

# THE NEW CALLIÖPE

For Members of Clowns of America International  
Volume 40 • Number 4



**LIFETIME  
ACHIEVEMENT  
AWARD**

**ELAINE  
"VAL N. TINE"  
PERSON**



# 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 Joey**  
Regina Wollrabe  
503-807-2584  
coajrjoey@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@punkinthec clown.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@bobbythec clown.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**  
Position Open



**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 • klowkop@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 Joey:** Regina Wollrabe (Director), 503.807.2584, coajrjoey@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



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: Tuesday–Thursday

11:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. (EST)

E-mail: coaioffice@aol.com

Website: www.mycoai.com

**Magazine Production**

SPS Publications, Inc.

**Editorial Assistants**

Brooke Fiedler

Lauren Jurgensen

**Graphic Design**

Jessica Friend

**Creative Consultant**

Regina “Cha Cha” Wollrabe

Send articles for consideration to

[thenewcalliope@gmail.com](mailto:thenewcalliope@gmail.com).

Send ads and advertising inquiries to [advertising@mycoai.com](mailto:advertising@mycoai.com).

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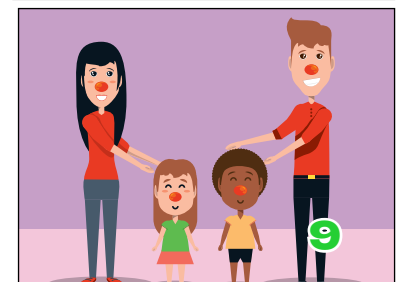
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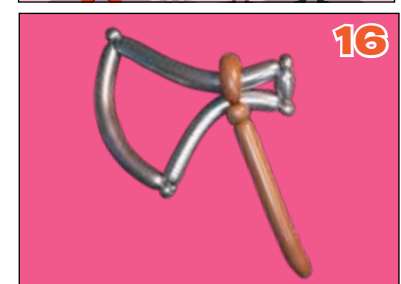
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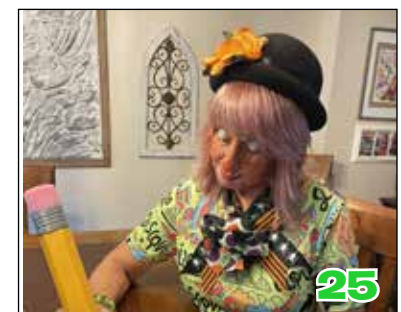
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### Permanent Membership Cards

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 ELAINE “VAL N. TINE” PERSON

By Lauren Jurgensen

COAI Lifetime Achievement Award winner Elaine “Val N. Tine” Person, of Altamont, New York, has countless achievements under her belt. Perhaps the most significant of those achievements is her role as a mother.

After giving birth to her only biological child, Melinda, in 1977, Elaine and her husband Tom “Mac N Tosh” Person adopted or fostered more than nineteen children over the next thirty years. “To my seven adopted siblings and to several others, they are the only mom and dad they have, even though many weren’t legally adopted,” said daughter Melinda.

Elaine’s generosity of spirit is what makes her an exceptional clown. Before she started clowning, she had already managed to convince Melinda and two of Melinda’s brothers, as well as her husband Tom, to perform as clowns. Melinda, who worked with New York Telephone and AT&T, was eager to encourage clowning in her family after attending a meeting of the non-profit charitable organization Telephone Pioneers of America, who were working to reactive their clown troupe at the time. Elaine was already working full time and presiding over the high school PTA, so her own plate was too full to take on clowning just yet. Nevertheless, Elaine and the children’s grandmother helped them apply clown makeup, sewed their costumes, and transported them to a variety of community events so that they could clown.

Once Elaine’s term as PTA President ended, she finally had time to become a clown in her own right. (This was likely no surprise to anyone, given her infectious enthusiasm and her background studying drama at Ithaca College.) That’s when she, Tom, Melinda, and a few of their other children decided to attend Clown College at Schenectady County Community College, and met instructor Bill “Snappy the Clown” Hart. The local Electric City Clown Alley #285 was founded just in time for the family to kickstart their new adventures in the world of clowning. Elaine and her husband Tom have been active participants ever since. They’ve served in a number of board offices, while working together to write the alley newsletters, host picnics and holiday parties, and champion fundraising events.

That experience eventually landed Elaine a position as a co-chair for the 2002 COAI convention. While there, she oversaw everything from hospitality, the Red Nose Festival, and banquet entertainment to humor therapy and hospital clowning workshops.

“For many years, my role in the clown world has been to support clown arts with a minimal amount of performing,” said Elaine. “I am not and have never been your



Elaine Person clowning around at the Village Fall Festival.

typical COAI convention competing clown. I have had four hip, four shoulder, and one knee replacement, survived cancer, and had an additional thirteen surgeries since I was a kid. I love to be ‘in clown,’ but most times I lack the physicality that is often required to perform as a clown.”

Throughout her life, Elaine inspired many more of her children, as well as her children’s teen friends, to enter clowning. “For me and the teenagers who grew up and spent time in our family, we were able to experience the joy of spreading happiness to others through our clowning activities as well as by providing service to our communities,” said Elaine’s daughter Melinda. “For many of my adopted and foster siblings, it gave them a needed feeling of self-worth that they had never experienced.”

It’s clear that Elaine knows how to motivate and inspire the clown community. “She has the rare gift of being able to identify the leadership potential in others and, in turn, foster it,” said friend Jeremy Cohen. “There are a number of clowns who wouldn’t be where they are today without her guidance.” Her passionate recruitment efforts also helped her to grow the Electric City Clown Alley’s membership by more than a hundred and twenty members in just ten years.

Not only that, but she was a driving force in motivating over eleven hundred COAI members to volunteer with Red

Nose Response during and after the Hurricane Katrina disaster. COAI was holding its convention in New Orleans that same year. Elaine brought four hundred red noses (courtesy of Bill ‘Snappy’ Hart) to the COAI convention that year, which was happening in New Orleans, where convention attendees put on shows for kids who had lost their homes in the hurricane.

“Try to imagine four hundred young students all wearing red noses, smiling, and laughing at the clowns. It was truly a memorable moment for all who participated,” Elaine fondly recalled.

