

Taking the Caring Clown Into Your Plain Clothes Life ~ ShobiDobi

This is something I've been noticing over my years of clowning as I'm sure most of you have. There are definitely qualities that have passed into my *normal* life. I now laugh easily, I listen better, I am not afraid of people who are grieving and there is generally less fear in my life – less fear of suffering, death, and loss. But there are a few places that I've just been noticing lately that I'd like to share with you.

I see Kids when I'm in Plainclothes in Plain Places.

I mean I SEE them -- I make eye contact with children, because that is what I do as a clown. It is a habit. And I've begun to notice the children's reaction. Small children are fascinated and curious with a look of "Who is this person not just looking around, but seeing me." When I get a reaction I usually give them a little finger wave. It is just habit. The kids will follow me with their eyes down a shopping aisle and look around corners for me. I see them and they see me. I am not clowning around. I'm just shopping!

Once at a friend's clown performance (I was in the audience in plainclothes), this little 2-year-old girl sitting in the front row crawled over everyone, climbed into my lap, made her little self comfortable and went to sleep. I had never met her before, but I know I *saw* her when I came in. Needless to say, the mother was a little dumbfounded when she came to retrieve her daughter after the performance. "Do we know you from somewhere?" I just shrugged my shoulders and said, "Well, I AM a clown."

Have you ever considered that one of the reasons children love to be face painted is because adults will then notice them? "Oh aren't you cute." The children don't think, "The clown made me cute or pretty or funny." They think, "I'm cute." The adults look at them with recognition. When I first started to face paint, I remember painting this little boy as a tiger. The next week the father came back and said, "Do you know what you did to my son?" I thought, "Oh my, I got paint in his eye." The father continued, "He has always been a little shy, so when you painted him as a tiger, everyone looked at him and even played with him. Everyone told him how cute he looked. The local paper took his picture and his teacher pinned the picture on their bulletin board." The adults *saw* him and validated the play in his life. The child's life is a great deal about play.

I have come to believe that a lot of children are afraid of clowns because they have never seen adults act silly and play. It's *the big boys don't cry they play ball* attitude. But that is a discussion for another time. Please send me any of your observations.

The Clown and the Plainclothes Persona Separation

Being a recovering serious person, I've always kept my clowning and my *normal* persona separate. This is the way I was taught, and it is what I hear at most conventions. And

I still believe in this to an extent. But why should Shobi have all the fun! And if I have learned anything in my years of clowning, it is that there are no rules in clowndom. How could there be, we are the tricksters of life! I think traveling with Patch Adams changed my clowning forever. As we were in costume all the time, it was necessary to be Shobhana sometimes to relieve Shobi and just to get past customs! But I was always dressed and ready to go. There was a great deal of exposure to spontaneity in being this free.

I have gone into the community dressed in a clown often since 9/11 as part of my awakened feelings about clowns and community service. Shobi never passes a chance to play with everyone on the way from a gig or the hospital. She dusts off other cars when getting gas and stops on purpose *in face* to go shopping. Lately, my plainclothes persona has been doing some of the same. There is so much fear and stress in our society today and so much seriousness, can this be part of our Hometown Clown Relief community service – a selfless service performed without recognition?

Passing It On

What I'd like to share here is passing the clown play into our everyday lives. For me it was taking risks, but like all risk taking experiences, the more you do, the easier it gets to do.

One July I accidentally poked a stick into my eye in the garden. Beside it hurting a lot I needed to check it out, so I had to go to the Emergency Room. I dreaded Saturday night in Oakland at the emergency room. I've clowning in ER and understood triage. As I was breathing and not bleeding, I knew there would be a lot of people always ahead of me. So just on instinct (and as a clown I've learned to listen to and trust my instincts.) I grabbed my bag of balloons and a little pump as I left the house.

Well, I was sitting there in utter gloom with everyone else in utter gloom, so I just took a risk. This would have been a piece of cake in clown face, but there I was with a triage tape on my wrist. So I took out a balloon and made a flower for the lady sitting across from me. She took it and smiled. Then I looked around for a kid and there he was on the other side of the waiting room, leaning in gloom up against his mom. As kids can see balloons from a mile away, he was already looking in my direction. So I made him a balloon motorcycle! Why fool around with the small stuff? That sure caught everyone's eye and the play began. A group of very savvy young couples came into the ER waiting room. In no time I had those hip young adults in silly doggie hats. And they started playing in them. Oh my, did everyone start to laugh!

After about an hour of this I went to the triage nurse and said, "Isn't it my turn yet?" "Oh my gosh, you're a patient!"

You'd better sit down" I said, "I can't do that, my eye will start to hurt." It turned out that I only had a scratched cornea.

