

This book of history is dedicated to Melvin Richards, age 1 year. He is my great great grandson. I am in hopes that he will read this when he is 35 years old and he can see how things have changed. Maybe for the best, maybe for the worst. I am hoping things and life will be good for him. This book is also dedicated to all other children of our family. May God be good to them. (Baby girl Sloane is now with us. Melvin's Sister.)

My life has been very full. Many adventures, many happy experiments to make things better for others. I have tried to use my head, my luck and my insistence to learn as much as I can stuff into my brain. The riches of life come from dedication to hard work, care for others and keeping a good spirit alive your entire life. Never give up. Greed and being un-true to yourself and others is the enemy. It is very easy to know the difference between right and wrong. Take the right path; it is its own reward.

Mel Jacobson

"Letters to Colleen".

January 13, 2023.

A true story of the philosophy of clay, craft, recovery, dedication and learning from the "ground up". Some names and places are changed to protect the privacy of others. The facts are correct.

This is the story of how Colleen came to me with sorrow, unhappiness and ready to quit life.

Our time together was full of stories that mostly happened before she was born. But the stories are metaphors for her life. See the world, have experiences that open her eyes to new ideas. Find amazing friends that teach us to live a full life. Colleen had to understand that who she was, is really well founded, and She can live with her amazing energy to solve the problems that confront us all. And then live a life without fear, fear of total living, fear of failure. And, the most important, the fear of doing and making without it always having to be perfect.

It all turned as magic into a beautiful, talented, full of life young woman with a huge passion for craft, art and skill and living that "full" life. And she realizes that she has power, strength and intelligent class. This story fills in the many

stories of my own life and profession. And, in many ways the stories explain “how I did it.”

It is also a true story of trust, dedication, cooperation and care.

Bill Baillie called me. Bill was a former student acquaintance of mine; his wife’s dad was a fellow teacher. Bill’s Brother Mark was an electronic wiz and worked for me with student events, shows, and dances at our high school. I was close to the entire family.

So, Bill wanted me to meet with his daughter. She had quit college, as she was not a declared major in art and not allowed to take more classes. She came home depressed and angry. She hated school and what was being taught. I said to Bill, “it seems that Colleen and I agree on that subject 100%.”

The family had taken Colleen to a psychiatrist and along with the doctor they were very worried about her “well being”. It was serious.

Being a Japanese trained “Master Potter”, there was the thought that Colleen could maybe apprentice with me. That was very far from my mind. I had no intention of having an 18 year old girl, with major `issues` in my studio. That was February 2009

Bill again asked if I would meet with her and he would attend the meeting. So, I said yes, that would be fine.

The meeting took place a few days later. Colleen was crest fallen, head down and did not want to answer questions. I finally said in a loud voice...”Colleen, what do you want”? Her head popped up and she said, “I want to be a potter like you and work on a potter’s wheel and then draw and paint.” I said “that I can do, I know how to teach throwing on a wheel. I have taught literally thousands how to do it”.

I then added, “It has to be serious, with a tight schedule of teaching and my wife will monitor you while in the studio. I also want your Mom and Dad and grandparents to feel free to drop in while you are learning.” (I was protecting me.)

I told her to arrive at my studio the next day at 2 p.m. Not late, not early. She arrived right at 2. I told her if she ever felt uncomfortable to let me know, right then. No waiting. I indicated to her our conversations would be about clay, work and skill. I would not want personal issues to be a part of our work. As happened to me in Japan, my day was work, and then more work and success at skill had to be accomplished. She agreed to that concept.

I did a demonstration of my basic throwing technique. She said she could center and make pots. After the demonstration I gave her about 5lbs of clay and told her to make some half pound pots that she would make as I had shown her. I went into the house and had coffee. I gave her a half hour and walked back into the studio and I almost fainted. She made ten very nice pots that looked like mine. "SHE IS A NATURAL I THOUGHT". And of course she was, and still is.



Colleen at 19 years old, she is now 32, after 14 years with me.

I told Colleen that she could come back tomorrow for one hour. And, if things went well she could come every day at 2. I then explained to her that my philosophy of learning was based on the concept of total trust. She had to feel safe. She had to trust that what I taught and how I did it was in her best interest. She had to experience growth and understanding. This was all going to be about the total experience of being a potter. She would have to learn clay, construction, and the skills of moving to all the steps of drying, firing and glazing to perfection. Nothing would be left out, and there would be no shortcuts, ever. It seems that is what she wanted and what she was looking for.

She went on to tell me her college prof wanted the students to make “vagina, or penis pots...He called them “gutsy”. He wanted them to tell stories in their work and he did not care for wheel work. He called it “Vo Tech crafty”. College was a zoo in action. The same story was repeated in her other art courses. She said, “I will not do that sort of art, it is shameful.” I totally agreed.

