

THE NEW CALLIOPE

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*Clown
of the
Year*

**Crissy
Melnitzke**

**MIZ
DAISY**



Crissy “Miz Daisy” Melnitzke

COAI’s 2017 CLOWN OF THE YEAR

By Regina “Cha Cha” Wollrabe

Clowns of America International is bestowing the 2017 Clown of the Year award on Crissy “Miz Daisy” Melnitzke of Winter Haven, Florida. Crissy was chosen for her outstanding qualities as a clown and for all she has done to promote the art. Her caring heart is well known in her local community, and she is also continually giving back to her clowning community.

Crissy’s career began in 2007 after she graduated from Toby’s Clown School in Lake Placid, Florida. She is still a member of Toby’s Clown Alley, as well as Clowns of America International, Southeast Clown Association, World Clown Association, and the Giggle Bytes Clown Alley.

From the beginning, Crissy has worked to perfect her character and skills, and to continually improve her props. She has attended a convention every year since 2008, and began competing to improve her skills with the help of judges’ critique sheets, which she kept and studied. Her plan to get as much clown education as possible paid off. To date, she has taken home thirty-one awards. After winning many awards at SECA, she competed at the 2014 COAI International Convention in Lake Buena Vista, Florida, and walked away with eight medals. This resulted in her winning the Convention’s Best in Clown award. Crissy recalls, “It was so awesome to see my name on the same plaque with people I admire.”

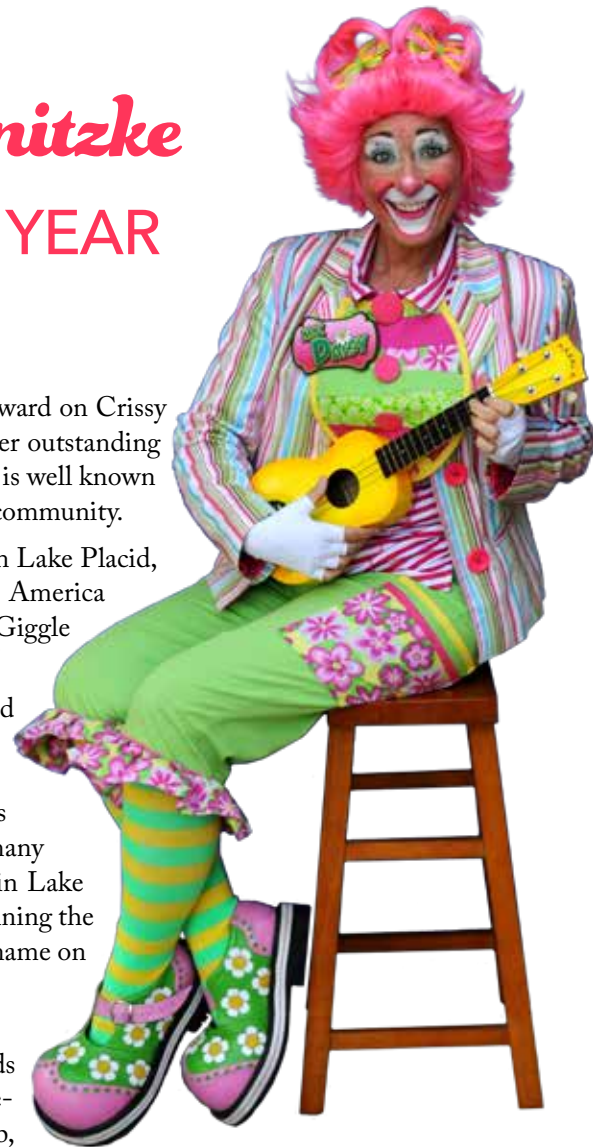


PHOTO BY SUSAN BANNER



Top to bottom: Crissy “Miz Daisy” and her mom, “MaMa Rose,” clown around together at the Celebration of Life Seminar. Crissy, age ten, at Circus World, Haines City, Florida.

Fifteen of her thirty-one awards are for First Place in skits, parade-ability, clown ministry, make-up, balloons, and face painting. She has won an award for Best in Performance Scrapbooking, and the individual CHARLIE Award from COAI for her work during Clown Week 2015. Her scrapbooking expertise also made her a perfect candidate for SECA Historian.

The Shy Girl

With all of these competitions and awards to her credit, one would assume Crissy is a naturally outgoing person, but she is quite the opposite. She was painfully shy as a young girl. Growing up in Tiltonsville, Ohio, she was the youngest of four children. She remembers her family members connecting with each other through music. Her musically talented father encouraged her in this area. Crissy would pick up any instrument just to see what it would do, and she found she could play well by ear. However, as a

reserved and quiet child, she never wanted to perform or even speak to people. In eighth grade, she finally mustered the nerve play the piano in a school talent show. In high school, she played the saxophone in her school band and orchestra, and twirled flags with the color guard at football games.

