

# Party Girl

Bev White knows a thing or two about Happy Tymes.

By Stephanie Finnegan



A lot of time and energy go into the birthing of a bear prototype. Artist Bev White was challenged to create a 2006 anniversary original. Looking back to the premiere 1986 cover and the debut bear that was created by Laurie Sasaki, White put her own unique spin on a classically heart-tugging design.

Artist and educator Bev White has been a beloved fixture on the teddy bear scene for 20 years. In 1986, she fashioned her first original bear pattern and has been pioneering original themes and concepts ever since. Applauded for her spot-on renderings of famous folk, reconfigured as teddy bears, and for her popular Teddies To Go® instructional workshops and kits, the always kinetic and kind-hearted White saved a weekend in her hectic day planner to chat about her past accomplishments, present achievements and future aspirations. Keeping with the symbolic numeral “20,” White underwent a thoroughly in-depth and introspective session of “20 Questions.” The artist, who has led a personally and professionally productive life, chats about worry lines, clutter-juggling, the importance of knowing how to wield a needle and even our Commander-in-Chief, George W. Bush. Take some time out of your booked calendars and share a 20-year retrospective with Bev White.

1) What were you like as a 20-year-old?

Hmm. At 20, I was a willful, impetuous young lady, hoping to become a compassionate and responsible registered nurse. I enrolled in a three-year hospital program that was very regimented. Nursing education called for long hours of study and extensive on-the-job training under the vigilant and prying eyes of instructors and housemothers. My nursing experience set the stage for who I would become as a woman, wife,



“Through trial and error, using sewing, soft-sculpting, appliqué, painting and dyeing techniques, I eventually can create the ‘bear likeness,’” White remarks. Some of her personality-inspired bears are based on meticulous photographic research; others are conjectured, such as this 30-inch one-of-a-kind “Noah’s Ark” rendition from January 2006.

mother, grandmother, entrepreneur and, yes, teddy bear creator. The people skills and hand skills that I learned in those formative years, including the surgical ladder stitch with my curved needle, are still very evident and useful in my personal and business life today.

**2) What were you doing in 1986, 20 years ago?**

I was busy being a supportive wife, mothering five children (two sets of twins) and beginning a business that I hoped would be both personally and financially rewarding, while still doing a little camp-nursing on the side. I began my Happy Tymes Collectibles business ([www.happytymes.net](http://www.happytymes.net), (610) 873-0407) with wooden nursery rhyme dolls, in the fall of 1984. I quickly introduced a wooden teddy bear at the request of a customer who wanted the "Three Bears" to go with "Red Riding Hood." I began experimenting with fabrics and plush. In 1986 I created my first original pattern, "Prayer Bear," while unknowingly developing my own teddy bear persona and style. That year I made my first limited edition: "Ben, Betsy and Thom" were 12-inch dressed bears made of wool fabric and accompanied by a little history to mark the bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution Convention.

**3) Over the past 20 years, what changes have you witnessed in yourself?**

Beyond the obvious changes that come with aging, I guess my attitude and values have made major shifts. I am still highly motivated. Ideas just seem to pop into my head and I can't let them go. I've always had a penchant for seeking out unusual solutions and pushing the boundaries of normal. This is what led me into the development of my Portrait Bears® in the early 1990s, with the creation of "Laurel and Hardy." Practicing and refining my interpretive skills through the ensuing years has drawn me to currently view some artwork of the Old Masters with a somewhat humorous, if not jaded, eye. I now enjoy re-creating some of the well-known paintings by fellows like Michelangelo, Van Gogh, Picasso, in "bearly unusual form." By using three-dimensional soft-sculpting techniques, I can incorporate the teddy bear(s) into an oil or acrylic picture parody of the original painting. I find it gratifying to couple my teddy bears with fine art, having left my painting interests behind a long time ago.

**4) Over the past 20 years, what**

**changes have you witnessed in the bear world?**

I've watched the rise of the teddy bear as a collectible, trying to find my place in the swell of growing bear makers. I rode the wave of success as teddy bear collectors fulfilled their passions. I've witnessed the mania of human stampedes at show openings and truly enjoyed the spectacle. Today I find myself mellowing as collector demand cools and they become more selective. I, too, have become more selective with my time and what I choose to do. Everything seems to work in cycles, and that may be true for teddy bears once again. However, one thing I believe is certain. Our good old friend, the teddy bear, will always be with us, comforting and comfortable within our treasure chest of beloved memories.

