

## **Birthday Party Clowning In Unique Places**

**By Rich Snowberg**

Over the years *Clowning Around* has featured several articles on a wonderful facility in Kissimmee, Florida, called **Give Kids the World**. It is here that children with chronic or often terminal illnesses are provided a vacation that includes visits to Disney World and other theme parks and attractions. The sick child and his/her entire family stay in a chalet at *The Village of Give Kids the World*. Each evening they have a special celebration. One night it is Christmas, another is a special theme, and the last night is a birthday celebration for Mayor Clayton. The Mayor, a supersized large cuddly character, is each week provided a big surprise birthday party, which is celebrated by all children who also might have birthdays that same month. It is basically a reason to bring all the families together for a fun evening. It is reasonable and easy to do this same thing in your local children's hospital, or on the floor of a general hospital that contains youngsters. Even if none of the patients are currently celebrating a birthday, you may regularly celebrate the birthday of one of their care providers (nurse, doctor, etc.). A birthday party provides a reason not only for celebration, but also for bringing people together.

The last point mentioned above, is important for all performers that provide birthday party entertainment. As you prepare for your appearance, remember that you are about to attend a celebration that is bringing friends and family together. Recognize not only the birthday child's mother and father, but also other adult attendees. As for the children present, my character sees them as all brothers and sisters. "My what a big fun family you have with so many brothers and sisters!" This will prompt laughter as well as introductions on behalf of the birthday celebrant.

Have you been asked to appear at the birthday party of a one or two year old? Many of us have, and wonder what we are going to do. Just remember, the birthday party is a celebration by a family, and that in these cases the entertainment is more for the parents or group of relatives and siblings, than it is for the infant. There is a viable market here, so don't overlook these opportunities.

Now let me turn to actual birthday party celebrations in hospitals. My first experience with this type appearance came via a friend that had a daughter who was being hospitalized on her birthday. This young girl of about seven or eight years of age, was disappointed because she wasn't going to have a birthday party. Mom came to me and asked if I'd do a special party just for her-in her hospital room. I agreed to do so, but both because she was a friend and the child was in the hospital, this was going to be my gift. (Thus I was not willing to accept payment for a show that I was going to be providing in a hospital. This was a personal decision on my

part and each of you will decide yourselves the issue of payment for a show of this kind.)

A day or so before the party, the mother told me that the nurses had agreed to this party and wondered if it would be all right if other hospitalized children were also allowed to see the clown appearance. Since this was agreeable with the parents, it was thus decided to have the show in the hospital play room. So while the hospitalized girl could not have her personal friends from school attend her party, she could have other children currently also residing at the hospital take part in her special day of celebration.

It was decided that this show would take place in the early evening, when in particular mom would be able to attend. This worked out well also for the hospital staff, as all of the children's general therapy or other procedures had already been completed during the day. The show proved to be a big success, and the nurses wondered if I would be willing to provide other similar parties, if the occasion arose that another hospitalized child spent their birthday at the hospital. (Even in a hospital you may receive referrals for other appearances.)

And speaking of referrals let me tell you what happened when I arrived at the hospital. While initially taking the elevator up to the pediatric floor, an adult group asked me what I-a clown, was doing in the hospital. I explained my mission, and they responded that they too were going up to another floor to celebrate the birthday of their adult brother and husband. They asked if I could also drop in as a surprise visitor for their birthday celebration. (Their brother and husband had had gall bladder surgery a few days earlier, and was up and around, but not yet able to be released from the hospital.) I indicated that when I finished with the children's party, I'd come back down to their floor and inquire at the nurses station if it was permissible for me to make an appearance on their floor. (Be very mindful that someone, particularly one in disguise, is not an anticipated or welcomed guest in a hospital. And, hospitals don't like any more surprises than they have to deal with on a daily basis. ) When I arrived at the nurses' station, I was told that I was expected and to just go down to the solarium, where the family had gathered. Thus a second birthday appearance became a reality on the same day-at the same place.

I have also appeared at nursing homes for birthday parties. The most memorable was one for a 100-year old man. I'll save that story for another time. In conclusion, just remember, many times people, children and adults, can't control where they are when they have a birthday. However wherever they may be, if it is their birthday, it can be cause for a celebration with friends, families, and a clown.