

# Grease Paint

March 2020



## High School Drama Departments

The presentation for the Rock Island High School Drama Department went very well. Special thanks to Jillyan for her help. A good audience of students enjoyed some history, conversation on our activities and watched a couple of skits. One asked about improv and Jillyan accepted her suggestion to work a short routine about cheese and the moon.

There were some key elements that caught the students attention. When the drama department puts on a play there are not enough parts for all the students. And, you can only have so many stage hands working before they step on each other. Clowns can do walk-around before the play. They can also do a pre-show to warm up the audience.

Another element they seemed anxious about is that they could perform their own skits. They learned they could write them, direct and produce them. Entertaining with their own material really caught their attention.

Drama departments could be a good source to attract new members. Most departments face the same situations. There are not enough parts to allow every student to participate. And, the idea of creating their own skits to perform and walk-around audience warm ups creates a lot of interest.

If you have friends in the school system, or know the drama teacher, you can reach out and see if they would be interested in a presentation by the troupe.

**Robocall Epidemic:** Things you can do when you receive them.

**It Didn't Matter:** 1st time out in senior center, very scared.

**Clown Funerals:** Some of the hardest clowning you can do.

**Show Team:** A group of clowns producing a QCCT show.

**Who's on First Chemistry:** A classic sketch and the element that made it work.

**QCCT Library:** A history of what happened.

**2020 Troupe Dues:** Time once again for our annual membership dues.

**Library Organization Idea:** An idea being used in another organization that might work with our library.

## *It Didn't Matter*

Well this is it. Makeup done as best I could, old shirt that I added a few patches on. Baggy pants and I spray painted an old pair of Keds sneakers. Kazoo and finger puppet in hand I stepped out of the car. You could almost see my hands shaking as I entered the community room. One by one, like a small wave reaching across the room, the seniors looked at me as I walked in.

Just what I wanted. I was always too shy to get up in front of class at school. Now here I stand dressed like a clown and everyone is staring waiting for me to do something. Someone said "look, a clown is here". I started to mingle. I would visit each table with my finger puppet. I started a small conversation with my puppet and I was surprised that some of them started talking to the puppet as well.

A little at a time I began to relax and have fun. By the end of the two hours I was laughing and carrying on like a professional. But deep inside I knew I was nothing more than a part time clown. Someone who put on a costume and makeup to visit them. I kind of felt like someone who was directed to put in a couple hours of community service.

As I was getting ready to leave one senior motioned me to come over. I walked over and she pointed to a chair asking me to sit down. "Which one of our residents is your parent", she asked. I said "no one I just stopped by to say hello". I watched as she slowly started to tear up. Through the tears she said "I have been here five years now, I don't want to wait another five years to see you again".

At that point I forgot all about time. I spent another hour letting her introduce me to some of her friends who were still in their rooms. Some could not get out of bed, others were too depressed to do anything. But when we came by they perked up and their faces burst into smiles.

All I had was a simple finger puppet and kazoo. Seniors are not that picky. They love attention, they like to sing and most of all they like someone to take time out of their day to visit them. I'm not a part time pretend clown to them. I am their source of entertainment. And, it doesn't have to be all laughs. I have spent time with seniors who just wanted someone to listen and give them a hug.

It didn't matter that day if my makeup was perfect. The costume was good enough for them. They didn't care if I did balloons, face paint, or magic. All that mattered to them was that someone got dressed up, came over to their facility and spent time with them. Don't judge yourself as a clown. Your audience probably has a completely different opinion.

## ***Clown Funerals***

(These will probably be hardest clowning events you will ever do)



I have done more than my share in my clowning years. At one time I had a small group of my own named the “Home Town Clowns”. One at a time they passed away. Two had written my presence into their final plans. Rainbow wanted me to be an active part of the service. So did Patty Pockets. I asked troupe members for their help. The services were cherished memories of dear friends walking up the rainbow bridge.

Most recently was the funeral of Jack Kirch, a minister from a local church that provided a meeting place for the troupe. His final requests were for me to follow the casket up the aisle, sit beside him during the service and at one point make a few comments. The service went very well and the comments I received from the family really touched my heart.

Funerals are a celebration of life. But they are the hardest events any clown can do. We clown to entertain. The loss of a loved one is an emotional drain that makes it hard to put on your traditional clown demeanor. It can be very hard to tempt a smile when you are crying inside yourself.