After she retired from her career at AT&T in 1998, Bill “Snappy the Clown” Hart asked Elaine to assume the position of executive director for Clowns on Rounds, an organization that sends professional entertainers dressed as clown doctors to visit nursing homes and hospitals. She’s been running the organization ever since.

Elaine says she has the utmost respect for her Clowns on Rounds staff. “Hour after hour, whether they are in a hospital, nursing home, or children’s emergency room, they are there to bring some laughter and smiles to a usually unpleasant environment,” she said. “Sometimes they just lend a listening ear to a patient



*Left to right: Four of Elaine Person’s kids clowning with Marie “Mischief” Beck. Elaine Person and her husband, Tom “Mac N Tosh” Person. They have been married forty-seven years.*

or share a joke or two with the caregivers. I cannot do what they do, but I can work to raise the funds that keep them going back week to week.”

In 2011, she was named as a recipient of the 2011 President’s Call to Service Award for volunteering more than eight thousand hours to her community during her lifetime. The award included a congratulatory letter from President Barack Obama. She was nominated by the Telephone Pioneers, the same organization that she had helped years earlier to reestablish their volunteer clowning troupe. Her many other accolades include Telephone Pioneer of

the Year (regional as well as chapter), Electric City Clowns Clown of the Year and Founders awards, and the Capital Region Clown Arts Festival Entertainer of the Year and Master of Smiles awards.

In addition to her years of service to the Telephone Pioneers, COAI, and Clowns on Rounds, some of the other organizations she has volunteered with include the Guilderland (NY) PTSA, RID - Remove Intoxicated Drivers, Stop DWI, The Albany County Traffic Safety Board, Parson’s Child and Family Center, the Heart Gallery, Red Nose Response, Electric City Clown Alley, and many other area charities and organizations.

You can easily see how Elaine’s accomplishments have led to her Lifetime recognition. “Many COAI members throughout the Mid-atlantic and New England regions, who are looked upon as leaders in the craft, have been mentored by Elaine while developing their formal and informal leadership skills, and at the same time found support for their creative abilities by one of the best in the business,” said her friend Paul S. “Fuddi-Duddy” Kleinberger II. “Elaine’s impact within the humor therapy aspects of clowning have been felt and recognized by caring and humor therapy clowns around the world.”

Her dedication becomes even more clear when you learn about Elaine’s



*Elaine (standing middle) at a Clowns on Rounds fundraiser.*

efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic, with her friend Billy Vaughn describing it best. “Under the direction of Elaine, the staff of Clowns on Rounds immediately took up the challenge of providing their services remotely. Videos were prepared that could be presented on hospital television in-house networks. Additionally, the staff took up the challenge of developing routines that could be presented outside and viewed by patients and staff through first-floor windows. As these routines were refined, they were shared with caring clown and humor therapy groups across North America. [Thanks to Elaine’s work with Clowns on Rounds], it has been much easier for humor therapy programs to continue to provide their valuable services in house.”

Without a doubt, Elaine “Val N. Tine” Person has touched the lives of many—her immediate family and friends, her local community and Alley, and many others who benefited from her immense love and laughter.

“It is truly amazing and heartwarming to be recognized for spending over half my life being in the clown world with amazing people,” she said. “A wise person once told me that if you want to have a happy life, surround yourself with positive people. Our clown community, like those all around the world, is filled with positive people—the ones that want to make the world a better place by sharing a smile and laughter with children of all ages.” **TNC**



Above: Elaine Person. Right: Elaine Person at the 2006 COAI Convention in New Orleans where she bought and gave out red noses to four hundred school children who were entertained by several clowns who attended the convention.

# HERE’S WHAT THEY’RE SAYING ABOUT ELAINE PERSON

If you look at Elaine’s career in clowning, she has made quite an indelible mark on our art form. What stands out even more is that in addition to being a great clown, she is an equally extraordinary person.

Within the clown community at large, she has been a tireless mentor for those in need of learning new skills. In addition, she has the rare gift of being able to identify the leadership potential in others and in turn, foster it.

There are a number of clowns who wouldn’t be where they are today without her guidance.

*Jeremy Cohen, Founding Member Red Nose Response*

For me and the teenagers who grew up and spent time in our family we were able to experience the joy of spreading happiness to others through our clowning activities as well as by providing service to our communities. I wish the same for my children. For many of my adopted and foster siblings, it gave them a needed feeling of self-worth that they had never experienced.

In 1998 when my mother retired from her full-time job she became executive director of Clowns on Rounds. She has been running the organization ever since. During all these years, her staff have almost all been members of Electric City Clown Alley and COAI. They are very dedicated to their work bringing smiles and laughter to patients, visitors and staff at our local healthcare facilities. This is made possible by the exemplary work my mom does for this organization.

*Melinda Person*

With her leadership, the Electric City Clowns have won the COAI CHARLIE Award five times.

With the onset of the Covid-19 Pandemic, the staff of pretending physicians and nonsensical nurses of Clowns on Rounds had to leave their hospitals and could not have any direct patient or staff contact. Under the direction of Elaine, they immediately took up the challenge of providing their services remotely.

*William Billy Vaughn*

Simply stated, Elaine Person, who performs as “Val N. Tine” the clown, is an inspirational dynamo!

Hundreds of COAI members through the years have been inspired by Elaine and her accomplishments. Many COAI members throughout the Mid-atlantic and New England regions who are looked upon as leaders in the craft have been mentored by Elaine while developing their formal and informal leadership skills and at the same time found support for their creative abilities by one of the best in the business.

Elaine’s impact within the humor therapy aspects of clowning have been felt and recognized by caring and humor therapy clowns around the world.

