

512-809-1755

## Mary Beth Martin: The Clown Within

Mary Beth was a quiet child, always obedient. She never threw spit balls at the teacher and was probably the chief eraser monitor. "I never misbehaved," she said. She was the most invisible girl in school, that is, until she found out what a little grease paint and extra, extra large pants could do for a girl's constitution. Suddenly, this goody two shoes became a master of mayhem, a joking juggler, a hider of magic scarves; the rebel she knew she always could be.

### A Clown Calling

It all started when they asked Mary Beth to teach Vacation Bible School. But you can't really blame the pastor. How was he to know about her underdeveloped, unrevealed urge to throw pies in the faces of unsuspecting clowns? Her husband-to-be was in for a surprise too. Had he done a background check, he would have guessed that on their honeymoon at Disneyworld and Circus World, Mary Beth would want to spend hours watching clowns apply make-up. (Her request for a honeymoon at Circus World should have tipped him off too.) Be that as it may, it was in the hallowed halls of church daycare that Mary Beth found her true place in life.

"I was teaching three-year-old kids and the curriculum said, 'Everybody dress up like clowns and celebrate all of God's gifts.'" Like an understudy who overhears that the lead actor is home sick with the gout, Mary Beth sprung into action. "So, I brought the makeup and put it on myself and all the kids," she said, unashamed of her influence on innocent children. "I knew that's what I wanted to do."

### A Profession With Perks

There are many good things about being a clown:

1. No need for purses, shopping bags or compost bins—you can use the extra space in your oversized pockets.
2. You look well-proportioned, no matter which way the stripes are going.
3. You can throw away your ladder and wash your third floor windows on stilts.

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4. Changing your name to Bozo, Biffo or Little Loo Loo won't upset anyone except the lady at the Social Security office.

5. It's the only profession where you can become someone else without plastic surgery, brain transplantation or mass consumption of alcoholic beverages.

It's number five that got Mary Beth Martin into clowning. But don't jump to conclusions. It wasn't because she was evading the Feds or wanted to get out of witness protection in Bolivia. Mary Beth Martin became a clown because it set her heart free. When she slips on her 2x clown pants and glues that rubber red ball onto her nose, she is transformed. And all her inhibitions, and prejudice against red lipstick vanish.

### Clown Co-Dependency

Possibly, the unsung hero of this story is her husband Mike. "I told Mike, 'this is what I want to do, I want to go to nursing homes and hospitals and make people happy,'" she said. Either Mike is one of those exceptional Trophy Husbands or he's a clown co-dependent because he has supported her ever since. For example, she was a clown on the TV show *Buckskin and Friends* and Mike would go along to help her. "I would do silly crazy things," she said, "and my husband learned to love me. He loves when I'm a clown," said Mary. This piece of information alone could have saved some couples a bundle on marriage counseling.

### More Than A Pretty Face

Being a clown is more than grease paint and size 37 shoes, and squirting lapel daisies. As a beginner, Mary Beth knew getting to the big top of clowning would mean months of study. And where does any clown worth her magic tricks go to learn? Clown camp of course.

Clown Camp was like home to Mary Beth. Every clown, regardless of family lineage, or political party, was accepted. "You learn balloon sculpting, juggling, magic tricks, stilts, unicycle, making props, and how to transform your face with grease paint," said Mary Beth. "The makeup is not for creating a mask," she said. "It's to emphasize your emotions. You never paint the top lip red. You don't get any expressions that way. You have to put white on top and red on bottom." Who knew?

When Mary Beth is all painted up and slips into her oversized trousers, she is no longer Mary Beth Martin, but Dr. Pokum, the clown. You fall in love with this fumbling, bumbling character, knowing she wants to make you happy.

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Dr. Pokum doesn't charge for autographs or play in clown horror movies -- because real clowns don't scare people -- even though the pay is good. It's in the nursing homes, the orphanages of South America and drug rehabs of Siberia that she finds her celebrity. She even clowned at the White House Easter Egg Roll hosted by President George H.W. Bush in 1992.

Even though Mary Beth loves making people laugh, it is she who gets the biggest thrill. When she pulls on her yellow yak hair wig and paints her lip red, she is Dr. Pokum—the smile maker.