Terry Clark - Happiness Through Art

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Guest: Dr. Terry Clark

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David Lowry: 0:29

Hello everyone and welcome to Peaceful Life Radio. I'm David Lowry and with me today is my good buddy Don Drew. Don, you doing okay today?

Don Drew: 0:38

I'm doing great and I'm really excited about today. David, I can actually confirm that we're being heard in Japan these days.

David Lowry: 0:43

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Don Drew: 0:55

Today I want to introduce our guest. This is Terry Clark. I've known Terry for about 12 years , Terry is just a wonderful individual. He is a former journalist and has been a professor of journalism, but I'm going to let him tell you more about his life and history. Let me mention the reason why we invited Terry here today is he had a second half of life transformation where he has really fallen in love with art and painting and he just does some wonderful work. We'll talk more about that, but for right now, let me introduce Terry Clark and ask him to tell us a little bit about himself.

David Lowry: 1:31

Welcome, Terry.

Terry Clark: 1:32

Thank you both. I appreciate that. It's quite a time to sit down and reflect on some of the things you said you wanted to ask. I grew up in New Mexico. My dad was much more competent and talented artists than I will ever be, so I've been around art all my life, but I never really pursued it as a career. My dad was very good, and as a kid, I was always drawing, but that was about it. And my life led me to teaching to start with, and then eventually got the journalism bug, and went and got a master's at Iowa in journalism,

since I hadn't been to any journalism school and ended up in community journalism. I love small newspapers, small town community newspapers, and worked into that and was fortunate enough to own one in Waurika, Oklahoma, a long time ago.

David Lowry: 2:21

What was the name of that paper?

Terry Clark: 2:22

The Warricka News Democrat. Now that's because every small town had several newspapers, and this was a merger between the Republican and the Democrat as the town shrunk or grew but it was independent. At any rate, that job allowed me to start a teaching career as a professor at Oklahoma State for a while, teaching journalism. And then that led me to the University of Central Oklahoma, where I was a chair for many years. Being a community journalist, couldn't teach anything, and I pretty well did, until I retired about eight years ago.

David Lowry: 2:53

You had a long and distinguished career as a journalist and as a journalism educator, and many people would have thought what a life, right there. That's a career in and of itself. But Terry, no, he's, he had a secret passion. Let's hear more about this passion that caused you to want to move into the second part of life as an artist.

Terry Clark: 3:17

I think, especially Don, since you mentioned the second half of life art was my transition while I was still teaching. And then it became almost a savior through those last few years, and then became my identity once I retired. I know that a lot of people retire, they don't know what they're going to do or if they don't find something, they're not going to be living long, but I was looking at my bio on Facebook one day and it said, after I just retired, and it says a journalism professor. I'm no longer a journalism professor.

David Lowry: 3:45

You don't identify with that anymore.

Terry Clark: 3:47

No,

David Lowry: 3:47

That was a lifetime ago.

Terry Clark: 3:49

I still have the identity somewhat, but I don't identify with it. I never really thought of myself as an artist. My dad apparently did. I have a inscription from him in 67 saying to my artist son, but I didn't really think of myself as an artist until several years ago. We were down in San Antonio and I was plopped down in front of the Alamo and the concrete. Some little kids came up. Oh, an artist. I thought, Oh, I guess I am. And while I was still teaching and, I often joked that art was my therapy. It kept me from wanting to strangle administrators.

Don Drew: 4:19

you've mentioned your father several times now, Terry, and I've been to your house and I've seen the art and he's an incredible artist. Now what I see you producing is very different than what he did, but to compare the two, I don't think that's really very accurate. Tell us a little bit more about him and his history because I know that influenced you in the long run in many ways.

Terry Clark: 4:41

I think my dad probably could draw by the time he could walk. I still have a drawing of his as a teenager that's wonderful hanging in my , home studio. When dad was 18, he was jumping a freight and slipped and lost , the bottom half of his right leg and wore a wooden leg all of his life. There was blessings in that because he had three brothers who went to the war and came back, and if he hadn't had that happen to him, I don't know. I know I wouldn't be here. I still have his drawing table. where I do some work at home. And I was reading an old clip of his one time. And he said in this clip, it says, he says, the harder I work at painting, the younger I feel, I never thought of my dad working at art. That's one of the blessings of art. All of a sudden, time ceases to exist,

David Lowry: 5:26

let's look into that. This notion of, we've talked about it on this program, of flow, or time dilation. This neverland that you can go into where you look up, and it's like What just happened here? How much time has gone by?