*Paul S. Kleinberger II*

# TIMELINE

## Elaine “Val N Tine” Person

### Life Events

- 1971 Joined New York Telephone
- 1976 Married Tom Person on Valentine’s Day
- 1977 Daughter Melinda Person born
- 1978-1990 Adopted or fostered nineteen children during the years following Melinda’s birth, and cultivated a culture of community service within family
- 1991 Started clowning with the Telephone Pioneers
- 1992 Sixteen-year-old Melinda awarded for service to community and entertaining as a clown, Tom Person became Mac N Tosh the Clown. Twelve children followed suit.
- 1993 Completed Schenectady County Community College’s Introduction To Clowning with Tom and two children
- 1998 Retired from AT&T after twenty-seven years of service
- 2000 Seventeen-year-old Kelly Person recognized by local TV station for charitable clowning activities

### Memberships

- 1991 Joined Telephone Pioneers
- 1993 Joined the Board of Clowns On Rounds, Inc.
- 1994 Joined the Electric City Clowns, Alley 285
- 1994 Joined Clowns of America International
- 1998 Joined the Capital Region Clown Arts Festival, Alley 369
- 2005 Joined Red Nose Response, Inc., Alley 399

### Leadership

- 1992 Telephone Pioneers Clown Troupe Chairman of Community Service
- 1994-Present Electric City Clown Alley President, Vice President, Assistant Treasurer, Red Nose News Editor, Alley Events Coordinator, Fundraising Chairman, Special Events Boss Clown
- 1995 Presented Humor Therapy workshop at the 1995 COAI Convention

- 1997 Accepted Executive Directorship of Clowns On Rounds, Inc.
- 1998 Appointed Clown Director North of The Telephone Pioneer Clowns
- 1998 Presented Humor Therapy workshop at the 23rd Northeast Clown Convention
- 1999 Co-chairman of the 24th Northeast Clown Convention overseeing registration, catering, special events, and banquet entertainment
- 2000-Present Presented Humor Therapy workshops and classes at clown conventions and gatherings around North America
- 2002 Featured speaker International Humor Conference
- 2002 Co-chairman of the 2002 Clowns of America International Convention overseeing hospitality, humor therapy/hospital clowning classes and workshops, Red Nose Festival, and banquet entertainment
- 2005 Assumed fundraising responsibility for Red Nose Response 2010 Special Advisor to The Battenkill Joeys clown alley

### Awards

President’s Call To Service Award presented by President Obama recognizing more than 4,000 hours of community service

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inducted Telecom Pioneer Hall of Fame</li> <li>Humor In Action Award presented by the Humor Project, Inc.</li> <li>BPOE Elks Mother of the Year</li> <li>Telephone Pioneer of the Year (Region)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Telephone Pioneer of the Year (Chapter)</li> <li>Electric City Clowns Founder Award</li> <li>Electric City Clowns Clown of the Year</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Capital Region Clown Arts Festival Entertainer of the Year</li> <li>Capital Region Clown Arts Festival Master of Smiles Award</li> </ul> |
|---|---|---|



## From the Education Director

By Jim Donoughe

This year's convention, now just a few months away, is an event you won't want to miss! Our theme this year, "Fairytales," will be hitting the stage with a stunning backdrop of the thundering waters of Niagara Falls. This year, our focus is on themes of education and the opportunity to try new things.

We will kick off the event with our headliner, Eugenio "Chagy" Adorno, a renowned Ringling-trained clown and faith-based performer. Following this, board members will bring fresh perspectives with balloon wearables, puppets, and innovative party concepts. Of course, we can't overlook the presence Santa and Mrs. Claus, who will also be making an appearance to offer classes.

Expect some interesting perspectives on clowning that will compel you to think outside of the box. We're even offering a class on using a Cricut, not the insect, but the craft-cutting machine to enhance your clowning skills and open your horizons to something new!

You will also hear some familiar voices delve into teaching new topics like paradeability, clown movement, and other skills such as hospital/retirement performing, home performing, and even clowning in church. We're expanding the boundaries, like

all fairytales do, offering sessions working with foam, sock puppets, and other messy mediums.

Join in on the fun challenges involving balloons and face painting, testing your creativity and skill against the unknown. There will also be a spotlight to showcase your skills in paradeability and skit competitions. You can find more info on the competitions and rule changes on the Friends of COAI and official Facebook pages.

We also will have some fantastic vendors joining us, including Captain Visual with his unique instruments, Dave Hill, a crowd favorite with his affordable selection of magic supplies, Joselyn, a costumer from Mexico with a wide selection of wares, and The Bigios, with costumes and assorted clown supply needs. These and other big surprises are in the works, so stay tuned for additional details! **TNC**



## From the Director of Alley and Regional Support

By Gloria Sterrett

Hi everyone! I'm Gloria Sterrett, and I apologize for not keeping you very well-informed!

Some of you may already know me, while others may not. I've been your Alley & Regional Support Director since the end of 2019.

My clown name is "HeySeed," but you can call me "Dolli," which is what I mostly go by nowadays. (That's my full name LOL!) I've been clowning since 1988.

I oversee eleven Regional Vice Presidents who help serve your region. So, if you have any questions or concerns, please contact one of us! For a complete list of officers, you can refer to page 2 of *The New Calliope*.

As your Alley Secretary sends in your updated information to ([mycoai.com/annual-alley-report/](http://mycoai.com/annual-alley-report/)), or ([mycoai.com/alley-charter-application/](http://mycoai.com/alley-charter-application/)) to start up a new Alley, I record it and send it to

Sammy to update on the web! So, please make sure to submit it by March 1<sup>st</sup> each year to be recognized as an active and working Alley!

If you know of a folding or closed alley, please pass along the information to your Regional Vice President.

I'd also like to inform everyone that we have three online Alleys:

1. Giggle-Bytes - COAI Clown Alley # 1000

Free to join for COAI members in good standing.

All COAI members are welcome, simply contact the business office and ask to join!

If you would like to become a part of the future, "BACK TO THE FUTURE," reach out via email ([coaioffice@aol.com](mailto:coaioffice@aol.com)) or phone (352-357-1676) to let us know you're interested.

The Alley meets on Zoom every 2nd Monday of the month at 8 p.m. Eastern Time!

2. Rising Stars Clown Alley – The COAI Online Teen Alley

All COAI Teens are welcome to join!

3. Jr. Joey Alley – The COAI Jr. Joey Online Alley

All COAI Jr. Joey's are welcome to join!

Gloria Sterrett

401 N Washington St

Delphi, Indiana 46923

Director of Alley and Regional Support

Quick Links:

[mycoai.com/annual-alley-report/](http://mycoai.com/annual-alley-report/)

[mycoai.com/alley-charter-application/](http://mycoai.com/alley-charter-application/) (for new Alleys)

Gloria Sterrett

AKA: "HeySeed" B.Y.C.C.M. "Dolli" The Clown (FB website)

Phone (call or text): 765-564-9604

Email: [heyseedbyccmdolli@yahoo.com](mailto:heyseedbyccmdolli@yahoo.com)

Bump a Nose!