Rainbow didn’t take long to plan. A change bag was used and I started carrying it up showing it was empty. I mentioned something about her and placed a small colored silk in the bag. One by one other clowns came up and made comments adding their small silks to the bag. In the end I manipulated the bag and walked to the last clown in line. He reached in and pulled out the beginning of a very long multi colored silk streamer. The streamer stretched in front of all the clowns.

The “Rainbow Connection” music played as I gathered up the streamer. My final comments were to her husband as I handed him a heart shaped balloon. At that point there wasn’t a dry eye in the house.

Patty Pockets clown shoes and a picture sat on top of her coffin. Toto began walking up talking about her clowning. I followed with some comments. I closed saying it was not about Patty. It was all about her audience. That was who she cared about. Reading books for seniors, telling stories for children or spending time clowning with the family, that was important. That was also a memorable service.

Father Jack was different. I sat next to him in front of everyone through the service. When it was my turn to comment I pointed out his strength with the youth. He learned early that our children would be leading the world later in life. He always reached out to them. I also mentioned a few personal events and situations where he stepped up to help people. The family was very pleased with what I said and enjoyed my part of the service.

If you have not been asked already, you might be asked in the future. Here is my suggestion on a funeral for a clown. First I recommend you sitting down and making notes on all the positive things you remember. If you are going to mention them you need to try to speak from the eyes of the audience. Look over your inventory. You may want a prop or magic trick to use.

If you use a prop or magic trick, keep it very simple. The item should compliment what you are saying. This is not a variety show. You do not need the biggest, highest impact item. In harsh words you want the focus to be on your comments, not the prop/magic. Also, keep it short and simple. If you need to spend a lot of time preparing the audience, setting up the item, it is best not to use it.

Some people may come up and ask if you do birthday parties, or other community events. I recommend you not to get involved with that conversation. A funeral should never be used as a marketing event. Granted, they didn't think about a clown until they saw you. But that only explains their contact. They don't want the opportunity of speaking with you to slip away.

I mention that I am not there to discuss business. I say that today I am honoring (clowns name). I pass them one of my business cards and ask them to email me or call me in the next day or so. "I would be happy to talk to you about this but today is not a good day. Will you give me a call in the next day or so and I will be able to speak with you?"

Finally, be prepared. Your voice may get weak. You might choke up when you try to speak. My comments during these funerals were delivered with tears in my eyes. This will be the hardest clowning even you can do. Be fair with yourself.

Expect to feel sorrow. Let those tears fly. Those are not tears of sadness. They are tears of cherished memories of a special clown. Remember to have something to dab your face with. I do not when I am involved with a funeral. I feel it is alright for others to see a clown in tears. It makes it a lot easier to give a child a hug as you say "I understand dear, (clowns name) was one of my best friends too."

Remember, you are there to honor a clown. This is not an entertainment activity. It is one of the highest levels of respect you can be asked to do.

## *Show Team*

A team of clowns is being organized specifically to perform shows. A variety show will be produced to include skits, storytelling, magic and other entertainment. Some of the routines will be set to music. This will go beyond the show that was designed for the Parks Department camp.

Going forward the Quad City Clown Troupe will have two major components. They will have both a caring clowns and a show component. The show will be targeted to run about half an hour. It may also include safety messages.

The show will be family based entertainment. If a member is contacted asking about a performance, information should be passed to the Show Team to make contact. The contact for the Show Team, initially, will be Brian. He can be reached by email at: [topperhtc@yahoo.com](mailto:topperhtc@yahoo.com).

## *Who's On First Chemistry*

Abbott and Costello were a famous comedy duo. One of the most remembered skits they did was "Who's on first". If you do not remember, or want to read it again just do an Internet search for it. This sketch is often remembered and will never be forgotten.

What makes the sketch work is the chemistry between them. Like all comedy teams one person is the straight man and the other the comedian. Abbott was the straight man and the interaction between him and Costello is what made them so famous.

Who's on first is a play on words. Different words are used to name the players on the baseball team. The person on first base was named Who. Second base as a person named What and I don't know was the third baseman.

