from left to right. All of that has to be cemented and put on the sides of the wall on the inside of the head, where it's controlled by a system of strings and springs. The trick is to make it so that the eyes are self-centering and can be turned and moved to give the doll different expressions and gazes. I also created some eyebrows for her. You control the eyebrows with wires that come out of the side of the head. Inside, a string and spring mechanism with a little pulley makes the eyebrows move up up. The work that goes into creating the mechanics of the dolls is amazing!

Once I finished her head, I needed to work on making her actually *look* like Penelope. Penelope has big, brown eyes, just like me. She also has three freckles and beautiful long eyelashes. I also had to get her a custom-made wig, was installed by pulling a netting over the head and then sewing on the hair in a spiral pattern. Isn't she lucky that she has a creator who is not only a costume maker, but who also went to hairdressing school and was a hairdresser for over forty years?

Well, Penelope is going to be exactly like the full-grown one and have a sailor

outfit. I purchased fabric with both a blue-and-white and a red-and-white polka dot pattern. Her outfit also has big, puffy sleeves with cuffs on the end. The skirt has ruffles, under which she wears bloomers with a nice edge on the bottom cuff. I gave her custom-made shoes and, of course, a sailor hat with a bow. It's trimmed with gold and silver flowers.

LittleDesigno now has a sister and they are right next to each other. They each have their own story. Penelope's story is that she's the world's best babysitter, but she doesn't change diapers or burp babies because she's not a civil engineer (I guess she just uses that as an excuse). She is also a well-informed child for her age (she's seven-and-a-half years old, which means she's a handful and a half). Penelope loves moving furniture from room to room, so don't be surprised if you come home and your bedroom is now your living room and the living room is now your bedroom. She's quite creative that way. Penelope always takes her little brother with her in his little wagon. Or *her* wagon, that is – if Penelope goes to a birthday party, it's always *her* birthday party, too, and she is conveniently concerned about where all of her gifts are.

I'm working on another little guy, too. He's a real boy, and I purchased him but don't know exactly what I'm going to do with him just yet. He's also a little rustic. I didn't like his smile, so I'm going to change it and probably give him some new clothes. The last one I'm hoping to create will be my little hobo guy. My

hobo guy is called Ties, and he has a dog named Bones and Ties. Ties always says that the reason why he has a dog is so that he can make bone soup. Of course, the dog is always watching from the corner of his eyes—ha!

I hope you've enjoyed the story of how I began restoring ventriloquist dolls. I've used dictation to write the story three or four times now. Please remember that I'm a learning-disabled person and can only write using a dictation program. "Learning disabled" does not mean that a person has a lack of verbal skills. It just means that when spelling words, the letters are not always ordered in the right direction, or that the phonics are not always correct. I hope this turns out to be a much better explanation for why I created a vent doll, and why I've given him a brand-new life where he can make children and adults happy. This little guy has finally found the happiness that he deserves.

As a side note, the little boy's name is Buster. Buster has a dog, too, which I named Dell after my dad's dalmatian. He also has a cat named Mitsy, which I named after my own cat. You've probably read the story about them in *The New Calliope*. The dog lives inside of a fire hydrant that pops open, and Mitsy the cat lives inside of a fish tank with clown fish. The lid pops off of the fish tank and she always has one of the clown fish in her mouth as she announces, "They taste *funny!*" **TNC**

REBO'S Clown Bits and Props

By Bev Bergeron

Spooky Halloween Shows and Attractions

The Man Eating Chicken -- Live!



When it comes to Halloween, no one makes the kind of money Phil Morris has made with his magic and costume business in Charlotte, North Carolina. There's still hope for the rest of us to make a few bucks, however, while bringing the fun to the spooky October holiday.

Some may know me from my time on network television, where I portrayed the character of Rebo the Clown on *The Magic Land of Allakazam*. I also spent years in the comedy review show at Walt Disney World. Few, however, may realize that early in my career, I spent a lot of time as a “spooker.”

When I assisted Mr. Harry Willard the Wizard at his big tent theatre, I was also assisting Wyman Baker—one of the two original Dr. Silkinis—at his Frankenstein's Monster Spook Shows. I was nineteen when I took my own company of five on the road with a spook show called “Aloom the Fiend.” Later, when I left Disney in 1986, I joined up with Wyman Baker again to bring back spook shows in the Georgia and Tennessee regions. We had almost ten years of successful shows.

Way back in the late 1940s and for some of the 50s, I helped set up a Spook House in a classroom. We used an old mattress, for the children to walk on in the dark, and hung strings from the ceiling. People held containers of “brains” (spaghetti) and a bowl of “eyes” that were grapes. Today, I feel that these dark Spook Shows are too much trouble to set up. The liability is also too much to mess with. I would advise against them.

That being said: Halloween is not only fun for magicians and clowns, it's also very profitable. When I was only fourteen, I booked several shows at an elementary school carnival. Within a few years I learned the secret to using these shows to make money. I was soon knocking on the doors of the people responsible for putting the shows together.