# JUNIOR JOEYS

By Regina “Cha Cha” Wollrabe,  
Junior Joeys Director



Hey, Junior Joeys! How are you?

I just want to reach out and give you a great big high-five and say thank you for being a funny clown who helps people smile and laugh. Laughter is a medicine, and it really does help people feel better. You may not be able to have a real job yet, but being a clown is a very important job that you can actually do as a young person.

To be good at clowning around means more than just being silly. It means you are working on how to be a clown who respects and loves people, and that you are working on skills, physical humor, comedy, and so much more. As members of Clowns of America International we feel it's really important to have a mentor. This can be a parent or grandparent or someone who teaches clowning and wants to help you grow and learn everything about what it takes to make you a funny clown.

We feel it's helpful to have someone who can help you learn what clowns used to be like and how they started. Many famous clowns started in the circus. Clowns keep growing and changing, but one thing stays the same—we have funny, silly ways to do things or express ourselves. We want to bring joy to hurting people, or help someone celebrate and feel special, or teach an important message using humor.

Read books and clown magazines, and learn all you can. Many of our great clown teachers over time have written great books to pass on their knowledge. We can also help you find names of those books if you can't find them yourself. We are here to answer questions and share our knowledge to help you grow to be the best you can be.

As many of our former Junior Joeys who are now adults can tell you, everything you learn from clowning will help you in your adult life, no matter what you end up doing. Good humor will help you make new friends and get jobs in your future.

When I first started clowning I use to love looking at the clowns in *The New Calliope*. I would get ideas by looking at other clowns and then dream about the type of clown I wanted to become. Being a clown is not just about what costume you wear. The clown is you. It's how you think and how you make other people feel by the funny way you do things. The costume can help you feel funny, including the clown nose, a funny hat, and fun shoes. When my kids were young, I would ask them to draw a picture of what they thought they would like to look like as a clown. We did our best to work with a costumer to make it happen.

Remember one thing: The world needs you!

**A quick announcement to parents of children ages twelve and up:** Your Junior Joey Director and mentor clowns will be at the 2024 COAI Convention in Niagara Falls, New York, May 13–17, 2024. We hope to see a good group of Junior Joeys show up. It's going to be a fun convention! We do not have a separate program for the children, but we will make ways to be connected and have check-ins with each other. Please let the COAI Business Office or your Junior Joey Director (that's me, Regina!) know that you are planning to come so we can be fully prepared for each Junior Joey and make it the most memorable educational week of their lives.



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# In Memory

## Creating a Routine to Honor Clowns Who Have Gone Before Us

By Bruce “Charlie” Johnson

At Clown Camp there was a Staff on Stage demonstration show just about every morning and evening. It has been my honor and privilege to serve on the Clown Camp staff every year there has been a program beginning in 1990. Richard Snowberg, the Clown Camp founder and director, often scheduled me to perform either the first or last Staff on Stage show of the week. He sometimes specifically asked me to include a motivational routine as part of my show.

The June 2023 session of Clown Camp was dedicated to the memory of Richard Snowberg, who passed away on March 19, 2023. We also honored other people associated with Clown Camp who had passed away since the last program was held in 2019. Patty Wooten and Arthur Pedlar had each been part of the Clown Camp staff many times.



Kenny Ahern, the Managing Director of Clown Camp, scheduled me to do the last Staff on Stage show of the 2023 Clown Camp program. I began the show with a memorial section. Here is how I opened my show.

### Script

Walk on stage carrying kalimba, an instrument sometimes referred to as a thumb piano, in a case. Pause to wave hello to the audience. Notice something in midair and look up. Gradually slow down movement of hand until you stop with hand raised open palm towards the audience. Look down at audience. Look back upwards. Reach up and grab scarf that suddenly appears in the air. Put scarf down on nearby chair.

Open case and remove the kalimba. Play the lowest C and then run finger up tines on right side producing a pleasant sound. Smile. Reach into front right-hand pants pocket to get sheet music. The pocket is bottomless so that your hand goes all the way through. Reach down as far as you can and pat leg, looking for music. Switch to left pocket.

Pull out old yellowed piece of paper with hole in it. Clip it to the top of a music stand. Look at the music and begin to play the kalimba, resulting in a discordant series of notes. Shake your head. Peer at the music. Begin playing again. The same series of notes is played. Pull out a book titled *How to Read Music*. Look at a page, and then at the sheet of music. Turn the page and study the book again. Look at the music



Caption

and then realize what is wrong. Unclip the sheet of music, turn it over, and clip onto the music stand. Set the book aside.

Play “Baa Baa Black Sheep” twice. Acknowledge the applause by tipping your hat. Put down the kalimba.

Pick up the book. Display the front of the *How to Read Music* book to the audience. Flip through the pages so the audience can see that while some pages include instructional text, most of the pages have four lines of music. Point to the title on the cover. Gesture mystically toward the audience in order to hypnotize them. Flip through the book showing that each page has the word “Music” printed four times.

Set the book aside. Pick up the kalimba and play one verse of “Amazing Grace.” At the conclusion of the song, set the kalimba down. Pick up a container of waxed dental floss.



Caption

Say, “Amazing Grace is a song frequently played at memorial services. Something that you frequently see at a memorial is big numbers listing the date of their birth and the date of their death. On the day that they are born, they open their eyes, cry, and begin breathing. On the day that they die, they close their eyes, stop breathing, and their family cries. Those days are not the important ones. All the important things that somebody accomplishes come between those two dates. They are represented by the smallest thing on their memorial. That is the dash between the dates. I would like to use this dental floss to represent that dash in a routine called the Thread of Life. It is based on a classic magic effect.

“When somebody dies, their dash comes to an end. (Break off first piece of dental floss.) We may feel like we have lost our connection to them.

“Ohana is the Hawaiian word for family. It means more than just the family that we are born into. It includes the family of friends that we choose. Richard Snowberg often referred to Clown Camp as the family reunion. Many of us we have experienced the

reality of Clown Camp participants and staff being a family.