Terry Clark: 5:41

I think you're right in a number of ways. First of all, I was almost late to this because I was painting, but I think that when you are working on anything creative, regardless of music, gardening, sculpture, whatever, you're into that. Even if you've got your hands in the dirt planting something, that's what you're thinking about. And to me, that's creativity. It seems to me that in Genesis, Yahweh says, I am that I am, it's always

present tense. And as I get much older., just what my dad said. I feel the same way. Nothing else is there. I'm not worried about the past. I'm not worried about the future. I'm certainly not worried about the present. I'm dealing with problems and lessons and joy. And it was also true when I was writing something I wanted to write. You'd get all your research of course you had a deadline perhaps. But then when you started writing, you didn't always know exactly how it was going to turn out. And, it just worked. I read something today Martin Luther King Jr. said, you don't know where the staircase is going, but take the first step. Because it's going to happen.

David Lowry: 6:46

I want to explore something with you back in the day when I did woodworking I would start something and then along the way something would happen and the wood grain would be not the way I thought it was going to be or the board wasn't as square as I thought it was or as refined as I thought it was. And there was almost a sense of futility like maybe I should just start all over or tear it up, but I would stay with it and it becomes something even better than what I had imagined. And so you were talking about sometimes you don't know where that thing is going. You would write something. And it's like it had a mind of its own as it was being birthed, and I think you may be doing that in art as well. You start the process, and then the process takes a life of its own or something?

Terry Clark: 7:34

I think so and then you see a different way to go, or, I started out in watercolor, and love watercolor because of the skies. My mantra is out here are the skies. I love our skies because they're so fluid and so constantly creating, and then I've gone into acrylic so I can cover up my mistakes and the person who does my framing Teresa Hurt at Pirate's Alley, I was complaining to her about some of my failures. She says, Terry, they're not failures, they're lessons. I'm always learning and when I start a paint, the one I just finished today, I was working on it yesterday, and it's small acrylic of the Truchas Peaks in New Mexico, I looked at it, and I said, that up there is wrong? I go home, I sleep on it, I think about it, I went to bed that day, and I finished it. By just making some corrections, so you don't quite know where it's going. Part of that's my editing background. Okay but you have to have the faith to know that, okay, it's good. Or this is what I want. Or occasionally there's, and I've had this, teacher in the last two months, she says, if you tried to rescue something once or twice and it didn't work, just kill it.

Don Drew: 8:44

I'll have to remember that one.

David Lowry: 8:46

Wait a minute, is this a life lesson we're talking about here?

Don Drew: 8:49

Terry, you grew up in New Mexico. I know that you love the landscape. Many of your earliest paintings, watercolors were New Mexico. And by the way just so are, Listeners know I have a TC, a Terry Clark wall in my house where I've got four of his paintings. They're all just incredible. But I've seen how you tend to meld things like Native American spirituality and the New Mexican landscape together. How do you do that? Is it something you can explain or express?

Terry Clark: 9:20

It's such a combination of factors. I'm not sure I ever realized how spiritual New Mexico was when I was a teenager growing up. But it's been a constant draw on me and I started out painting a lot of New Mexico. One, my dad did a lot of that, but that was what I knew for landscapes. And then you've got to always be learning. You learn from your mistakes, or you try this, or you learn, this is successful, let's try this, or you take a few classes, which I've done, and you get other ideas, and you're always looking at other people's art. So you're always learning. But then some of my reading going along has added to the spirituality. I've transitioned, tried to, into not only acrylics, but more of the Great Plains, because there's so much beauty out here that most people take for granted, and the sky. The land is spiritual. There's two worlds I believe. There's the physical, the now, but then there's the spiritual. Everybody has a different interpretation of, and that's fine. But to me, being creative and you obviously have inherited the creativity. So you're the most like from the creator. You're in touch with the creator more than ever. I don't care what you call him, they she whether it is Yahweh or Allah or the great mystery or some other term. If you believe in a creator, Or creation force, even that. We have that cosmic dust or that inheritance that gives us a spiritual side. I read every morning. I am not a Catholic. But I read every morning that great Trappist, Monk Thomas Merton. And not too long ago, from his journals, he calls God an artist. Why did it take me so long to see that? Little bird hit our window. and died. It was a little swallow we think they're ugly and common. I went out to pick it up and go bury it. And I was looking at its wings, the pattern of this little bird's wings. They're a work of art. So this to me has become the spiritual of art.

David Lowry: 11:27

Being able to take that energy and information and put it on a canvas is really tricky, right? Because and I think that when people look at art sometimes they say, What am I actually looking at? That's not exactly how the thing looks like. And then you say, Yes, you're right in one sense, but if you look at it through a different lens or viewpoint of this energy that's being expressed in a creative way you're capturing more of its essence from the second world that you're talking about.