By the time I was a freshman at the University of Texas at Austin, I booked a school show and received help from three fathers. One stood in front of the classroom, which we had made into a small theater; one collected the money and tickets; and the third seated the children and got them out the door once the show was over. I did fifteen five-minute shows that evening. We were paid something close to a dime per child. With the fathers pushing the audiences in and out, we managed to perform for over five hundred people. Several



of the children saw the show more than once. All my props were set to repeat, except for the vanishing cane, which was a quick fix. I received fifty percent of the take, which made me around twenty-five dollars for the shows. Remember that back then a drugstore clerk only made four dollars for a full day's work (I would know, because I had to quit my drugstore job to take on more shows).

I did these Halloween shows for years—including my time at the Air Force and when I returned to university. After a few years running around in the free world, Mark Wilson talked me into joining him in Hollywood at CBS-TV for a magic series. Soon after, I was married and had a daughter. My daughter grew up and attended school.

The cycle began again: the school had a carnival, and I would help. By this time, Mark Wilson and I were into trade shows and magical props that would sell products for the clients. I started my own company, Magical Oddities, which offered clients a small museum of unusual optical illusion items—like the old water faucet that appears to float in the air while water flows from its spout. With about fifty of these items in stock, and some live attractions like the Headless Lady and the Talking Head, I saw a novel way to attract new customers.

I didn't want to set up all the props for the school carnival. As a solution, I grabbed an old attraction of mine from the 1950s, “The Man Eating Chicken.” I featured it alongside the Talking Head and the Headless Lady. I used a classroom, like I had done with my past magic shows, and hung a large sign with a drawing of a huge chicken with teeth (I know chicken don't have teeth). The chicken was gripping a man in its claws. Beneath the drawing, the sign read *See the Man-Eating Chicken*.

The children lined up to see everything I had advertised. They ran out laughing. Best of all, they told others to pay to see the show!

If you haven't figured it out yet, the school cafeteria was serving fried chicken for the fundraiser. Once every half hour, I would ask one of the children's fathers (who happened to be eating fried chicken) to sit inside a large, refrigerator-size box and eat the chicken. A cut-out hole in the box marked *Danger!* allowed the children to look inside and see "The Man Eating Chicken." A few of them needed help to understand the joke, but none of them revealed the secret when they got outside the classroom. This helped bring in more money.

You, too, can have fun and raise money for others—while making some for yourself—by bringing these attractions to your local area. You don't even need all the attractions I used. All you need are a few effects, such as the easy-to-make Headless Lady. When constructing the Headless Lady, note that some instructions say to use a mirror to hide the head. Don't do that. Instead, use black-art. Just glue some black velveteen to a piece of cardboard, then bend it in the middle.

The tubing that you put around it will cover the edges and, if the lighting is right, the black velveteen background will give the illusion of the head being gone.

A big cardboard box, cut with a hole, works great for The Man Eating a Chicken. Another great attraction can be made with a cardboard box, too. Hang a sign on the box that reads *The Funniest Looking Person in the World*. When anyone peers through the hole, what they'll see is a mirror with their own reflection. Believe me, no one will tell the others what they saw through that hole—and it's fun to watch. You might even put this item near a door so that anyone walking by the school room will see the box with the kids looking inside it and laughing.

If you want, you could even do a five-minute show before the viewing of The Man Eating Chicken. After your last effect, the audience will then walk past the man eating the chicken. It still works. **TNC**



Welcome, NEW MEMBERS!

- Jillaine “Jolly Jill” Rabine**
Canajoharie NY
- Inocencia “Happy Faces by Ino” Hernandez**
Bronx NY
- Itzel “Happy Faces by Ino” Hernandez**
Bronx NY
- Michele Ewa** Medford NY
- Michael “TELSTARR The IMPOSSIBLIST”**
Telstarr Martel Toronto ON
- Gabriel “Gabs the Fool” Cole-Brant**
Minneapolis MN
- Garrett “Filbert the Clown” Sherman**
Lexington KY
- Barbara “Barbara Whiteman” Whiteman**
Lake Forest CA
- Rob Adamson** Wheatley ON
- Glenn “G” Schroeder** Skokie IL
- Valerie Schroeder** Skokie IL
- Shaneda “Mz. Sass The Clown” Ford**
Desoto TX
- Sterling “Ace” Beard** Richardson TX
- Ana “Alec” Rangel** San Antonio TX
- Luis “Estrellin” Lopez** Aguadilla PR
- Geraldine “Jeri” Benjamin** Bellingham MA
- Ivonne “Bonne the Clown” Ramirez**
Mahwah NJ
- Stephen “Buzz” Dilsworth** Porter TX
- Liza “Lulu” Brant** Minneapolis MN
- Wanda “Jiggletwists” Knudsen**
Richton Park IL
- Korene “Fortune Kookie” Tom**
San Francisco CA
- William “Ali Kazoo” Norton** Lawton OK
- Francis Jeff Kennedy** Ashley PA
- Caden “Caden the Clown” Kerr** La Rue OH
- Jim “Jiminy” Fowler** Davis CA
- Violet “Vastra the Clown” Hammond**
Rosalia WA
- Kali Chatterbox” Varn** Lavista NE
- José Valentin Fuentes Garcia** Yonkers NY
- Kenneth “Dun Duh Dun” Burton** Willits CA
- Tiffany “Silly Tilly” Dunlap** Willits CA

The Kidshow Way



SUCKERS

By Skip Way

Kidshow artists share a love-hate relationship with sucker effects, those fun little magic routines that lead the kids down the garden path with a double-cross surprise ending. A few favorites include Chinese Wands, Hippity Hop Rabbits, Run Rabbit Run, and Fraidy Cat Rabbit.