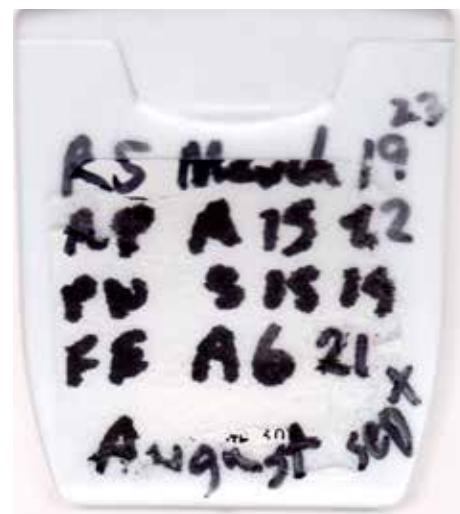
“We have lost some members of our family since the last time we were together. (Break off piece of dental floss.) Richard Snowberg passed away on March 19 of this year. (Break off piece of dental floss.) Arthur Pedlar passed away on August 15, 2022. (Break off piece of dental floss.) Patty Wooten passed away on September 15, 2019. (Break off piece of dental floss.) We have lost more than staff members. Fran Etkorn participated in Clown Camp many times. I first met her over twenty years ago when I was her alley leader. I had seen her frequently after that. Due to a medical condition, she was on oxygen for years. She did not let that interfere with being a clown. Sometimes she disguised her oxygen tank as a little fire hydrant while performing. She passed away on August 6, 2021.

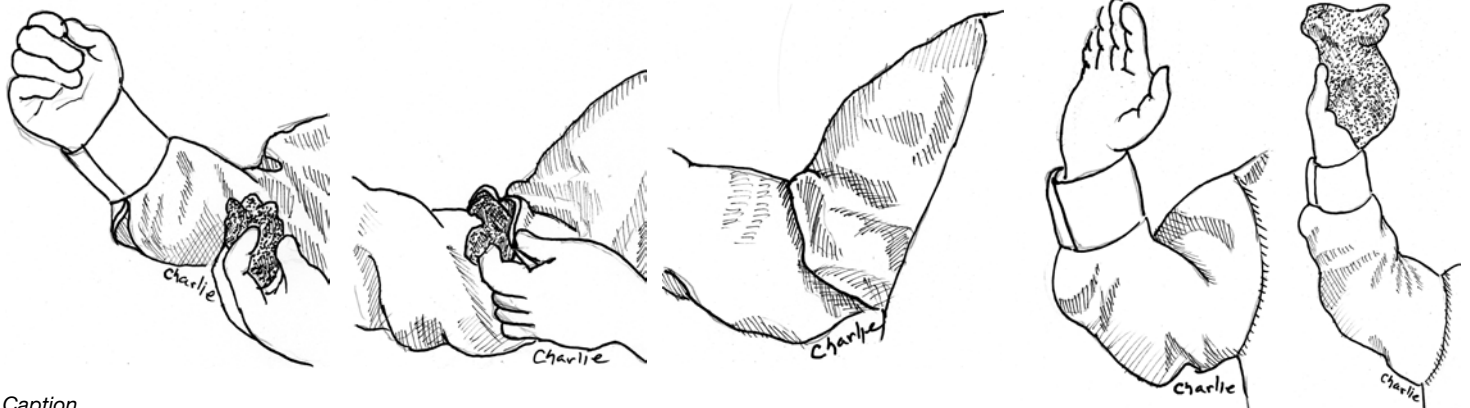
“We were not able to meet together in recent years because of the pandemic. Most people that I know lost someone during that time. (Break off piece of dental floss.) My aunt Marilyn died after being infected with COVID. (Break off piece of dental floss.) Dom Yodice was a friend of mine who was a



circus model builder and who collected memorabilia from the film *The Greatest Show on Earth*. He passed away after contracting COVID. Some of his collection has been donated to the Circus World Museum where it will be preserved. (Break off a couple more pieces of dental floss.) Perhaps one of these pieces represents the dash of somebody that you know.

(Pull one piece of dental floss away from the others.) “You may feel like your dash is isolated.





Caption

“However, our dashes are not separate. Our lives are wound up with each other. (Roll the other pieces of dental floss up into a ball.) We each influence those around us. We cannot prevent that. Our only choice is whether we will be a positive or a negative influence. I hope that each of you chose to be a positive influence upon those around you.

“According to the Jewish faith, a person does not truly die as long as somebody remembers them. That belief is shared by many cultures. If you saw the Disney movie *Coco*, you will remember that is the theme of the film. As long as we remember those who have gone before us, and share stories about them, they will still be connected to us.

(Place ball of pieces on the single piece that’s held in the other hand.)

“As entertainers, we have another way to keep the memory of those who came

before us alive. We can let their performances inspire what we perform today and in the future.

“The comedy bit about the piece of sheet music being upside down was part of Arthur Pedlar’s clown act. I performed it today in his honor.

“Richard Snowberg believed that everyone had something to share with others, and everyone should continue learning. That is why Clown Camp uses the terms staff members and participants instead of teachers and students. Everyone here is both a teacher and a student.

“I have learned from and been inspired by many Clown Camp participants while being a staff member for over thirty years. I met Dottie Goldfarb at Clown Camp in 1990. She was a professional violinist performing with an orchestra in Southern California. She wanted to become a clown but did not know how

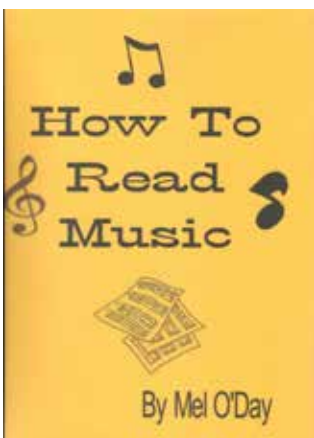
to use her violin to create humor. She chose Fiddlesticks as her clown name. I helped her with some ideas. I was living in Southern California at the time, so I saw her at regional clown conventions. In 1993, I had the pleasure of seeing her perform the routines that I helped her create. That was the last time that I saw her in person. I moved to Seattle shortly after that. However, I have never forgotten her. She passed away several years ago. One of the comedy bits that I helped her put together was the *How to Read Music* book. I performed it this morning in her honor thirty years after seeing her perform it.

“As long as we remember and honor those who have gone before us, they will always remain a part of the thread of life.” (Pull on dental floss, revealing that it has been restored.)