After high school this small-town girl, not really knowing what she was getting into, ran away—not with the circus but with the military. In boot camp, her plan was to stay in the background and be quiet so as not to be seen, but this idea quickly backfired. Her sergeant immediately singled her out and said, “Fontana, you’re too quiet back there. I choose you to be a squad leader!” Fearfully, she took on the challenge, found her voice,

and excelled at the job. Crissy gradually moved up the ranks as an Air Force Pharmacy Technician, Staff Sergeant E5. She also performed in a co-ed Precision Drill Team where she spun a rifle. Crissy served for a total of six active and two inactive years, three of which were in Japan.

Meanwhile, her entrepreneurial parents sold their family home in Ohio and traveled across the country with their mobile shoe repair business, Heels on Wheels. They landed in palm tree paradise: Florida. After leaving the Air Force, Crissy followed her parents to Florida and became a hairdresser. One day, a man named Robert Melnitzke came in to get his hair cut. They tied the knot soon after, and their son Michael arrived three years later.

Finding Fun

Crissy's schedule became more hectic with her multiple roles of hairdresser, wife, and mom. One day, when she was feeling overwhelmed, she realized she needed fun and laughter in her life. In that moment, a childhood memory came back to her. When she was ten years old, her family went on vacation to Haines City, Florida, not far from where she lives now. While visiting the theme park,



Left to right: Miz Daisy helps birthday girl Keeli get the right ingredients for her cake. Crissy as "Professor Nose a Lot" helping kids discover "Fundamonium" during the summer reading program.



Circus World, she and her cousin had their faces painted as clowns. Crissy remembered waving at other people on the road during the drive home. Everyone who saw them as clowns broke into big smiles and waved back enthusiastically. As these memories came flooding back, Crissy had a burning desire to research the art of clowning.

She went to her local library and checked out every book she could find on the subject. Then one day, she stumbled upon a set of harvest gold daisy sheets and a blue mop head at a thrift store. These became Miz Daisy's first clown costume. Soon, a local business heard about what she was learning and

hired her to clown for them. "I bought a tiny little balloon pump and balloons at the dollar store," she laughs. "I made balloon animals and dressed in what I thought a clown should look like. I put on a big, fluffy costume and went as a whiteface clown, with a huge, grotesque mouth and big eyebrows."

The Invitation

Not long after her new clown adventures began, Crissy and her husband attended a Christmas event called "Carols in the Park," where she saw a clown painting faces. Even though Crissy was very reserved, she told her husband she



Left to right: Miz Daisy performs at graduation from Toby's Clown School, Lake Placid, Florida. L.E. the Elf shares a special moment with a sweet little girl after the show. Bud-E and Miz Daisy clowning around for breast cancer at the Belk Pampering Event.

wanted to talk to the clown. Crissy approached her, began to share what she had been learning, and asked how to get more training. The clown invited her to a local alley meeting where about eight or ten people met in Polk County once a month for education. This alley planned to take a clown class from Toby's Clown School and invited her to attend. She graduated in 2007. "Then I joined COAI to receive their cool magazine with all of the educational articles and the comics in the back," she explains. "Today I also enjoy the information on the website, and I have so much fun in our online alley."

Conventions

Before her first convention as a new clown, an experienced clown told her, "Don't even bother to compete if you don't have professional shoes." These words discouraged her because she wanted to compete so she could learn and grow but couldn't afford real clown shoes at the time. She eventually decided to try anyway, wearing really big tennis shoes with daisies on them. A judge said, "Your shoes look good. Clown them up a little more until you can afford to get a real pair." Experiences like these have helped Crissy be a good mentor because she remembers how those discouraging words impacted growth as a clown. She also remembers how much she appreciated the judge's acceptance and the



Winner of the individual CHARLIE Award for Clown Week 2015.



Audience participation routine with L.E. the Elf.

understanding that she was new. That judge knew how to encourage her and help improve her appearance.

Today, Crissy loves making props and sewing her costumes; she wants them to look perfect. "When you look good, you feel good, and that inspires more confidence," she explains. She recommends attending conventions to grow as a clown. "Going to conventions is such a great way to meet like-minded people, see what others are doing, and learn a multitude of ways to clown around."