Making a Silly Person ~ One at a Time

Maybe one of our duties in Hometown Clown Relief is to *make silly adults*. Last Tuesday, I had to go to the hospital for a routine blood test. It was at my hospital, but in plain clothes nobody ever recognizes me as the clown. When the tech walked in I was calmly sitting there without expression, but wearing a red sponge clown nose. "Oh, Lordy" she explained, "You made my day" she laughed as I looked around innocently to see what she was laughing at. So I reached in my pocket and gave her a nose saying, "Pass it on" She answered with, "My kids are going to love this" Ah ha, you see, one more serious adult hits the dust!

So I've gotten more courageous. The other day I gave a red nose to an elderly gentleman in a coffee shop I frequent in the mornings. I said, "Just put it on when you are sitting on the bus and see what happens. You don't have to do anything else. It is better if you just act nonchalant." The next day he said, "I put on the nose and went onto the bus, everyone smiled at me. Then I even wore it in the supermarket and everyone laughed to see this old man with a red nose. It brightened my day, just to brighten their day." I think a large part of our caring clown work is teaching and nurturing others to play. Once when face painting, I was talking to the kids about adults being silly. It's sort of my – *clown interviewing three-year-old routine*. Children are eager to tell you things if you listen. And sometimes we only talk in gibberish. I said, "Well now that you are a tiger and you a bunny rabbit, go and make the adults play." They did! They were walking around making adults notice them and engaging them in play.

The teenagers, who were waiting near by listening to this discussion, decided to have mustaches painted on their faces --even the girls! So I painted on nice curly moustaches and goatees. They went to school and their teacher later told me they were all acting very nonchalant. "What moustache?" they said looking at each other as if the teacher were crazy. So the teacher went into the lady's room with an eyebrow pencil and emerged with a moustache and the same nonchalant attitude. They all laughed. They were all playing. Later they went outside as the moustache family, spreading the play even further.

Seizing the Moment!

We all know that what happens in our clown lives' benefits our *regular* life. When you start living in the moment, you begin to *seize the moment* also. One time at a workshop in Japan at the workshop space, there was a big glass window facing a garden. I was speaking about *seizing the moment* when I saw a family with young children in the garden. I said, "Everyone put on your red noses" (the half ping pong ball noses I make for workshops). "Now everyone on the

count of three, turn around and wave at the family in the garden." We got quite the surprised laugh.

It only takes a second to seize the moment, but we have to have that awareness constantly observing in the back of our minds. Is this not our hospital clown training – to be aware of everything going on while engaging a patient? When you pluck that moment without thinking right out of originating mundane life, and put it into clown play, it is just wonderful.

In Japan, I was driving in a van from Kyoto to Osaka with five other clowns - all of us in plainclothes. Everyone was speaking Japanese and as I do not understand Japanese I was just happily looking out of the window satisfying my infinite curiosity about life by experiencing a Japanese highway.

There was a Japanese army convoy in the next lane and I caught the eye of a very bored young soldier in the back of one of those troop transports. As it is with highway travel, his lane and my lane moved at varying speeds which meant our van would move ahead of his and then his truck ahead of ours. It was sort of like *Peek-a-boo* on the road. Every time he moved back into my range of sight, I would *catch his eye*. So the next time I waved a little. He continued to be non-responsive as I moved forward out of sight. So the next time I put on a red sponge nose, so when I moved back into his sight there I was – this middle aged lady wearing a big red nose waving quite calmly as if it were something I did every day (and it is). I got a response.

Our car moved forward again out of his sight. I gave everyone else in the van a 2-inch red sponge clown nose. The next time we moved back into sight, all of us had red noses on and just nonchalantly waved at him. He almost fell out of the back of the truck laughing and we moved out of sight again. Then like it was scripted, a moment later we moved back into sight, all of his buddies were hanging out of the back of the truck laughing. Again like it was scripted, we moved far ahead out of sight. Ah what a perfect catch - we seized the moment. This is my favorite clown story. My insides just squeal with delight every time I remember the look on those soldiers' faces.

One a Day Nose Job

How do we practice staying in the moment and seeing the funny side of life? Today I had to renew my drivers' licenses. I am getting in the habit of grabbing a red nose out of a basket by my door as I go out. I scanned the DVM office for a suitable *victim*. But soon I was standing in front of a man saying, "Smile, please." He got nosed! So the people after me were treated to a man with a red nose saying, "Smile, please" How perfect can that be!

Maybe there is a discipline here or at least a practice – to practice being in that moment looking for the ridiculous through our wonder-filled clown eyes. So by having the clown nose in my pocket, it reminds me to practice my profession.