Abbott opens the sketch identifying those name of players and their position. The entire set-up is a wide open sketch for Costello to try to learn the players names in their position. As I said this is a classic that everyone should be familiar with.

The chemistry that blends the sketch together is pauses for Costello's facial expression. The interaction between Abbott answering his questions with the players names and Costello's confusion was the thread that moved the sketch to the closing.

Following this train of thought, clowns should be able to development their own materials. You do not have to assign names to things and try to remake this sketch. But the concept of

a straight, or serious clown speaking with a confused clown is a nice background. The first thing that comes to mind is the old "Life Magazine" story round.

One clown asks what is life. The second clown says it is a magazine. The first clown asks how much it costs and the second clown says two dollars. The first clown says he only has a dollar fifty. The second clown says oh well, that's life. The first clown comes back again asking what's life. The circle starts all over again.

Site down and think of different things you can do with one serious clown and the other that is confused. Nursery rhymes may work well. Jack and Jill went up the hill to fetch a candle stick for Jack to jump over. Let the serious clown correct that. Then add a twist. The confused clown acknowledges the pail of water but adds it rather than replace the candle. He may say ok to fetch a pail of water to put out the candle in case of fire.

Remember that it may take two clowns to do the sketch. However, both cannot be the comedian. One must play the straight part. Even though done in clown character, the straight clown must lead the audience through the set up and the rest of the sketch. The only time both clowns should play the confused part is if there is an audience member, preferably a child, standing there to correct them.

If the documentary was correct Abbott and Costello came up with who's on first completely ad-lib. In the documentary they tossed the written script someone gave them to the floor as they stepped up to the microphone. Abbott began with the set up and they fell into an impromptu ad-lib sketch that became famous.

There are a few clowns that can stand up in front of an audience and perform without any preparation. They ad-lib the entire routine interacting with one another. But those who cannot need to sit down with a partner and work through some ideas. You might surprise yourself.

If two of you put together the sketch, working as a team, the presentation does not have to be done word-for-word. You both know the storyline and where the story needs to go. So you work as a team to get from the beginning to the end. The more you work together the more ad-lib you can add. The partner will know where the sketch is going and interact to make it happen.

When you are working on a routine think more of the chemistry than the script. Use the script as an outline for the routine. But allow the chemistry between the clown characters to come out. Pause and use facial expressions as needed to enhance the storyline. The entertainment needs to come from the blend of the team, not just words on the paper.

## *QCCT Library*

At one time the clown troupe had an extensive library containing magazines, books and VHS tapes. The long time problem was and continues to be a place to store it. Over the years our meeting facilities have not provided an area we could secure the materials. So, someone had to act as the librarian and haul the suitcases of materials around.

As you might suspect, hauling the cases around when no one really checked anything out proved to be more trouble than it was worth. Slowly the cases stopped being brought to meetings. There was no indexing system so no one really knew what the library held.

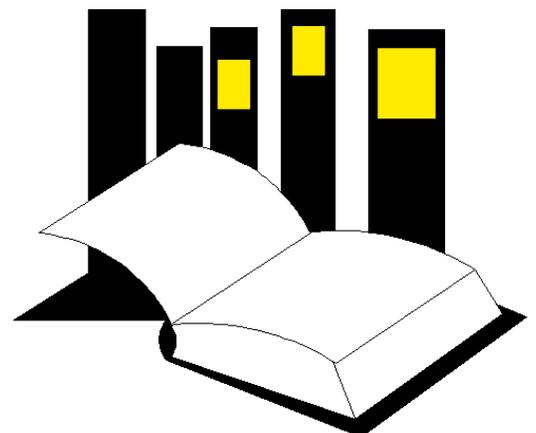
Our last meeting place, prior to the Parks Department allowed us to store the suit cases in their back room. Out of sight and no indexing system rendered the library almost useless. When we moved to the Parks Department, a serious discovery was made. Even though someone went through the cases and separated all the tapes from the magazines and books, the materials were not being checked out.

Janet and Dwight volunteered to take over as library custodians. That is when they discovered a lot of the contents were gone. One cannot pin point the times the items were taken. The library has mostly been sitting in an unsecured back room for a very long time. And, pointing fingers will not solve anything, or bring back the missing materials.

