

Seeker Of The Stone's Soul: The Walk

by Bruce Salisbury

The artist rises early as usual, a morning shower washing off stone dust accumulated the day before. The morning shower brings new life to the day awaiting the artist, washing away what was and leaving what will be.

From the lodge, the walk to the carving field has a forest on the left and open grazing ground on the right. Did you hear the tapping on the left? Stop, listen, and locate the source of that sound. Stop and listen. There, within the branches of the pine tree, a northern flicker. Cool, very cool.

Walking from the lodge to the dining hall, via the carving field, brings into focus two calves, one

brown, and one black, butting heads. A little further two trees stand as naked sticks once full of life now dead. Further along the walk a mother goose tends her adolescent goslings. Walking past the barn, the carving field (field of dreams) reveals itself, as a mule stares at the passerby. The morning air is disturbed only by a couple of master and beginning carvers, discussing their excitement at discovering their creation emerging from within the stone.

The carving field is a mosaic of artists' tents, each sheltering a carver (sculptor) and tools. Tools and equipment span a wide range from hand tools to grinders, air hammers, and high end boring equipment. For the beginner and experimenter, there is a special large tent. Here, there are hand tools provided by the symposium and other artists, worktables, sand bags, and instructors. For those that desire, there are mentors to pass on their expertise, skills, and philosophy.

The day before began with finding the

right stone. Among the three vendors there were a hundred or so laid out on a paved basketball court. There was stone from Italy, Alaska, and Canada, just to indicate a few of the places. Some stones are soft, and some are not. How to choose? Soapstone is soft and often selected by beginners and masters. Some do not enjoy the soapy dust that collects at their feet (thus, the reason for the name "soapstone"). Alabaster, another relatively soft stone, provides both the beginner and master unlimited exploration. The colors vary and provide food for an active imagination. The extremes from translucent to opaque are wide. Marble, the stone of choice for many master sculptors of the past and present, varies widely in color and texture. Some marble is smooth, while some have a crystal-like structure.

At one end of the court sits an old storage shed, or "the candy store", as it is affectionately referred to by all. Here, both novice and master sculptor can buy most tools of the trade. One can find hand sculpting tools, air

hammers, electrical angle cutters, and safety items.

The mallet strikes the chisel and a piece of stone is removed. Again and again the mallet strikes the chisel. Pieces of stone fly through the air. Some artists impose their desired object on a stone; while others meditate (communicate) with a stone's soul to merely enhance what Mother Earth has created. Putting metal against metal, steel against stone, the artist moves toward a desired conclusion, transforming the stone from a natural state to a state of imagination. Inward satisfaction is gained by seeing the mind's eye transformed into hard reality. Seeing the stone developing into the desired form is the purest form of satisfaction. It does not matter if it is a traditional human figure or an abstract design. The artist, the creator, is happy.

Unexpectedly a piece of stone is removed. The heart sinks as the stone speaks out against the artist. "You, the artist, must stop and reconsider before proceeding." The artist stops, and ponders a moment about what has happened. Does the artist set it aside for another day or proceed with an altered vision?

The Northwest Stone Sculptors Association is made up of the friendliest people you want to meet. Each artist shares their trade secrets, since there are no secrets, since no matter what the skill level; the finished product is yours and yours alone. Yes, a piece could be copied, but no two stones are created the same.

Take the plunge and spend a couple of days or all ten days at Camp Brotherhood to learn about stone carving, communicate with friends, and enjoy the eagles that fly over the field at noon.