

Fun Time Travelers

. . . . Clown Their Way Through Mexico

by Bart "Dooley" Marcy

After having traveled to ninety-five countries, I attended the University of Wisconsin's Clown Camp in 1996 and that November spent two weeks as "Dooley" - clowning in Russia with Patch Adams on the Nasal Dip tour of hospitals and orphanages.

These experiences inspired the formation of "Fun Time Travelers," which is a loosely organized group of relaxed, independent, intellectually curious people who enjoy traveling but are willing to give more than their tourist dollars for some memorable experiences. Rather than carrying maps and guide books, the "Fun Time Travelers" fill our pockets with balloons, stickers, funny noses, noise makers, clown props, and a variety of other paraphernalia as we head out to experience other cultures.

While in Russia and Norway in June, "Dooley" escorted small groups of fun-loving people to children's hospitals in St. Petersburg, Oslo and Thronheim. In November a handful of other merrymakers spread good cheer in Mexico City, Guadalajara, Ajijic, Chapala, Puerto Vallarta, and Hermosillo. The trip to Mexico was put together on short notice and the spontaneity continued.

We clowned in the parks and streets of Mexico City and Guadalajara; in Ajijic we spent several hours each evening participating in the town's week-long San Andres Festival; and when the rental car totally gave up on the highway between Puerto Vallarta and Guadalajara we spent three hours entertaining passing motorists with our antics.

On Thanksgiving, while having breakfast at Danny's in Ajijic, one of us asked the owner about orphanages in the area. He told us about the Ninos y Jovenes orphanage in San Juan Cosala - and off we went for what turned out to be the highlight of the trip.

Arriving just after lunch via a rugged dirt road, "Dooley" put on his simplified "full face" make-up (which was inspired by the summer issue of the Hospital Clown Newsletter), and the other "Fun Time Travelers" improvised with their Smile-on-a-Sticks, Kazoos and sponge rubber noses. Speaking no Spanish, having little idea as to where we were or what we should expect, and

looking a bit outrageous, we emerged from the vehicle to be greeted by what appeared to be one of the staff members.

We were escorted to an open meeting area, and through a variety of gestures we got the message we were to wait until the children had finished their lunches. We stood silently while our guide dashed from building to building. Doors opened, staff members peered out windows and smiled, children peeked from around the corners . . . and we excitedly waited for something to happen.

After waiting for what seemed like eternity, there was suddenly a great deal of commotion. Coming from all directions, we were surrounded by over one hundred attention-seeking, excited children. The welcome was overwhelming. We produced and inflated a gross of balloons, "kissed" the kids with lip stickers, struck up our Kazoo band, clowned with a rubber chicken, did magic and photographed groups of children modeling our rubber animal noses.

After a fun-filled hour we headed to the parking area with the entire orphanage following us. They made every attempt to convince us to stay, offered to go with us as our chauffeurs, and reluctantly let us leave after we promised to return in the spring.

Since returning home we have learned, via the Internet and E-mail, one of the people who glanced at us through an open door at the orphanage was Padre Macias, the founder of the Ninos y Jovenes orphanage. Padre Macias was himself an orphan, and he has dedicated the past twenty-five years to establishing and managing the Ninos y Jovenes orphanage. There is a local organization of wintering Americans in Ajijic that supports the orphanage with some fund raising events and some holiday parties. The "Fun Time Travelers" will be back in Mexico for ten days in May. The kids will be ready, lunch will be over, and this time we will know how to get there!

Anyone interested in the "Fun Time Travelers" can contact Bart Marcy via the Internet at bartmarcy@gmail.com