We are starting to build the library back up once again. Considerations are being made on how to alert members what materials are available. Fifteen VHS tapes were donated to the troupe and they will be transferred to DVDs. One copy will be retained as the master and a duplicate will be available checkout. If the duplicate is damaged we can make another off the master.

If you have materials you want to add to our library please bring them to one of our meetings. If Janet or Dwight are not at the meeting, someone will get it into their hands. If you have any ideas on an indexing system that might encourage members to use the materials, please email your ideas to [topperhtc@yahoo.com](mailto:topperhtc@yahoo.com).

We need to build our library back up again. And, we need to safeguard it. There must be a system or way to let our members know what is available. And, then we must have some type of system so we can track the materials being checked out and returned.



## ***2020 Troupe Dues***

It is time once again. 2020 dues should be paid to the treasurer. The dues are \$15.00. If there is a situation where that is not possible for you, speak with a board member. The board has the power to decide if your dues will be forgiven for the year.

If you attend any of our meetings you know that the clown troupe is in great financial condition. The vote was passed to charge dues allowing members to make an investment in the troupe that they learn from, and perform with

Those who attended clown class in 2019 were given free membership for the balance of the year. Those who attend the 2020 class will probably be extended the same option. Last year WCA gave a free online membership to anyone that attended a clown class. No word has been said if that will be extended again to attendees in 2020.

The troupe ordered name tags for members. Charges will be expensed through the troupe funds as an advertising expense. It is hoped that people, calling you by your clown name, can be asked to visit one of our meetings.

The troupe also has business cards that can be passed out. Often it is a lot easier to hand out a card than to go through a lengthy invitation. At the same time the card has information on it to allow the individual to contact us if they have questions.

Do not forget the new member challenge. We set a goal of July 1st to bring in five new members. Time to ask anyone that might be interested to attend one of our meetings. Getting them to a meeting is only half the goal challenge. When they come, the meetings need to be exciting enough that the visitor will want to return.

When you see guests come to a meeting be sure to introduce yourself. Do what you can to make them feel welcome and comfortable. A few have come just to learn and are not ready to get out and clown yet. That is not a problem. We welcome their interest.

Dues are accepted in cash or by personal check. Personal check is preferred as that gives the treasurer the members information to post to their individual file. There is no problem with paying your dues in cash. It just requires the treasurer to make a note of who paid for posting to their file later.

We hope you enjoy the membership, take advantage of clowning opportunities with the troupe and expand your circle of clown friends. If you need to make payment arrangements, speak with Jerry. I'm sure he will try to work with you if you need to spread the cost out for a couple months.

## *Library Organization Idea*

There is an organization that Brian belongs to that has a similar problem with their library. They do not have a place to store it so they had to come up with an indexing system and a procedure for members to check materials out. This might work for the Quad City Clown Troupe.

A page was set up on their website that lists the materials available in the library. The heading specifies that the materials are available for checkout by the organizations members. It also allows the member to send email requesting the material. The email is received, the librarian notified and the materials brought to the next meeting.

This idea would solve two direct problems. First it would provide an index of available materials for our membership. We would need to stress that check out is only available to our active members. If guests wish to view some of the materials, they are welcome to browse through them during a meeting.

Second, it would provide a communication path between the requesting member and the library custodians. Requests can be send through email and the materials brought to the meeting to be picked up. Some type of form or record will be designed that identifies the items checked out and the individual taking them.

This is one idea. We welcome others. Keep a few things in mind with your suggestions. The library is too big to lug around from meeting to meeting. Items cannot be checked out if members have no idea what is available. And, there needs to be a mutually agreed location for pickup and return. At the present time, our meetings seem to be the only option.

Also keep in mind that if we choose this option it will take time for inventory and posting the list on the website. This will not be an overnight project. The library itself will need to be organized into categories first. Once the project is done it will be a simple matter of keeping the information current. However, the initial build of the system will take time.

If you have materials you wish to donate to the library, please bring them to a meeting. If Dwight or Janet are not there, another officer will take them. He/she will pass them along to the custodians. Some of the items will pass directly into the library. The troupe receives a copy of Clowning Around, newsletters from various organization and other materials. Some of these, such as newsletters, may be stored in binders.

Help us bring the library back to life. Share your organization ideas during the meetings or by email to: [topperhtc@yahoo.com](mailto:topperhtc@yahoo.com)



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