**5) What makes a Bev White bear so recognizable?**

Well, surely the faces, I am told, are a dead giveaway. From the very onset of making my first bear, I have always placed a little eye accent above each eye. I call them "worry lines." It seems only fair that for all the work they create, my bears should worry a little for me, too. Actually, the mark originates from the faces in the childlike illustrations of the poems and stories in my precious childhood book, *My Book House*. I transferred the innocent illustrated faces, first to the painted faces of my wooden nursery rhyme dolls, then later to the stitched bear faces as well. It does give the bears a sometimes sad or pensive expression, but I like it.

**6) When you were approached to make the TBR cover bear, what did you see as a challenge?**

When I first understood that my "Birthday Bear" might smile back from the cover of a *Teddy Bear Review*, I was delighted, to say the least! My design decisions were based on creating a very appealing little bear for the collectors

"These 20 years have changed our industry, indeed the world. However, one thing that has not changed is the desire for a sweet-faced teddy bear with its eyes wide open and begging for a hug," White declares. Her "Dolly Sisters," the pattern created in 1996, certainly prove that point. These "American Bears" were made to wear "American Girl!" doll clothing.





White has always achieved great acclaim at the Disney doll and bear events. Her 2006 homage to the J. M. Barrie characters—Peter Pan, Captain Hook and Tinker Bell—is clever and vivacious. Can't you almost hear Pan crowing?

among us, and one that would connect the teddy on the 1986 cover with a new one that reflects contemporary design and current appeal. *(Author's note: the Volume 1, Number 1, Premiere Issue bear was designed by California artist Laurie Sasaki. It stood 12 inches high, was made of tan plush and was fully jointed. It was one of the "Bearrie Patch" bears.)*

**7) Why do you think people collect teddy bears?**

Reasons for collecting teddy bears are as varied as the humans who take them in. Many are obvious and we've all discussed them at length: personal enjoyment, friendship, emotional need, historical interests, brag rights, obsession, investment. I suspect that there are some reasons that cannot be articulated and remain undisclosed.

**8) Of your bears, which do you think have the greatest allure?**

I really cannot put my finger on the hot button for bears. Some folks love detail, others simplicity. Some like only traditional bears, while others seek out the extraordinary. You need only to be among a group of chatting collectors to hear the diversity. It's difficult to claim that one bear has more allure than another. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, uh, make that ... "the bear-holder."

# Happy Tymes Are Here Again!

To honor *Teddy Bear Review's* 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Bev White created a 7-inch show special, limited to 86 pieces, available at the Washington, D.C., Doll & Teddy Bear Expo. In addition to these cuddly characters, White has fashioned two 14-inch artist originals to capture the magazine's milestone. One of these two bears, pictured on this issue's cover, will be given away as a door prize at the celebration in Washington, D.C. The other artist original can be won by YOU, a lucky reader. Just answer these six questions, and send in your responses by October 31. All fully completed entries will be put into a drawing, and the winner will be randomly pulled. Only one entry per person, and photocopied entry forms are accepted. No employees or relatives of Jones Publishing or Happy Tymes are allowed to enter. No e-mail submissions allowed. Void where prohibited.

1) What is your favorite part of *Teddy Bear Review*?

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2) What is your least favorite part of the magazine?

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3) What would you like to see more of in the publication?

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4) What was your favorite article in this issue?

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5) Do you collect bears and make bears? Or do you just collect? Just make?

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6) Would you like to see more "plush pals," animals besides bears, covered?

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime phone number: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Subscriber: Yes No \_\_\_\_\_

*Please send your entry forms to Stephanie Finnegan, Features Editor, Teddy Bear Review, 115 Harvard Avenue, Metuchen, NJ 08840. Contest closes on October 31.*

**9) What is one of your proudest moments in the past 20 years?**

In my personal and family life, I have been blessed with so many proud moments ... too numerous to count.

**10) Where do you see the industry going in 20 years?**

I sincerely hope new bear makers will continue to enter the field, find satisfaction and experience personal growth. Additionally, I hope that a whole new generation of collectors will emerge and continue to appreciate their innovations. While the old venerated bears of the past will always be valued, I hope that the wonderful new creations of individual bear makers will find their place in history, too.

**11) How many bears do you think you've designed or created at this point?**

Well, I've kept a bear log through the years, but it has suffered some neglect. During the 1990s, the annual count was approximately 300. However, recent years have seen a reduction in studio and company design work. Since 2001, my Teddies To Go® have shifted the demands on my time. So I guess an honest answer is, I simply do not know. Let's just say "a lot of them."