Terry Clark: 12:00

First of all now photography can be an art. There's no question about that, I do paint from pictures. The one I did today is out of memory. But the best thing to do, and I've always been advised that if you've got a photograph you're painting from, do a sketch, put it away, and then paint. Because we can all look at the same photograph or anything and see three different things. And when I'm painting something that's important to me, that I'm moved with, have an emotional connection with, I'm seeing it through my eyes and my perception and my experience. And everybody may think, oh, those are the Truchas mountains, but if they've been there they're going to have different emotions and I think part of that goes back to this idea. I am that I am, I'm in present tense. Talk about peace. If I'm not worried about yesterday or thinking about tomorrow or the bills or anything else, but I'm dealing with this, no wonder I'm happy. I'm peaceful. I'm at peace and. when I drive down to my studio in the Paseo Arts District, the minute I get in the car and head that way, I feel better, Not because things are wrong at home, but I'm looking forward to that time where I'm touching eternity.

Don Drew: 13:08

Terry you've made 80 trips around the sun now, I believe.

Terry Clark: 13:11

I have.

Don Drew: 13:12

But I got to tell you, one of the things when I look at your art and I see you producing art or talking about art, I see a much younger person, a person who is still filled with great hope for the future and great creativity. And I don't see that in everybody that I meet that has been around as many times as we have, right? It, it seems that art has in many ways rejuvenated and reinvigorated you. On the one hand. On the other hand, I remember it was a few years ago that you came to me and said, I'm feeling stuck. I've been doing watercolors for quite some time and it's, I'm just not feeling it anymore. And I know one of the conversations we had, I suggested you try some other forms of art what was going on then? What's going on now?

Terry Clark: 14:02

There's still. the feeling from time to time that I'm stuck. I painted a certain house on the great plains so many times I can draw a floor plan, but to try something different. And that comes from study, informal study, studying other people's art. Watching other artists. As a writer, I always was interested in how other writers wrote, and I love seeing other artists on YouTube or things like this paint, because you always learn something. This is my do it yourself art school. I've not been to a formal art school. People will tell you I'm not the world's most patient person. That's an understatement. I'm a type A person. I'm firstborn. I'm a Capricorn, so I expect things to go a certain way. And art's

taught me patience, and I find that art inspires me. I guess I've always been curious, or maybe that's the journalism background, I don't know, but there's so much to still experience it's an adventure every time you decide to start a painting or a drawing. I don't know if I answered your question, but that may be the best I can do at the moment.

David Lowry: 15:07

Terry, I have a question for you, and it goes like this. Does art come out of you that's being expressed create me, or is it something that you're captured with, and you say, I must express it?

Terry Clark: 15:20

One, it starts with seeing. I take innumerable photographs of clouds. We were going someplace the other night out with a couple of friends and they have this crooked old tree out in the middle of nowhere. I said, stop, I want a picture of that. So where does it come from? That might be a picture and it may not I need to paint. That's true because when I get down or something like that, or in a blah period, most often it's when I'm not involved somehow with art or reading or something like that. And every once in a while, there's something I want to paint that, that happens. The worst time is when. I sit there in my studio and say, Oh, I need to start a painting, but I don't know what to start.

David Lowry: 16:01

Like a writer's block, huh?

Terry Clark: 16:03

Yeah. And see and it's not so much a block. It's just you give me something to write. And I will sit down and get it done. I may postpone it till deadline, and I can do that. For instance, I used to have a blog and I quit and somebody said, why aren't you still writing? And I'd say I don't want to, it takes too much time. I'm aware of time in terms of years. But also, there's a force keeping my hands off the keyboard, I'd call it paralysis. Every once in a while there's something that just says, I want to paint something, and my best paintings are those that come from ideas that touch me deeply that I want to react to, and I know what my best paintings are. And the watercolors, there are a few. The acrylics, there are a few. The others are meet my standards for other people to look at.

David Lowry: 16:52

Wow. I've never thought of it that way. Everything I write is let me show it to Don.

Terry Clark: 16:58

Everybody needs an editor.

David Lowry: 16:59

Yeah, everybody needs an editor.

Terry Clark: 17:01

The the thing I would say is and I wouldn't have thought it in terms of peace until you guys contacted me. But being in contact with eternity, through my creativity, through my, what I do, I never approached it like that. First of all, I would call it salvation. It was my rescue after retiring. But since then it's just who I am.