(Sidebar story) Colleen attended the University of Minnesota at Duluth. A couple of years ago the college dropped art from their curriculum. The art staff was fired and only two professors were kept on to teach “recreational art”. There are no art majors, or advanced degrees given in art. (As I was quoted at the time “they commit suicide with stupidity and really don’t know it”.)

As long as Colleen had no formal training other than high school art, it seemed to me that she might as well get started with the Japanese apprentice training. And since I had been through it, I could temper her studies in clay to be “gentle”. She did not need any aggressive studies. It became a study with JOY.

My entire life as a potter was based on “self teaching”. I am very stubborn about learning all the steps; I do not ever look for short cuts. I wanted to be curious, and make sure I knew what I was talking about.

I had taken two 10 week quarter courses at the University of Minnesota, from Warren MacKenzie. He became very famous, but I was in his first classes he taught back in 1956. I was not an art major, and almost had a degree done in sociology and philosophy as I was thinking of the ministry. Taking ceramics and painting was an interesting way to get A's and pad my grades and honor points, and it changed my life totally. As luckily happened during a luncheon with my painting teacher as I thanked him for giving me A's as I was not a major. He said, "God you are stupid, I did not give you good grades as a gift, you are one of my most talented painters."

He thought I was rough around the edges, but had amazing potential. He went on to say "get on the right side of this campus, the creative side." So, I moved my major during my senior year. And that is a huge move. I had to make up a lot of time and learning that was missing from my life.

In so many ways I was a "fish out of water", and had to make my own way in learning the basics of drawing, painting and art history. It was dive in and swim. And that is what I did.

At the time, I was `almost` confident in painting, but with the 60's gut of "anti-art" painters dominating the scene in New York, I kept on thinking, I will never do that sort of art, and basically I rejected painting. I can clearly remember that I had thoughts of turning to a craft that had some history, rules and regulations for success. Dog feces spread on a canvas and called art abused my thinking of what is art? I always attached the concept of "BEAUTY" to art, and still do. And most of all, how do I teach art to 15 year old kids and explain "what is art, a soup can?"

That is when I turned to pottery, clay and kilns.

I had started teaching junior high general art. In many ways I created my own apprenticeship. I did the lessons that the kids were doing. I worked right alongside of them and told them "I was learning too". That concept of working with the kids instead of walking around the room and "helping" was the core of my teaching philosophy.

I purchased a wooden kick wheel for school, and purchased one for me to have at home. An electric kiln was installed at school and off I ran.

There was just enough information gleaned from my time at the U, with Warren. I had the basic skill of centering and simple throwing. Even at the very first, I hated the school grade clay we used. I had to get something better. I read some of the early books and it seemed that Fire Clay might help. (I was planning to build a kiln and would need high temp clay.) So, I mixed A.P. Greene fire clay, 50/50 with the scrap school clay, filled steel pails, and let it age. It was a great throwing clay body. Because I was using steel pails that the school floor wax came in, they had started to rust. Those tiny pieces of rust were very critical in my life. Rust caused spotting in my pots that I soon began to make at home, and fired in my new gas kiln. Life changing. There were MacKenzie clones popping up all around me, dedicated followers. Not for me. If I could not make it on my own, I would not make it.

One day while unloading a kiln full of my own pots, Sharlene, my wife said, "Melvin why don't you call Warren MacKenzie and get some decent glaze recipes from him?"

I turned red, choked a bit and said "I will never call anyone for a recipe. "I have to learn on my own, and make my pots mine, never Warren's".

That rage filled rant became critical in my philosophy and the start of my own studio and living my life as a potter/artist/teacher. And, of course in total control of my own outcomes.

The most daring thing I have ever done was to build a gas kiln in my garage. I had never seen an ifb, soft brick. I had never seen a homemade kiln. I had to run a gas line thorough my house and out to the garage by myself. I had to cut a hole in the roof of the garage and put in a chimney for the hot kiln. But, I found a plan for the kiln written by Jim Mckinnell a teacher at Iowa State University. It seemed to make sense.

There was no way for me to continue making pots without a kiln. And to buy a readymade kiln that used electricity seemed silly to me. It was the start of "learning from the ground up". I had to understand what a kiln was, how it worked and how I could control it. I had to build it myself. So, in that respect I was a pioneer. In the early sixties there was not a network of potters around to call in for discussion. I was on my own. (and thank goodness for that, most anyone I would call upon for advice probably would have the wrong answers

as most gas kilns had been designed in the mid 1930's and the specs where industrial and probably outdated.) A free stacked insulated fire brick kiln was all new engineering and I was at the front lines of having a great kiln. That all happened because I found a plan by Jim Mckinnell and he was a great teacher and forward looking potter with a sense of design and modern engineering.

