

The Happy Clown

Some years ago, at the annual art show sponsored by the Women's Wisdom Project, I bought a painting entitled "The Happy Clown." I loved its flashy bright colors, the clown's ice cream cone eyes, and his happy, smiling face. This painting would be an appropriate gift for my soon-to-be-born first granddaughter, I told myself. It is never too soon to buy gifts for one's grandchildren, I suppose, but buying this piece of art for one yet unborn is a bit of a stretch.

Women's Wisdom is an innovative arts workshop open to homeless women for the purpose of tapping into and releasing their innate creative talent in order to build self-esteem and self-worth. In other words, the program accepts homeless women as women and takes them seriously.

Several months later, after the birth of my granddaughter, Caroline, I took The Happy Clown to the framing shop. The very professional woman who waited on me admired the work and studied it closely for several minutes. I could tell she was impressed. She selected a frame and the color of the matting, which, she said, would complement the primary colors of the clown's costume. I agreed. When she wrote up the order, I was struck again by the high cost of framing relative to the price the artist receives for creating the work of art.

Months later, The Happy Clown was ready to come home.

The attendant retrieved the painting from the back room. "My, what a gorgeous painting." She called across the store to another employee to come over and view the painting. And yet another employee was called over to admire it. They began to pepper me with questions: Did you discuss the work with the artist? Did the artist explain its meaning? Do you know the artist? No, I answered to each, this painting was done by a homeless woman. Oh, they said almost in unison, you mean the Women's Wisdom Project? I nodded yes. It's just wonderful, they raved.

I reflected on this exchange during the drive home. These employees work all day with art, with customers who appreciate art, and with artists themselves. They judged The Happy Clown as the work of a very gifted artist. The fact

that she had been homeless was not important to them, but the fact that the Women's Wisdom Project had been there for this woman – no, this artist – to enable her to produce this beautiful piece was important!

I hope some day, because of The Happy Clown, Caroline will come to understand and appreciate the importance of Women's Wisdom in the lives of homeless women.