She got her son, Michael, into clowning when he was two years old, during her graduation from Toby's Clown School. One of her teachers helped solidify her child's clown name, "Bud-E." Crissy encouraged him to clown so he could have fun with her. He finished Toby's class when he was six and became a COAI member at age eight. Her husband has even clowned with her once at a mobile home park's "senior prom." They did a little skit called, "There's No Fish under the Ice." Crissy says, "It was a wonderful experience that I will treasure forever." She has also included her mom in the act a few times. "My mom and I have had a lot of 'Lucy and Ethel' moments over the years," Crissy laughs, "but clowning together is one of the best so far."

Clown Week

Crissy's enthusiasm for clowning has increased year after year, but it reached epic proportions during Clown Week 2015. Her outstanding efforts earned her the individual CHARLIE Award for documenting thirty-six events she did to promote the art of clowning. For years, she didn't participate in Clown Week because she didn't know what a proclamation was or how to get one. This time, she called a previous CHARLIE Award winner, Connie Morrow, and the head of COAI's Public Relations, Bonita "Bon Bon" Love, who were both quick to give her suggestions.



Robert, Michael, and Crissy with Gucci.



Miz Daisy's husband, Robert "Slim Jim," escorts her to the "Senior Prom."

"I enjoyed educating the community," Crissy says. "I had so much fun giving out the clown nose rings that my husband's family helped me prepare." Most people in her area had never heard of Clown Week before Crissy started her whirlwind of activities, ranging from making little bandanas for her dog's training class to wear, to meeting with mayors who presented proclamations in three cities. After Haines City read their humorous proclamation, everyone at the meeting put on clown noses.

Crissy also clowned at a Publix supermarket, making "hot wings" and "chicken cord on blue." Her husband and son joined her in wearing their clown shirts to church. She went to her library, newspaper, bank, and McDonald's, twisting balloons, and making such a ruckus the local press wrote articles about her activities. She cut hair in clown. She made hospital visits, clowned at Walmart, and stopped by to see doctors and dentists. Other venues she visited included a hair supply store, JoAnn Fabrics, Wendy's, an ice cream shop, and a church function. She took her Junior Joey to an

assisted living facility and to the home of a woman in the late stages of leukemia. They also made a stop at the dollar store in clown make-up. Crissy rounded out the week with a soothing foot bath and pedicure, still in clown. Her scrapbook documenting her activities was so huge it cost thirty dollars to mail it to COAI!

Because Crissy attributes much of her personal and professional growth to conventions, she began giving back to the clown community by serving as a judge at SECA, teaching at conventions, and writing articles on organization for *The New Calliope*. "If I can share something that has helped me, and it saves others time and helps them do better, that makes me feel good."

She has a saying that she repeats often: "You can't keep it until you give it away." This statement, used in recovery programs, is important to her because it shifts the focus from yourself. "We get better by helping others," she explains. "To get the full recovery, you must help the next person. It's not an 'I' program, it's a 'we' program. When we get our focus off ourselves and put our sight on others, it lifts us up and helps us. God designed us for relationship. We need other people because we are not meant to be alone. We need to be with like-minded people. When we teach someone else, that in turn helps us to learn in a deeper way."

Through clowning, Crissy is finding the freedom to be herself and to discover things that spark joy. She feels she is coming alive as an adult. The more she clowns, the more that openness spills into her everyday life. She is now working on improving her clown business in every way possible. She loves playing her ukulele as part of her act, changing lyrics to make them funny. She also enjoys character development, making funny expressions, and coming up with silly antics to use when she performs for children of all ages.

Like going into the military, she had no idea where she was headed with clowning, but she keeps having fun while moving up the ranks and following her



Winner of the Convention Best in Clown, Lake Buena Vista, Florida, 2014.

desire to improve. She is committed to helping others laugh, have fun, and follow their dreams in life. As a child, she fell in love with the idea of making people happy by being a clown. Today, as she sets out to help others and put a little fun in her own life, she continues to make the world a happier place.

Crissy would like to thank Bob "Bunky" Gretton for nominating her for Clown of the Year. "Bunky has been one of my biggest encouragers," she explains. "I am grateful that he always believed I could be a great clown." She also thanks the Awards Advisory Council and the Board of Directors for believing she would be a good representative for COAI. "I am thankful to be a part of this wonderful organization that is doing such great things for people, spreading love and laughter," she says. "I am looking forward to spending time with my clown family this year in Kansas City. I hope to see you there!"

To congratulate COAI's 2017 Clown of the Year, e-mail Crissy "Miz Daisy" Melnitzke at crissy@mizdaisyentertainment.com.