At the same time, most potters were reading the book by Bernard Leach, a British potter and the mentor of Warren McKenzie and his wife Alex. It was sort of the early bible of potting. It was inspiring and the philosophy of Warren (British socialism), but had little to do with me. (Warren built a hard brick monster of a kiln that fired with oil. It was a poor design and did not fire evenly. In fact it was about 4 cones off from front to back and top to bottom. It finally suffered an oil leak, and that started a fire that burned his studio to the ground. A sad ending to a bad kiln.)

I will not repeat the building of my kiln with all the technical information. My book "Twenty First Century Kilns" has all the information one would need to understand modern kilns. At this time you may download the book at no cost from my Website found at (WWW.melpots.com)



My new kiln was almost perfect. It fired in a speedy manner, cone 10 dropped well and the top to bottom was the same. And just by chance, the flu size that I chose was smaller than the standard 81 sq inch flu. It meant the kiln fired fast and better than any other kilns around. Nils Lou picked up the idea and published a book with that spec and it changed a great deal of the thinking of kiln building. (And kiln thermodynamics.)



Note kiln two, with arch.

I wore out the first kiln, rebuilt it with an arch, then moved it into its own building and did a 45 sq foot flat top that will now be Colleen's to master.

I built a small version of the flat top kiln at the farm. It too is an absolute perfect kiln. It fires very fast with top to bottom accuracy. I have been firing that kiln to cone 10 in about five plus hours. `Amazing`. A variety of friends are now firing that kiln to absolute perfection. There is a group of four women that are now mastering the gas kiln subject with that kiln. The pots that are coming from that kiln are as fine as one can find. (They also built a "salt kiln" on my property and love group firing.)



The small kiln at the farm/ it has fired to cone 7 in 4 hours

I bought a pug mill to mix clay. It made making clay with my new formula a breeze. I brought home bags of scrap clay from the school, and added that A.P. Greene fire clay to it. I was adding crushed rust metal and grog and sand to make it unique. Again, I did not want to use commercial clay as that is what everyone else in Minnesota was using. I demanded of myself to make my own variation of cone 10 clay. And today, at 88 years old, I still make my own

unique clay body. (My dear friend Kerry Brooks has a commercial clay company and has tons, literally tons of scrap clay for stoneware temps. I haul a great deal home and mix it to my spec, both at home and at the farm. Colleen too uses pug mill made clay and refuses to use commercial clay out of the bag, except in making matched pieces.

We will return later in this story to talk of the farm.

As with Colleen in my studio after the saga of learning to throw pots with some success comes the new problem of covering those pots with glaze.

As we come to realize, glazing is just putting a glass surface over a clay pot. Glaze is basically silica that melts at a given temperature. We add clay to the silica to make it more matt. (It is complex chemistry) Silica, Potash and Alumina makes glass.

In the early 60's I did not even have high school chemistry under my belt. It was a foreign language for sure. But, I had to face it, head on. I found a recipe in the old Leach book called 1 2 3 4. It added up to ten. That means we needed one pound, two pounds etc. It was feldspar, silica and china clay. That was easy. I made a pail full and added oxides to color it. Iron was common for brown; cobalt made blue and copper was green.

Bisque or first firing was done in the gas kiln. It had to be a slow firing as not to blow things up. The kiln fired just fine, just as I wanted it.

I knew that the big time potters around the country fired to cone 10 (2347F) and fired in an atmosphere that was called "reduction". At about the middle of the firing the potter pushes in the damper of the chimney and keeps carbon inside the kiln to affect the pots. I had watched reduction firing at the U and I rather guessed how my kiln would react.

I glazed my pots, had more than enough to fire the kiln, loaded it up and turned it on. It did exactly what I wanted. It seems that the smaller flu started to add reduction to the firing at about 1900F. By the time the kiln reached cone 10 the kiln was full of carbon and reached temperature in about 9 hours. I shut it off, opened it the next day and there was nice shiny totally reduced pots. I was thrilled.

There was a ceramics magazine called “Ceramics Monthly” that I read. It was full of potters stories and recipes and ideas. It was a god send for me. At about that time there was a new book advertised, “Clay and Glazes for the Potter”. Dan Rhodes a professor at Alfred University in New York had made a book that could be understood and learned from. Again, I was thrilled to own it. It was chemistry 101 for potters.

In the back of the book there was a list of cone 25 recipes that had been tested to fire well at cone 10. And, there it was.....Rhodes 32, a `buttery surface that allowed layering of glazes to achieve interesting affects`. It was a four ingredient formula, and was dominated by a material called “Dolomite” that caused the buttery surface.

