

Portrait of Karin Clifford

by Louise Enhorning

Karin Clifford received her formal education in her native Sweden, graduating from the School of Architecture of the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm in 1953. She worked for several architects' firms in Sweden, London, England and Toronto, before gearing her ambition more towards arts and education. Her marriage to Canadian architect Michael Clifford brought her to Toronto, and the arrival of four children temporarily curtailed her career.

Her creativity, however, was never curtailed. She sought to provide for all children what her own got at home — exposure to and experience in artistic expression.

In the late 1960s, she initiated a program offering after school activities and classes at Brown Public School, where her own children were enrolled. One of the teachers was Karin herself, and other parents with artistic talents were also engaged.

Because of the success of these programs, Brown School and two inner city schools: Rose Avenue School in St. James Town and Charles G. Fraser in a Portuguese neighbourhood, became a pilot project under the auspices of the Toronto Board of Education and the YMCA.

Further expansion of the program occurred in 1969 when Karin was asked to join a dedicated group of inner city principals and school inspectors who, together with professionals from the performing and visual arts, founded the "Inner City Angels."

After initially serving as treasurer on the Board of Directors, Karin assumed the responsibility of Program Coordinator. She was eminently suited for her challenge. With her solid background in architecture, an art form incorporating practically every aspect of artistic expression, she was able to share with colleagues and students her feeling, intuition, and judg-



Karin Clifford Photo: W. Psotka Photog.

ment regarding form, colour, practicality of purpose, and esthetic quality. Arts programs were offered in schools, artists' studios, and eventually in the Inner City Angels' own home, Scadding House, nestled in Trinity Square, in the western shadow of the Eaton's Centre.

The \$500,000 required to move Scadding House to its present location was raised in 1975 through a sponsored "Walk for Scadding House." Clifford played an active role in the organization of this event where thousands of children, teachers, and artists helped to raise the necessary funds.

Clifford's involvement with a multitude of art forms fertilized her own talents and gradually textile art became her specialty. During her formative years in Sweden she had been continuously exposed to an artistic environment, and had absorbed the old traditions and culture, including the textile arts heritage of the province of Skåne, where she grew up.

In 1982, she enrolled in the Ontario College of Art's four-year Design and textiles programme. She graduated in 1985 as the winner of the POS-NER

Award.

Creative weaving techniques was her chosen field of excellence, as witnessed by the many awards she has received over the last few years: Ontario Crafts 1985, and the Handweavers' Guild of America's 1986 exhibition "By a fine Thread," where two of her pieces were selected. She is represented in several Ontario Crafts travelling exhibitions, and in Ontario Crafts 1987, she received the Betty Love Award.

Karin's work with young people and children led to ideas in several different fields. She was one of the founding directors of a "Museum of Childhood" being planned for Toronto, a museum to be filled with fun and nostalgia, and dedicated to the creative possibilities within every human being.

Although Clifford has lived in Toronto for thirty-five years, her Swedishness is obvious. She has maintained close ties with her native country, and those surrounding her — her close-knit family and her friends — have profited by her unassuming ways of promoting Sweden. Clifford has been actively involved in the founding and direction of the Toronto chapter of the Swedish Women's Educational Association (SWEA International) where she served as vice president in 1983 and 1984, and as editor of the association's monthly newsletter for a number of years.

The motto of SWEA is "to preserve and promote Swedish culture and traditions." Ever since she came to Canada, Karin has lived by this motto, and she embodies many qualities with which Sweden is proud to be identified — a deep-rooted sense of the esthetic, a fertile and visionary imagination, creativity, honesty and down-to-earth efficiency.

Achievements like those of Karin Clifford's continue to enrich Toronto's multicultural life.