

LIVING

Just clowning around



VIVIAN BLACK

STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

York Region resident blends the best parts of clowning, the circus, parades and music to create a wonderful event

BY FRED SIMPSON
Staff Writer

There's a little bit of the clown in everyone ... especially when you're a child.

At least, that's the premise on which a Richmond Hill resident has launched a whole new career, after designing clown costumes for the annual Toronto Santa Claus parade for six years.

"I want to get the children from four to 11 years actively involved in their own amusements," Vivian Black said.

She believes young people will have more fun being the clown, instead of standing around watching someone else do the prat-falls.

"I remember, as a child, how I would like to get dressed up as a clown and put on a play for my parents," Black said.

"I don't know if that really happens so much any more. With computers around, it's very important for children to develop their imagination.

Which is why Black has created Storybook Productions, which will see her carting her collection of clown costumes to children's parties.

"The children themselves will be the stars," Black said.

"They will wear the costumes and perform skits, there will be balloons and I will take a video of the whole performance that their parents can keep forever and share it with the neighbours."

I remember, as a child, how I would like to get dressed up as a clown ...

Black has titled her project The Birthday Party and believes her idea is unique.

"I'm not aware of anyone else who is doing this at the moment."

Even as she speaks, Black is doing the needle-and-thread routine on her industrial sewing machine in her home-cum-workshop.

Spools of varicolored thread are stacked on shelves, leftover bits of cloth are scattered about the floor.

Nearby is a drafting board on which she brainstorms ideas for all of her original costume designs.

"Right now, I've got 20 costumes made and I'm working on ideas for a few more," Black explained.

"I was at a trade show recently and I saw

the most incredible angel wings that I might work into a costume."

Her ideas can come to her from almost anywhere and from anything.

"The last costume I made was actually inspired by the movie *Shakespeare in Love*. I came home and made this costume in four days.

Black's Birthday Parade packages are two hours in length and finds her arriving at the home loaded down with costumes, balloons, musical instruments and other paraphernalia.

"I like to make it a neighbourhood event on the front lawn," Black said.

"If they have chosen a parade, they can have as many children in it as they want to," she added.

Black will be front and centre as the circus master, which is a blessing to the mother who can just sit back and enjoy herself.

"The children can stay dressed up for the whole two hours or they can have a parade, or a skit, and then swap costumes with each other. They can be creative."

The birthday guest-of-honour dons a giant birthday cake hat, wears a dazzling costume and leads the parade.

Black, of course, will be front and centre as the circus master, which is "a blessing to the mother who can just sit back and enjoy herself."

Anchoring some of the proceedings will be little skits written by Black and replete with cue cards.

"I sit in a big director's chair, I have a megaphone and there are backdrops," Black said.

"The whole idea is to give the children the opportunity to know what it feels like to be on the stage and feel comfortable. They just lose themselves in their roles."

Black's future plans are to take her show to the Sunshine Camp or similar facilities for children with cancer. She also sees the packages as being "effective play therapy for abused children."

Finally, she wants to offer them "a positive and binding means of self-expression."

"They want to enjoy the lives they have and they want their families to share it with them."

For further information or to book The Birthday Parade packages, call Vivian Black at (905) 881-8861, or E-Mail: vblack@ionsys.com



INSIGHT INTO EYESIGHT

DR. H.H. WALJI, (Optom., BSc., MSc., OD, FCO), OPTOMETRIST

TV AND YOUR EYES

Your favorite TV show is on the screen, but why is the picture out of focus? Maybe it's not the picture. Maybe it's your eyes. Watching TV for long periods of time can cause eye fatigue. But

TV watching is not harmful to the eyes.

To give your eyes a break when watching TV, you should be sitting at least six feet away from the screen. One guide is to sit at a distance that is five times the width of the picture. And don't sit in the dark. It's not good for

your eyes. There should be light in the room, but not bright enough to wash out the TV picture. Move the light or the TV so that it doesn't cause a reflection or glare on the TV screen.

The set should be in perfect focus. If you've done all you can to get a clear picture but still have trouble seeing it well, maybe it's time for an eye examination.

Corrective glasses or contact

lenses or a new prescription will put your eyes where you want them to be: back in the picture - clear and sharp.

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