

HORSE Sense

BY SHERRY PAIGE

Carving with Larry

PINOCCHIO'S DREAM

*When you wish upon a star, makes no difference who you are
Anything your heart desires will come to you.*

--Leigh Harline | Ned Washington



The people of Elmira, New York had a dream. They dreamed of restoring their beloved Eldridge Park Carousel. It seemed simple enough in conversation with each other, but it was one that would require a man kind of like Geppeto. It would require a man who could carve wood into a form that, when finished, would take on a life of its own. . .like Geppeto did with Pinocchio.

Little did they know that when all was said and done, it would at the hand of carving instruments belonging to the man who had given life to a 27-foot tall piece of Indiana limestone, now standing at the entrance to Marine Headquarters in Quantico, Virginia. A carousel in New York. A marine statue in Virginia. What does this story have to do with Tennessee?

If your heart is in your dream, no request is too extreme.

Larry Pefferly had a dream. He dreamed of living out his early retirement with wife, Jerry, in beautiful countryside somewhere. Their search brought them from Rocky Ridge, Maryland to Cornersville, Tennessee to put down roots on land where they could ride horses, all day long if they wanted to, without encountering a paved street anywhere.

It was as relaxing as they had hoped, but something stirred in Pefferly. . .something that wouldn't retire to his workshop without him. There the carving instruments lay, the ones his grandfather had used on national monuments, cathedral statuary and fine furniture. Now they were his. And although he had never undertaken the carving of anything so grand, he knew something was calling him to pick up the tools and begin. So he did.

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He decided to carve a horse. . . a horse in the style of those on a carousel. He did a little research, but when it finally came to striking, shaving and shaping the wood, Larry Pepperly says that mostly, he listened. He chose a piece of basswood since that's the wood that all the early carousel carvers of the 1800's used. And he listened to something internal that guided the use of each instrument left to him by his father.

An internal voice said, "Take a little off here," and then, "go deeper there," until before he knew it, he had released a fine carousel horse from a block of basswood, complete with proud neck and tousled mane. This he gave to Jerry, his wife, as a birthday gift.

When you wish upon a star as deamers do. . .

The Eldridge Park Carousel in Elmira, New York, had long been one of the most heralded carousels in the country. Three rows deep with over 35 horses and another 21 animals plus two chariots, it was in its heyday from 1930 to 1950, then began a slow decline in popularity as times changed. Out of sight and out of mind well by 2000, it fell into such disrepair that when the desire to resurrect it finally emerged, it was apparent that an artist who could employ the authentic craft of carving wood needed to be found. There were, after all, some 20 outer row standers (horses) to recreate.

Mary and Bob Lyon of New York were the ones to stumble upon the amazing work that was going on in the Pepperly workshop in Cornersville. For Larry had continued his carousel carvings with wife Jerry adding her painting skills to the mix. In addition to several more horses, he now had carved a lion, a goat and a rabbit; and put them up on a website. Mary Lyon was so taken with his work that she bought one for herself and promptly took it to the Carousel Preservation Society to show. Here was the man who could bring the Eldridge Park Carousel back to life.

Fate is kind, she brings to those who love. . .the fulfillment of their secret longings.

So in 2003, after many measurements, photos and reproduction sketches had been delivered from Elmira to Cornersville, Larry Pepperly began a three-year vigil of carving and sculpting the reproductions for 20 outer row carousel standers, starting with the lead horse, Silver.

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In the half-light of any early morning, his workshop could have been mistaken for a stable, for each horse had as distinct a personality as real animals do. There was Westward, the cavalry horse, Black Seinglend, bedecked in armor as though awaiting his knight and Old Glory, with eagle's wings emblazoned upon his chest. And of course, there was the dapple grey that Larry named Tennessee, wearing a wreath to honor the memory of his long time friend and supporter, Jim Dulin.

Had Jiminy Cricket been dancing along as this master craftsman was at his bench, he would have noted the Geppeto resemblance in Pefferly's relationship with his carvings. For once the animal began to emerge, all talk of its being wood was over. No, this was Sebastian, Dusty and King Pin; all eagerly moving toward that day when starry-eyed children would climb up for a ride and stroke their mount as though real and alive.

Like a jolt out of the blue, fate steps in to see you through.



To say that Larry Pefferly had it in him, is now an understatement. To recount that the people of Elmira, New York, including celebrities, politicians and media gathered that day in 2006 and gratefully unveiled a stunning Eldridge Park Carousel, is as well. What bears pointing out is that you never know what might happen when you dare to dream. For the good folks of Elmira, Pefferly's work is as much a monument to a treasured time as his father's was before him. For something of the same spirit in Lawrence Pefferly that forged the Statue of Iowa Jima came pouring through his son, Larry, in the Eldridge Park Carousel. Both took more than carving instruments. Both continue to give life to more than wood or stone.

When you wish upon a star, your dreams come true. 

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