These questions have about as many answers as there are clowns. The way these two simple questions are answered make up a clowns unique character.

You may see some elaborate ways of developing a certain character. Some involve coming up with a whole new life for your clown character. This format for character development has you answer a whole gambit of questions including how old you are, where you were born to what grade you are in and where do you live? Mind you, if you put on make-up very often, you are going to be asked these questions along with a lot more, all of which could never be rehearsed. There are also the host of editorial comments that some of the children and adults for that matter can come up with. One of these comments may be: "You're not a REAL Clown." That one can really hurt and that one everyone of you may hear over the course of your clowning career several times. Another one of these comments may be "That balloon doesn't look like a dog." You just made about the best dog you can make or had ever seen. How do you answer the question or respond to the difficult comments. That takes character.

Let's say you are a "First of May" (someone just starting out) or you have been clowning for awhile, but your results are limited. How do you develop a character or change your character? Some people say that as they put on their makeup, a change in their personality takes place. This reminds me of when Clark Kent takes off his glasses, opens his shirt, and becomes "Superman." This does work for some clowns, and if it does, all power to you. For a lot of us, just putting on makeup does not do it. Let me tell you what works for me and a lot of my other Joey's.

Skeeter is my clown name. Walter is my given name. When I explain my approach to character development, I talk of these as different people. Before you say, "Get the Shrink, he's ready," hear me out. Skeeter is ALWAYS there, even when I am not clowning. Walter is also always there, too, even when I am clowning. The part of me that is Walter has, over the course of my development and maturity, been taught certain rules and expectations. Skeeter's personality is not conditioned by society. An example of the difference between Skeeter and Walter is when my Boss comes up to me at the last minute and tells me about a special project that will require me to work all weekend. Walter says to his boss, "I understand," but in his mind he is trying to figure out how to explain to his family and friends why he will not be there this weekend for them. Skeeter, on the other hand, may yell at his boss, have a temper tantrum, or even throw a pie in his bosses face. Skeeter's response is "Raw Emotions." Society has no control, restraining the display of his disappointment. Skeeter's reaction is not the only clown reaction. A different clown may have a completely different way of showing his disappointment, depending on that clown's character or personality. Over the years of clowning, the character that is Skeeter has taken off the back burner and is now in the forefront. I even hear my better half tell me, "Skeeter better not do this," or "Skeeter better not do that." I will admit, now that Skeeter has surfaced, Walter is enjoying everything a little more, but has also gotten into some trouble.

Here comes the hard part for me. Now that Skeeter is back with me all the time, some control are necessary. Skeeter, left unchecked, could really be a problem. Hitting the boss in the face with a pie is not a good idea, also to hit the kid in the face when that kid says, "You're not a REAL Clown," is probably not the right answer either. IS IT?? That's why Walter needs to always be there, too. Even as a clown, some of the lessons learned from society are required to interact with people. When in make-up, it is Walter's job to keep Skeeter from offending anyone. When Shrine clowns are in make-up, it is our responsiblity to the craft and as Shriners to keep your actions above reproach. I think of it as Walter is there to censor Skeeter. Walter will allow Skeeter make himself look "not so smart" or ignorant, or make a blunder. Walter even allows Skeeter to do that to his clown friends, but Walter censors ANYTHING offending or unkind to people around him or to any type or group of people. Remember, Clowning is G-rated.

When clowning, try to ask yourself, "How do you really feel?" Do not worry about what others may think of you. Then, send it through the part of you that censors your action and get the action OK'd. At first this is a slow and cumbersome process, but eventually becomes second nature. Remember, you have had a lifetime suppressing the clown in you; it will take awhile to get it out and learn to control it.

By the way, when Skeeter is told, "YOU'RE NOT A REAL CLOWN," he replies, "I don't think you are really a kid." Most of the time that will defend that he IS a real kid and a defense of not being a real clown will not be required. It has worked for Skeeter in the past.

If you have another slant to character development, let me hear from you. I am still looking for your "Tricks of the Trade." At your next clown meeting bring up the idea of hosting a "Judging Seminar" or a "Back to the Basics Weekend" for your clown unit. We have a large amount of talented clowns in our organization willing to share their Knowledge, so take advantage of it.

Walter W. Seavey
"Skeeter"