### Comments

The barehanded midair scarf production is an important part of my show. First, it establishes my credibility by appearing to be a demonstration of skill. That contrasts with the initial difficulty that I will have when playing the kalimba. Also, because it happens suddenly and is over quickly, people realize that they might miss something interesting if they do not pay close attention.

It helps introduce a premise for the show, that magic is part of the environment. Magic is something that I



MUSIC  
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experience instead of something that I cause. I am just as surprised and amazed as the audience. The majority of this show was my Sorcerer's Apprentice act. In that act, a magician named Bruce Johnson does not show up. His props are set on the stage. The emcee leaves Charlie, the janitor, in charge of the props while the emcee goes to find Mr. Johnson. Out of curiosity, Charlie begins playing with the props and unexpected things happen.

The scarf production also bookends the show by foreshadowing the ending. My show concluded with a quick production of a series of scarves. The final scarf was thirty-six inches and depicted the 2023 Clown Camp logo honoring Richard Snowberg. When the audience saw that scarf produced, they realized that my show was ending and people began to stand as they applaud.

Arthur Pedlar said, "Clowning is different from every other circus act because it is the only one that is based on thought."

I did not play the kalimba to demonstrate that I can do that. The humor is based on experiencing difficulty while trying to play the kalimba. Playing the instrument is also a segue to what happens next. Figuring out what I was doing wrong, by reading the instructions, leads to the joke about hypnotizing the

audience so they can read music. Playing "Amazing Grace" leads to talking about memorial services.

The broken and restored dental floss routine follows one of Richard Snowberg's concepts of performing magic. He had a doctorial degree in Educational Technology. He began using magic while presenting educational lectures to school teachers. He did not present magic as a puzzle to be solved. Instead, he used it as a metaphor to reinforce a point that he was making. In my routine, every move that I had to make for the magic effect to work was motivated by something I said while telling my story. In the theater, that is called justification.

Magicians call what you say during your act your "patter." There is another type of patter. Magicians refer to it as silent patter. Actors call it a silent script. It is what you think during your performance. It can be planned and written in advance. Here is an example from this performance. When I enter and begin waving at the audience, I think, "Welcome. I am glad that you are here. We are going to have fun together." When I glance up I think, "There is something up there. I wonder what it could be. That looks strange." When I look back down at the audience, I think, "Do you see it too?" When I look back up, I think, "It is still there. I wonder if I can reach it." I reach up into the air. When the silk appears in midair, I pause while I think, "Whoa! Where did that come from? That is amazing!" That pause gives the audience time to applaud. If they start applauding, I look at the audience, tip my hat, and think, "Thank you!"

The reason for using silent patter is that your thoughts are unconsciously communicated through your body language and your facial expressions. If you fake one emotion with your facial expression and your body language communicates something else, your audience does not believe what you are doing. Your thoughts unite your expressions and body language.

Your thoughts also bring your performance to life. In the 1934 Disney cartoon *Playful Pluto*, Pluto gets stuck to a piece of fly paper. He pauses and the audience can see that he is thinking about how to get free of the paper. It was the first time that an animated cartoon character was depicted as thinking. It is considered the first time that an animated character seemed to be real instead of just drawings that moved.

An additional reason for using a silent script is that it keeps your mind from wandering. If your mind is occupied with your script, you are not thinking about what you are going to do after the show is over. You also do not think about what has happened prior to your show.

I was scheduled to perform my Tramp Tradition Show at the Wild Winter Workshop on the morning of February 1, 2003. The workshop director was finishing her morning announcements when somebody came in and announced that the Space Shuttle had just broken up during reentry. The show was delayed by a half hour as audience members processed and expressed their feelings. Suddenly, without warning, the director introduced me and my show. I was still feeling my own sense of grief as I began performing. The show was well rehearsed so I was able to perform on auto pilot as I tried to deal with my emotions. I was performing, but I knew that I was not connecting to the audience. Your emotions are contagious. As long as I was not emotionally involved in my performance, the audience was not involved. Using my silent script, I was able to shift from thinking about the disaster to thinking about the material that I was performing. Finally, I began to connect emotionally to what I was performing. That then allowed me to connect emotionally to audience members. After that show, many audience members commented that I helped them deal with their grief and get beyond that.

I do not always write out a complete script for my silent patter. However, everything that I say on stage is fully

scripted and memorized. Because it is preplanned, I do not have to think about what is coming up. That allows me to pay attention to what is happening at that moment. That focus allows me to respond to the audience and supports ad libbing. When I insert an ad lib, I know how to immediately get back into what I planned.

The script not only helps me prepare for a performance. It also preserves ideas for future performances. I wrote the first version of *The Thread of Life* in 2009 and performed it at Clown Camp. My mother had passed away just a few months before the educational program began. Two other women who were frequent participants at Clown Camp had passed away that year. I had just learned how to do the broken and restored dental floss routine. I used that as the basis for honoring those three women during my 2009 Staff on Stage show.

I had not performed the routine again in the past fourteen years. I had not felt that there was the need, or an appropriate time, to revive it. This year, I wanted to honor those people who had passed away since 2019. So, I consulted the original script. I rewrote most of it to correspond to the current situation, but the original script provided me with the skeleton to use for the new routine. I did repeat some of the original lines in the new version.

Although I memorize my script, I create performance aids to help if I forget something. For example, I knew the songs that I played on the kalimba well enough that I could perform them from memory. However, I knew that I would also be nervous performing with it on stage for the first time. To provide a backup I had the music for those songs posted on the music stand so I could glance at it to remind me of what came next. It was important that I be able to conclude the routine by playing the kalimba correctly. Charles “Doc” Boas was the founder and director of Circus Kirk, the first student circus to tour under canvas. At the beginning of my career Doc taught me that if the audience cares

about your character they want to see you succeed.