**12) When you create your bears based on famous people, how do you capture their likenesses?**

Sometimes I motivate myself by researching the individual's background. That

may include reading history books, watching movies or videos, glancing at magazine articles, anything that will help me discover nuances that can be “trapped in the fur.” Almost always, I try visually to transfer the human features onto a bear through pencil and pen illustrations.

**13) How would you describe your studio?** My studio is mostly messy and fairly quiet. My storage space is organized but sometimes falls apart at the seams. Since my studio door is the primary entrance to our house, here in Downingtown, Penn., it is periodically a hub of activity. Frequently I listen to the TV, radio or CDs; however, I love to have the door and windows open to listen to the quiet sounds of nature in the surrounding woods. During most projects, my workspace seems to degenerate into disarray and sometimes chaos.

**14) What is your typical workday like?** “Up with the chickens” at the break of day, but I fade earlier and only occasionally pull an all-nighter prior to show crunch time. I am essentially a one-woman-operation, with one very able seamstress who sews for me. All the communications, ordering, cleaning, shipping, scheduling, traveling, office work, designing and, oh-by-the-way, BEAR MAKING are interspersed with household, family and community responsibilities. I do have the blessing of a supportive husband, Mike, with whom I can consult regarding problems and decisions.

**15) What is your favorite memory from the past 20 years in the bear world?** Three years ago I was invited to take part in what is now an annual party, given for the children and their families on the oncology unit at Children’s Hospital of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. Since my profession is nursing, I was so pleased to be given this opportunity. One little girl stood out, in particular, that day. She was so very ill as she sat in a stroller with all her tubing attached. She and her mom wanted to be part of the teddy activities. She told her mommy to stuff the bear for her, that she only wanted to “hold the heart.” Until 1983, I had spent about 20 years administering to the health needs of ill and injured children and their families. Now here I was 20 years later, back

on a pediatric unit ministering to the emotional needs of the “heart,” and this time it was with a totally different instrument very close to my own heart: the teddy bear.

**16) Who do you think your typical collector is?** I don’t believe there is such person. The words “typical” and “collector” are too divergent to describe the same person. Likewise, there is no profile that I can draw of the collectors who I have had the opportunity to come to know.

**17) What’s your favorite book, movie, TV show and song?** I still love those old Book House books of mine the best. I’m not a movie buff, but I really enjoyed *Pay It Forward*. I love the humor of the TV show *Everybody Loves Raymond*. Favorite Song? How about, “Happy Birthday to You”!

**18) If you weren’t making bears, what would you be doing?** I would probably have remained in some area of nursing or health care. It still runs in my veins. I’ve recently volunteered to be available as a Red Cross nurse.

**19) Bears are often given to raise people’s spirits and to uplift their moods. If you could give a bear to anyone in**



White began Happy Tymes Collectibles as a doll maker, specializing in wooden nursery rhyme characters. Pictured here, “Mary Had a Little Lamb.” Mary was a 6-inch clothes-peg doll, created from 1984 until 1990. White made 190 of these characters, all signed and dated on the backs.



The artist’s Teddies To Go® workshops have become crowd favorites. The Hellertown, Penn., Brownies, Troop #141, were the first to try the newly arrived kitties and doggies. According to White, “These inexpensive manufactured designs bring a lot of happiness and enjoyment everywhere they go. I know it’s because I am reaching folks of all backgrounds and age groups through this simple, hands-on bear-making process.”

**the public eye, to whom would you give one, and why?** I’d give George W. Bush one of my Teddy Roosevelt Portrait Bears®. I understand that he admires Theodore. As a matter of fact, I think they might share a number of common denominators! That’s about all I should say about that!

**20) Finally, how do you see Teddy Bear Review’s role in the bear community over the past 20 years?** *Teddy Bear Review* has brought greater credibility and exposure to the niche market of collectible bears. It has provided a showcase for the creativity of countless unknown bear makers, many who started on a shoestring. You continue to pace the industry as a whole with your own show (the annual Washington, D.C., Expo), the founding of the Theodore Society and the Golden Teddy Awards. I also know you support and encourage countless other shows, community programs and group efforts to promote the teddy bear. So there, my good friends, is where I believe your legacy lies—in all of the good that you have done through these past 20 years and the driving force that you will continue to be in the teddy bear world of the future. 🐾