



# What Keeps You Clowning

Healthcare Quarterly recently asked six members of Canada's therapeutic clown community – each a nominee for the 2005 Therapeutic Clown Award - about their experiences and what makes the role so fulfilling. Their responses are as individual as their alter egos.

## Joan Barrington aka Bunky The Hospital for Sick Children, Toronto, ON

In 1993, I presented a proposal to The Hospital for Sick Children to launch the first therapeutic clown program in Ontario. That summer, Bunky was born under the guidance of my mentor, Karen Ridd, and today Bunky is one of eight practitioners who comprise The Therapeutic Clown Program at SickKids. As staff members of the multidisciplinary team, we have demonstrated our professionalism and expertise in family-centred care. We are housed in the largest pediatric facility in Canada, out on the inpatient units, in outpatient clinics and specialized areas two days a week reaching over 10,000 children a year. My biggest pleasure continues to be helping patients with their stress of hospitalization and treatment through Bunky's light-hearted play and silliness. Offering children choices and building their self-esteem through empowerment is the ultimate. Using skills as therapeutic clowns, Bunky and all of us bring children laughter, hope, choices and most importantly, play for play's sake. Just our presence alone, *being here*, is the constant reminder to us all – these are children first, then sick children. Over the last 13 years, I have had the pleasure of being a pathfinder in this growing profession as it has spread across Canada. Bunky has made many lifetime friends who have supported me and The Therapeutic Clown Program at SickKids. They have made it possible, first for me, and now, us, to reach out to children and their families here at The Hospital for Sick Children.



## Paul Hooson aka Doc Willikers

B.C. Children's Hospital and Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children, Vancouver, BC

Doc Willikers has a great love of people and play. He also has a deep desire to serve those who are experiencing difficulty in life, particularly children and families who are coping with illness or disability. The support, encouragement and just plain fun Doc shares with his patients and colleagues make every day on the wards a joy.

"Doc" is the creation of Paul Hooson, who has been a full-time professional clown and puppeteer since 1975. Paul is also the creator of nationally acclaimed children's silent clown "Cirque Alexander."

Paul Hooson began work on founding a Clown Doctor program at B.C.'s Children's Hospital in March 1993, after being inspired by the work of the Big Apple Circus' "Clown Care Unit" in New York City. Over the next year, hospital approval and funding was secured, and training in hospital procedure undertaken. The program became a reality when "Doc" made his inaugural visit to the wards in early March 1994, becoming Canada's first Therapeutic Clown Doctor.



## Judy Higgins aka Sunflower

Timmins and District Hospital, Timmins, ON

### The rewards of clowning ...

- The warm welcome each week I receive from the hospital staff, volunteers, patients, and their families.
- The nurse or doctor saying: "Sunflower, would you please drop in to see ..."
- The smile I see when I enter a room and the "thank you for brightening my day."
- Seeing the impact that gentle play and caring humour have on the entire hospital team.
- The understanding that a simple smile, a squeeze of a hand, a magic trick, or a word of encouragement can make the world of difference to someone during a difficult time.

After graduating from the University of Wisconsin Clown Camp in July 2000, she began her weekly volunteering as Sunflower, the Caring Clown. She also has 15 years as a Public Health Nurse Workplace Educator – using humour to deliver her messages on cancer, heart disease, stress and shift work.



# Around?

## Kenneth Sperling aka Ollie Pale

Children's Hospital of Western Ontario, London, ON

Ollie's ability to create smiles on the faces of children and youth who are otherwise scared, unhappy, worried, or sad while in the hospital has had a positive impact on their well-being. His calm and gentle spirit sends the signal that it is OK to have fun in the hospital. Even though some of these children and youth need to have invasive or painful procedures, the smiles, laughter, and playfulness with Ollie after their test or procedure can help alleviate their worries and pains for a while. Seeing the smile or hearing the laugh of a child creates a pride in Ollie that generates his desire to carry on with his craft.

Ollie Pale has been clowning around at the Children's Hospital of Western Ontario since January of 2004.

Until recently he was available every Tuesday and Thursday. Now he is available every Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday.

Ollie was officially released into the London, ON pediatric hospital environment in January of 2004, where he produces smiles, laughter, and mischief in the hospital hallways. His name originates from the illegible script of a close family friend who has very shoddy handwriting.



## Ruth Coll aka Mollypenny

Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, Ottawa, ON

### Gift from the Unknown

A Badge of Silent Love  
The Laughter of a Child  
The Hope of the Parents  
The Heart of the Staff  
The Fear of the Unknown  
A Tear in the Eye....  
A Silent Prayer to Bring Comfort  
The Worry of a Teenager  
A Heart to Heart Connection  
More Laughter from the Playroom  
"You know what?" We laugh when we hear these words  
The Strength of Children Playing  
Changing a Moment ....  
Overwhelming at Times  
Courage and Hope from Within  
A Hug given by a Young Child to a teenager and Hug returned  
A Look... A Smile... A Wave...  
Enjoying the moments and Laughter of Today  
Tomorrow is Unknown, Dreams can come True....  
Parents watching from the Sidelines to see Children play, their problems forgotten for a Moment  
To Connect a Waiting Room of Families with Play, Just by a Squeak  
The Spirit of a Sick Child that keeps going until the End.....  
A Hug with No Words...  
Never to be Forgotten.....I Love You  
People Helping Children.....  
A Wish for the Health of all Children  
A Wish to Share with You....  
A Child's Job is to Play!!!!



## Beth Clelland aka Violet

Bridgepoint Health, Toronto, ON

Violet was first seen on a community college picket line on Halloween, 1989 wearing her grandfather's tweed jacket, red suspenders, a bowler hat, and a squishy red nose, and playing "When the Saints Go Marching In" on a half-size violin. After attending summer clowning school and several clowning conferences, and with the encouragement of friends, Violet developed several approaches for her performances, one of those being "caring clowning."

Currently she does puppeteering and magic tricks, fiddles and teaches crazy songs, and tells jokes, to kids and seniors, and makes gentle ward visits to patients at Bridgepoint Health Centre. She loves dressing up in rainbow colours and big yellow boots, but most of all what keeps her going is the interaction with the audiences. Through careful planning for each group's needs and interests, and just great, big smiles, she conveys the friendship she feels – and they always respond in kind. For Violet, clowning is just plain fun!