Unfortunately, the “in your face” embarrassment of having been suckered may bruise a child’s delicate ego. Creatively turning the sucker element back on ourselves will avoid this anguish and enhance the entertainment value.

Take Tel’s Bell for example. This handbell rings for the magician but remains silent in the hands of a child. The first time I used it, my child volunteer broke into tears because she couldn’t ring the bell. It broke my heart and clearly made me look like the bad guy. I promptly reflected the “sucker” ending back onto me so that this would never happen again.

Here’s how that looks: My volunteer announces the start of our show by shaking the bell, but the bell remains stubbornly silent. I explain that magic is powered by imagination, and we seem to be running low. With a little coaching, you can get the children to announce, “We have imagination!” I ask my volunteer if I might borrow some of her imagination. I ask her to place her finger to her temple and pull out just a tiny bit. When she touches her finger to the bell in my hand, it rings! She has saved the show! All cheers with no tears!

Fraidy Cat Rabbit is another excellent example. The door on a small cabinet opens to reveal a card displaying a black rabbit. The door closes and the rabbit changes to white! But it’s painfully obvious that the magician just turned the cabinet front-to-back. The magician changes the rabbit back to black and removes the card as he shows the cabinet quite empty.

The children shout that the white rabbit is on the reverse side of the card. The magician mischievously avoids showing the back of the card before finally giving in. Instead of a white rabbit, the card’s reverse side reveals the black rabbit’s back.

By feigning surprise and demanding, “Hey! What did you do with my white rabbit?” the children avoid the embarrassment of being wrong, and you’ve empowered their belief in the power of their imagination.

Avoid the tears! Reflect the “sucker” back on yourself and set the laughter free! **TNC**

Skip Way has been a professional children’s entertainer for more than forty-five years. Upon retiring from the Air Force, he settled in Raleigh, North Carolina, and began working stand-up comedy and military clubs along the East Coast. While lucrative, he missed the laughter of children and returned to a career in family entertainment as a classic kid-show performer named Happy Dan. Reach him by e-mail at rway@nc.rr.com.

RINGLING REMEMBERED “Through the Eyes of a Circus Clown”

Ron Severini, Author



“ Ron Severini is a font of circus memories and experiences. His book paints an amazing picture of life spent with The Greatest Show on Earth. Perfect for any history or circus buff!

“ This is a GREAT BOOK! I highly recommend it to all. ”

—SCOTT O’DONNELL,
Executive Director Circus World/Baraboo

—PRICILLA MOOSEBURGER,
Director of Mooseburger
Clown Arts Camp



Available in print and Kindle on
AMAZON.COM

TheSEVERINCompany.com

CLOWN COMICS

LET THEM EAT CAKE

Ann "Tuttles" Sanders

Featuring Connie "Punkin" Morrow and Jim "Donuts" Donoughe

Photos by Punkin and Donuts



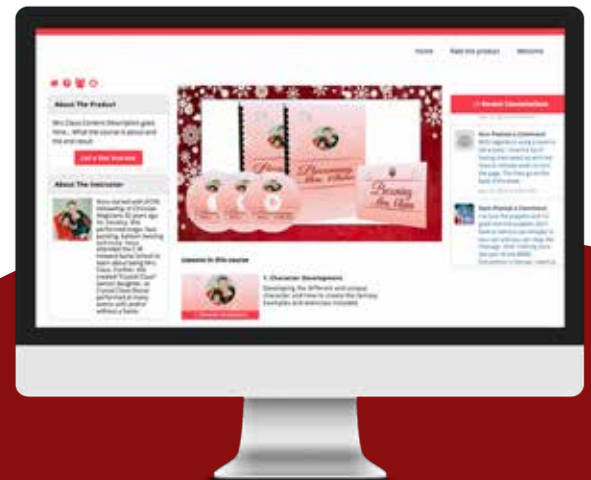
AN ONLINE VIDEO COURSE



Becoming Mrs.★Claus

**VISIT HERE TO ENROLL:
BECOMINGMRSCLAUS.AWEB.PAGE/HOME**

- **PROCEED AT YOUR OWN PACE**
- **2 BONUS VIDEOS ON CHRISTMAS MAGIC AND BALLOONS**
- **2 PACKAGES TO CHOOSE FROM**
- **OPTIONAL ONE-TO-ONE COACHING**



623.258.8819

Noraomalley7@gmail.com