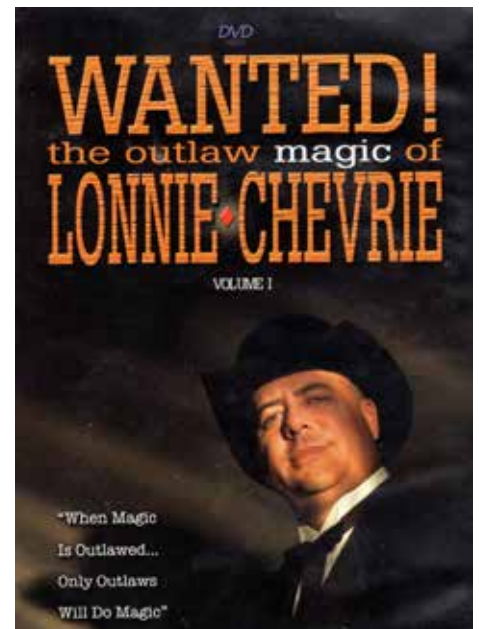
I have trouble remembering numbers, so I wrote the dates of the four people I mentioned on the back of the dental floss container. It was natural to look down as I was tearing off the next bit of floss so I could easily read the dates.

After forty-nine years as a clown, I am still learning new skills and writing new routines. I have always admired clowns who play music during their act. Over the years, I tried to learn to play several instruments, and failed. Finally, I was able to learn to play the kalimba. My Staff on Stage show at Clown Camp was the first time that I had ever played an instrument during a performance.

In books on creativity, business people are frequently urged to maintain a Beginner’s Mind. That means forgetting your preconceived ideas about how something should be done, and looking at it with a fresh perspective.

In *The Creative Process for Variety Artists*, a book I am completing, I give the phrase an additional meaning. That is accepting that you are a beginner when you learn a new skill. You will make mistakes in some of your initial performances. That is okay. You do not have to wait until you are an expert to begin using your new skill. Find a simple way to use that skill entertainingly. Start gaining experience performing it. That will lay the foundation for eventually doing more advanced routines. John Wooden said, “Do not let what you cannot do interfere with what you can.”

The comedy with the kalimba was an important part of the memorial. In *Comedy Techniques for Variety Artists*, I discuss the use of contrast. We judge things by comparing them. Comedy and drama are both heightened when they are juxtaposed. The kalimba comedy makes the Thread of Life routine seem more dramatic. In a circus or variety show, the clown acts provide the contrast to the more dramatic acts. In a solo show, you provide your own contrast. Something in a clown show must be funny, but not everything has to be funny. A good



clown can connect with their audience through many different emotions.

After the Thread of Life routine, I did two other short routines honoring specific people by performing material associated with them. My Staff on Stage show was on Sunday morning. I concluded the memorial segment by saying, “I grew up attending Lutheran Churches. At some point every Sunday, someone would say, ‘thus ends the lesson of the day.’ Now it is time for me to say, ‘thus ends the lesson of the day.’ Now it is time for you to sit back, relax, and have some fun. Kenny, I think it is time for the next act.”

Kenny Ahern, who was the emcee, entered and we performed the introduction to my Sorcerer’s Apprentice Act. The rest of my show was comedy magic routines that are a part of that act. Once again, it was important to juxtapose the dramatic memorial with humor to heighten the effectiveness of both.

## Methods:

### Sheet Music

I was honored when Arthur Pedlar agreed to describe his music and unicycle act while I recorded it. He stressed that the sheet of music he pulled out of his pocket had to be yellowed and have a hole in it to show its age. He gave me

permission to publish his description in *Creativity for Entertainers Volume Three: Creative Routines*. That description was reprinted in the 2023 Clown Camp notebook as part of a tribute to Arthur. That means every audience member would be able to read what had inspired my brief routine.

I graduated from California State University – Long Beach with a BA in Technical Theater. This is how I learned to age paper in my prop construction class. Print what you want to appear on the piece of paper and allow the ink to dry. Spray the paper with a plastic fixative to seal it. When that is dry, apply some yellow ochre acrylic paint to the paper. While the paint is still wet, rinse it under running water. After most of the paint has been removed, let the paper dry. Now crease it several times if it is supposed to be a document that has been folded.

### **Barehanded Midair Scarf Production**

Magic became my hobby when I was in the third grade. My father was a school teacher, so I did not have much money available to spend on props. I went to the public library where the librarians helped me find books on performing magic. I made many of my early magic props. I must have learned how to do the midair scarf production from one of those books. I know that it was one of the first magic tricks that I performed.

In order to perform it, you must be wearing a long sleeve shirt. When you bend your elbow excess fabric will bunch up in the crook of your elbow. I just wad up a scarf. However, you can experiment with different ways of folding or rolling it. Place the scarf in the center of the crook of your elbow. Now pull some of the fabric of the sleeve over so it covers the scarf. Make sure that the opening is towards your wrist. As long as you keep your elbow bent, the scarf will remain securely hidden. You still have a great deal of freedom to move your arm. When you are ready to produce the scarf, look up into the air as if you see something.

Quickly reach upwards straightening out your arm. As the slack in the sleeve fabric is taken up, it will force the scarf to fly up into the air. For me, the scarf usually opens and becomes visible for the first time when it is just beyond my fingertips. When you see the scarf, grab it, and pause to let the audience see what has happened. Holding your raised hand motionless is a natural cue for the audience to applaud.

### **How to Read Music book**

This is a transforming book. The version most entertainers are familiar with is the Magic Coloring Book, but that is not the only option. The principle was described in 1584 by Reginald Scot in *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*. That version was a school text that changed topics many times. It was accomplished by cutting the edge of the pages into tabs.

This two-way transforming book is easier to construct. The odd pages have music notes on the front and the word “music” on the back. The even pages have the word “music” on the front and music notes on the back. Using a paper cutter about a third of the edge is trimmed off the bottom of the odd pages. About a third of the edge is trimmed off the top of the even pages. If your thumb is near the top of the book, the pages with notes are revealed as you flip through the book using your left hand. If your thumb is near the bottom of the book, the pages with the word “music” are revealed as you flip through the book using your left hand. Because you remove your left hand from the book completely to make the hypnotic gestures, people do not notice that you are holding it in a different place as you flip through it a second time.

I wanted there to be some instructional text when I flipped through the book the first time, I got a book on playing the violin from my public library. I copied a few of the pages that included text. I scanned some lines of notes from the book and arranged them at random on the other pages. That way I knew for sure

that I was not violating anyone’s copyrighted material.

I printed the pages out on cardstock. That prevents the ink from showing through to the other side. I also think that the thicker pages are a little easier to flip.

