

# Clowning class fulfills Walter Mitty dream

For many people, circuses are a mixture of fond childhood fantasies and mythical adventures of running away to join one. High wire acts, tigers, hot dogs and clowns are all a part of the vagabond life that has caught the minds of everyone.

A small group of people are intent not only on capturing that Walter Mitty dream from the backs of their minds, but also on sharing it with anyone willing to take a few minutes and return to their childhood.

For them, week nights are a time to let totally loose, to become something that reality never permitted them.

*"You feel as though you could walk in a bank, and rob it, and all they'd do is laugh."*



Every Monday they meet in the Home Economics room of Rowe Junior High to assemble faces of white, gold, red and yellow over the burnt cookie crumbs. The evening starts as they begin preparation of their faces. First a layer of white is rubbed in to their skin as a base. The more excited forget to first put on a layer of cold cream to make the later removal easier. Tomorrow they may receive a comment of, "Are you O.K.? You seem quite flush." But tonight, the excitement has blocked all concern from their minds. With the base on, some move to their mouths interested in finding a grin that will make their work worthwhile. Others, concerned more in that magical sparkle that can make a clown, start there. Randy, who assists the instructor, Diane Kleeman, with the class, begins to add the long tip of a star around his eye. Meanwhile, Sean McCluskey, a.k.a. Button Bows, has troubles deciding how to begin. He's decided to try something new this week and doesn't know exactly what he wants his mouth to look like.

After the eyes are finished rubber noses are added. Vicky Halverson, a.k.a. Plum Dum, and Mary David ahead of the rest, add their finishing touches--a bright orange wig, a bright blue wig, and two sets of three-inch eyelashes. Both are older, and not really surprisingly the loudest and most excited. "I thought I'd enjoy learning how to make people laugh," explained Mary, "and I was right."

*"There was this one kid, a dooper, and as we were walking out he looked up, and then said 'all right.' It was the greatest thing."*

Over at another table, Bob Mueller, a.k.a. JoJo, is not as far along. He's being meticulous with his make-up, wanting his dream to be as close to reality as possible. "Clowns seem to make everyone around them happy, and that's the appealing part," comments Bob. "It's really just a riot. One time after class there was this one kid, a dooper, and as we're walking out he looked up, and then said 'all right.' It was the greatest thing."

Now, most everyone is finishing up, Randy and Diane do their best to get everyone's attention. Not an easy task in this group. Going slowly they eventually get most everyone's attention. They begin by asking everyone to find a partner. Then they explain the Harpo Marx-Lucille Ball classic, the famous living mirror. Randy starts, "The rules!" Diane follows in a performers voice, "it's got to



be slow, no making your mirror look away-no one's expected to do the impossible just yet." Meanwhile, Randy is having fun mimicking her. Later, Diane confesses, "It's the smiles that get you. Teaching clowning is great. You have people who are excited and really want to learn. That's exciting in itself."

Later, each gives an impromptu performance. Some are a little bewildered at first, but all eventually let go of the facade they've

*"My reason for joining the class was quite simple. I did it to save my marriage."*

built up, and just react as a child might.

They all finish their performances. It's time to go home, but no one is quite ready yet. They stay. Some talk with the instructors while others help clean up. The chairs are put on top of the tables. The partially eaten cake, somebody's home economics project, is surveyed. And finally, the lights are turned off, and the door is locked. No one is quite ready for reality.

Story and photos by David J. Hayden

