

The Eternal Optimist - Beverly White celebrates Happy Tymes' 30th anniversary

Written by Sharon Verbeten

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"My teddy bears are a nostalgic expression of who I am, a furry collage of my life experiences, my emotions and perceptions, my creativity and energy," said White, 70. "I take great joy in knowing that this work of my hands can bring a sense of wonder, happiness and friendship into the lives of others."

On the occasion of her 30th anniversary in the industry, White spoke with *Teddy Bear & Friends* magazine from her second home in Florida, just north of Orlando. In the more temperate seasons, you'll find her at home in Downington, a rural town just west of Philadelphia—where White and her husband, Mike, raised their five children.

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A nurse by profession, White put that career aside in 1984 and began her business, Happy Tymes Collectibles. "I wanted [the name] to be broad enough so it could cover what I wanted to do," said White, who crafts artist bears, including ["Sunshine," the one-of-a-kind bear on our cover.](#)

When she entered the market in the 1980s, she recalled, the market was on an upswing. "People were just finding out about ... this whole new thing called artist bears," White said. In the beginning, White taught herself her craft — but what she really wanted was for others to cherish and love her bears. She wanted them to be collectibles.



"Whatever I did," she said, "I never wanted [my bears] to end up at the bottom of toy boxes." To that end, she created the best bears she could. "I expect that this is going to be a collectible; the rest is up to you."

The name Happy Tymes, she said, reflects her happy memories of her childhood. "That name serves me well. I'm an eternal optimist."

White started out crafting wooden nursery rhyme dolls, but later ventured into bears. "Those first bears are rather amusing to look at now," she said. "There were no classes by experts and books of patterns in those emerging years. I chose then to do it my own way and still do today. I've always been able to do things with my hands; I have an artistic eye and mind.

"I chose to make my own road," she adds, noting that she wanted control over her inventory, style, and pricing. "I wanted to have control of my destiny. It's important to me. It was a way for me to begin to plot my direction."

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All White's bears feature her hallmark — an embroidered accent line attached to the eyes. “I call them worry lines,” said White, noting she took the inspiration from early nursery rhyme books (upon which some of her bears are based).



Personality is Key

White is careful to give each bear a distinct personality. Drawing from real life, she created her Portrait Bears, which began with “Laurel & Hardy” in 1992. This series of bears, White said, gave her “my identity within the teddy bear world.”

She has created ursine portraits of such notables as W.C. Field, Charlie Chaplin, several American presidents, Ronald McDonald, John Wayne, Winston Churchill, Elvis Presley, the Mona Lisa, the Beatles, and even the famous Berryman Bear. “A few common folk, too,” White adds.

“Their sculpting process creates a unique art form and some really neat teddy bears; this is wonderfully gratifying, and I wish that I could devote more time to it.” Today, some of her Portrait Bears can be found at the Jeju Museum in South Korea and at Teddy Bear Kingdom in Hong Kong.

White has attended Disney conventions since the early 1990s, for which she creates an annual collector's edition bear. “This has given me the opportunity to create some dynamic and prized edition and auction pieces for them,” she said.

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Working with Disney executives was “very challenging,” she said. “If you didn’t get things quite right, you had to go back to the drawing table.” There was a long line of approvals and licensing involved, but these creations have done very well, White said, and they still often sell for more than their issue price. The original 30-inch Laurel & Hardy sold at the Disneyland auction for \$3,400.

White also produces annual Christmas designs and her Global Designs line of more affordable bears. In addition to her Happy Tymes offerings, she also has developed bear designs for Cooperstown Bears, The Franklin Mint, Little Gems, and the Annette Funicello Bear Company.

One of the highest sums her bears ever brought was \$20,500, for a charity bear auctioned in 2001. Her bear, called “Chance,” was created to support research and recognition for the blood disease histiocytosis.

Many of White’s bears have been sold to benefit charities championing children’s causes. Such causes remain important to her as a nurse and as a volunteer for the local women’s crisis pregnancy center and the American Red Cross.

White’s Teddies to Go line started out as a way to engage the younger generation. A simplistically designed bear, panda, or bunny kit allows the interactive satisfaction of the customer stuffing their own bear.

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