Don Drew: 17:22

The reason why , I thought of you when we were thinking about whom we might talk to about this subject, you immediately came to mind because I know that whenever I am with you and you are talking about your art or other people's art or your painting or whatever it is that you're doing I can actually see you become transformed. Even if it's just for the moment, cause I know you have to eventually quit doing art and do something else, chop wood, carry water, right? You're going to have to do daily life. But when you are. in your art, when you are doing it, when you're talking about it, when you're present in the moment with your art, you seem to me to be a person transformed into a place of tremendous peace. And that's what made me think of you and you're not alone in this, of course. There's lots of folks that find art in their own ways. But you have, found a very meaningful way of expressing yourself and learning to grow and extract from what your experience, your life, and transform that into something that's beautiful you've done so many great pieces and one of my favorites actually is the Buffalo that you recently did a card for Christy and I absolutely love that Buffalo. It the expression of that Buffalo as simple as it is I think one of the most beautiful pieces that I have. And I just think it's an incredible piece.

Terry Clark: 18:46

Can I have time to tell you a story?

Don Drew: 18:48

Oh yeah.

Terry Clark: 18:49

That buffalo is pretty well done with acrylic pins. Which is something different. I still have that on my computer and I can run out copies of that card. And one of the things about peace is making people happy or encouraging. Okay. When you do that brings peace and joy. It does to me. And I think it does most people, I think my favorite Bible character is Barnabas because he was an encourager. But at the Paseo Art Center where I paint a group of people a teacher and 12 elementary school students from Norman came in one day and I knew they were coming, and they were all the way from second grade to sixth grade. And they came in and had wonderful questions, and I was showing them art and this and that, and they'd study some watercolor and this and that and the other. It's just a summer camp. I knew they were coming, so I'd run out 13 of those cards, on my printer at home. And I had those and they'd ask some questions. Some of them I thought, you, you ought to be a professor. You're in third grade and asking a question like that. So at the end, I took that card of yours, print of it. You have the original. And went into the table and I said, you guys come here. I got something for you. And each kid, what's your name? And I'd say to you and signed it And every one of those kids got one of those happiness, peace. And then five days later, the teacher brought back the thank you card. A piece of paper. And they'd painted a watercolor on it, a landscape, and then each one of them had taken a cloud. First of all, the teacher wrote the thank you thing down here. Each one of them had taken a cloud, pasted it on there, and signed it. That's on my wall.

David Lowry: 20:22

Now, Terry, you're going to be surprised when I tell you what. One of my favorite pieces of work that you've done, and Don may be too, because Don helped with it. The three of us created a blessing box. Now a blessing box, as we're defining it is for a local church here, it is a food pantry. It's on four legs. It's a little a little hutch that we put food in.

Don Drew: 20:44

Sits outdoors.

David Lowry: 20:45

Sits outdoors, right? And it looks like a little house. And Terry did a painting all around it as a community blessing community gift. And it's out there today still for the world to enjoy. It is the most elaborate blessing box I've ever seen ever. And Terry one of the reasons I like it so much is that, some artists are if I'm not going to get paid for it, I'm not doing it, but Terry shares his gifts, community wise, with those students you just heard about with people who are hungry and Terry I've met people at that box over the years. It's been up for a couple of years now, and they've given thanks saying, listen, I really needed the food in this box and I've met people who have given to the box, who said, and I'm giving to this box now, because at a time when I needed it, it was there for me

Terry Clark: 21:36

Jesus said something similar about giving. Giving should be pressed down and so forth. My name is, if you want something, give it. Every time some kid comes in, I've got a few little things around that are small and they have them sold and why not give it to some kid and make their day.

Don Drew: 21:50

Terry, I'd like to close us out today with a poem that actually you gave me in a book called Earthkeeper by N. Scott Momaday. And I'd just like to read this one poem because it's a gift that you gave me, it's a gift that I would like to share with our listeners, and it is art. And hopefully we'll all find some peace from this." May my heart hold the earth all the days of my life. And when I am gone to the farther camps, may my name sound on the green hills. And may the cedar smoke that I have breathed drift on the canyon walls and among the branches of living trees. May birds of many colors encircle the soil where my steps have been placed. And may the deer, the lion, and the bear of the mountain be touched by the blessings that have touched me. May I chant the praises of the wild land, and may my spirit range on the, wind forever. Thanks, Terry, for coming here today. We really appreciate you. Thank you for the art you share, whether it be through books or your paintings or in just in the way you've lived your life. It's an inspiration. Thank you.

David Lowry: 22:54

Real inspiration, Terry. Thanks for being here.

Terry Clark: 22:56

My pleasure. Thank you.