### **Thread of Life**

The broken and restored dental floss routine was created by Lonnie Chevrie. It is his variation of the classic Gypsy Thread effect. I learned it when Lonnie lectured at the Magic Show Conference in Branson, Missouri. I will respect his intellectual property and not reveal how it works. You can do a similar routine using one of the Gypsy Thread methods. You can also purchase Lonnie’s directions. They are sold as an instant download by Penguin Magic. The name of the effect for the download is “Waxed by Lonnie Chevrie.” The directions are also available on a DVD titled *Wanted! The Outlaw Magic of Lonnie Chevrie*. The name of the effect on the DVD is “String ‘Em Up.” There are several different sources for purchasing the DVD.

I use Lonnie’s method of performing the effect exactly as he teaches it. However, what I say is completely different. In his version, he talks about the little bit of dental floss that is left when you have almost used up a container.

### **Conclusion**

How can you pay tribute to performers who came before us? How can you use their routines as inspiration for your performances? What stories can you tell about them to keep their memory alive?

How can you base your routines on the thought process of your character? How can you justify your actions on stage? How can you utilize silent patter?

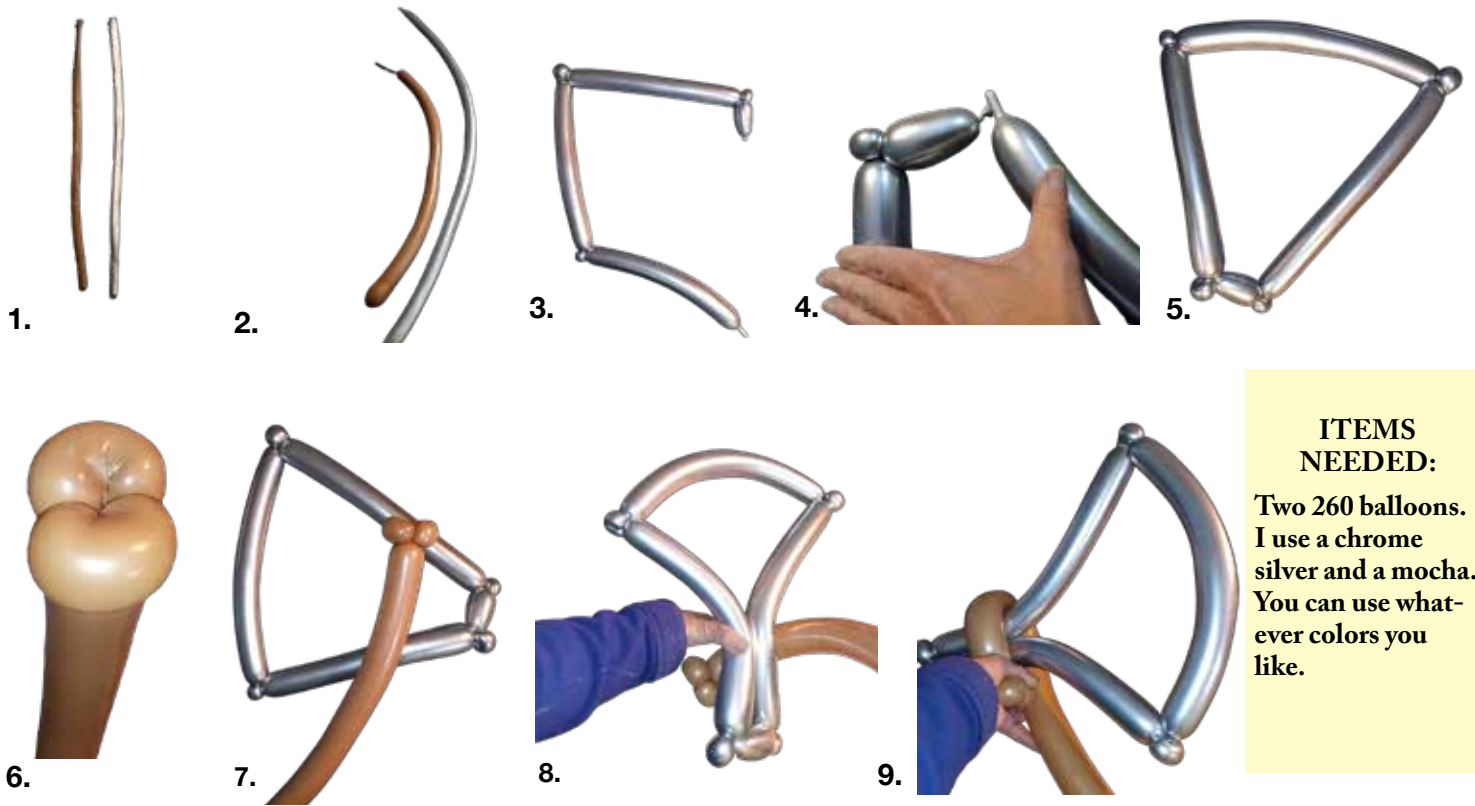
How can you juxtapose comedy and drama to make them both more effective?

I am always interested in your questions and comments. You can contact me at [clownjuggler@comcast.net](mailto:clownjuggler@comcast.net)



# Balloon Axe

By Merrily Johnston



**ITEMS  
NEEDED:**

Two 260 balloons.  
I use a chrome  
silver and a mocha.  
You can use what-  
ever colors you  
like.

I suddenly got my first request for a balloon axe a year or two ago. I tried to make one up on the spot. Truthfully, it didn't turn out that great. My second try was a little better but still needed some tweaking. Here's what I came up with on my third try. I liked this one best. It's super-simple and very popular! Yay!

1. Inflate the silver balloon, leaving a two-finger tail. Give it a good burp so that it's nice and soft. Inflate mocha balloon, leaving a six-finger tail.
2. Make a four-finger bubble followed by a small pinch twist, then a 15-finger bubble followed by a small pinch twist, a second 15-finger bubble followed by a small pinch twist, and finally a

third 15-finger bubble followed by a small pinch twist.

3. Tie the ends together.
4. Make a small pinch twist in the longer bubble.
5. Make two pinch twists in the nozzle end of the mocha balloon.
6. Figure out where you want the handle.

7. Squeeze the chrome balloon together where you'd like to place the handle.
8. Wrap handle around chrome balloon (axe head) tight enough to hold in place.
9. Twist mocha balloon into the two mocha pinch twists and arrange the pinch twists on either side of axe head for support. Decide what length you'd like to make the handle. Tie knot and trim excess.