Rhodes 32 became the standard glaze of my studio for over 30 years. It always fired well, and I could make the glaze in a variety of colors that layered into an almost magic pattern. Now I had my best glaze, the glaze with gloss, and made a glaze that was almost black called Temmoku. I found that black glaze recipe on a bucket I bought at a potter’s garage sale. It too was magic. Finding a glaze is so much more interesting than taking a worked over glaze from someone else. A glaze has to fit the pots, it has to be fired a certain way, and of course it has to match and fit the clay body. Another potter’s glaze may not work for me at all. It is back to the concept of taking it from the beginning and making it your own.

Colleen was confronted with the same issue. Bisque fired pots lined up in my studio....”now what to do with them?” That was my issue too. How do you sell pots?????

It was my thought when I built the kiln that as a teacher I had a part time job that was in my home. I could stay home all summer and I did not have to get a part time job at Sears, or at a gas station. I would be home all day, every day with my wife and kids. That was a win, win idea.

Colleen’s family was sort of in quandary. School is very expensive and here she was using my studio, clay and firing. Grandpa wanted to pay me, or buy some expensive piece of equipment for me. I told the family that whatever pay I was to receive had to come from Colleen. I felt she had to stand up and

participate in our studio, and by doing that she would be helped to heal herself.

So, Colleen and I had a heart to heart talk about money. I told her she had to work and sell pots to pay her own way. I suggested she talk to some restaurant people and see if they needed pots. On her first visit to a place in N.E. Minneapolis she talked them into `Silver Ware` pots to put on the tables. They held a half dozen "roll ups". They ordered 50 of them.



Colleen and her first order ready to deliver.

I told Colleen that I would be taking a 50% commission on all her sales. It was just like a gallery, they got their cut. She agreed and has always kept perfect books of sales and I am the first to get my commission. After her apprenticeship was done, I told her that my commission dropped to one third.

She was very pleased. She then became a partner in the studio. At that time I was in my mid 70's and slowing a bit. Colleen added to my life with help, support and encouragement.

As for me when I first started to sell pots, galleries took big commissions, art fairs were a pain in the butt to haul pots, sell in the rain, pack up and go home and do the same thing the next day. I hated both of those venues.

The concept of taking charge of your own sales was front and center of my thinking when I finally walked away from "Uptown Art Fair". I remember driving down highway 7 thinking "take charge of your own sales".

Sharlene and I talked about it while I was unpacking all the pots. I said, "We have a great house here in Minnetonka, we are building lovely decks, why can't we do a sale here at home?" She said "well" and we started to plan it.

Then came the mailing list, ideas for getting names, thinking how to do it. As always the list started with friends and relatives and neighbors. But both of us asked everyone we met if they wanted to be on our "show list", and that batch of names grew fast. The largest mailing we ever did was 921 pieces

We found labels that could be typed, and by using carbons Sharlene could get three sets of labels. We decided on post cards, and even tried bulk mail. We decided on a summer date, weekend before the Uptown event happened. Sent out the cards and set up the back deck with tables full of pots. We sold everything and away we went.



An early deck sale. The studio behind me is new.

Getting started and gaining a tiny reputation of good pots, I started to get invitations to show pots. Anderson's fine china had a show and sale for me. The Sons of Norway did a show, and then several more offers came in.

Colleen and I have show/sales together now. Of course my mailing list is all digital and Colleen has amazing contacts with email/social media. But we use face book as a positive force to advertise our work. I never have any political issues on face book. I want anyone that loves my pots to be welcome at my home. The pottery business is off limits to political wrangling. When dealing with my pots, I do not see color, politics or ethnic or religious dispute. All are welcome.

I use a theory that if one makes a fifty mile circle from your studio, how many people might buy pots? As Minnetonka is in the middle of my circle, it is a million and half potential customers. I ought to be able to find some to buy pots. Over half of my customers are less than ten miles from my studio.

I keep my very modern mailing list spotless. It is computer generated and I can keep it clean, and my home printer makes the labels. I only use first class post card stamps as they will come back to me if the people move. Every 6-10 years I send a note to customers to let me know if they want to be taken off the list, or if someone dies. Sharlene did hand calligraphic art for years. They were very classy.

I use face book as an advertising scheme. It reaches literally a thousand former students and friends. I do not 'bark at the moon' as some do on face book. As I have said, in my studio, all are welcome. With the country split in half, it would mean I would defame half of my friends and customers to get "political" and hateful. I do not do that. And, yes, I am a Christian, have been since I was born. It was a critical part of our family and for me growing up. I have values, but I do not preach to my customers. I am private with my faith.

Even before I go to the bank I sit down with my mailing list and update it. I have a thumb drive with that mailing list updated in my fire proof safe. And I save the data base to three other secure sources on my computers. I fuss and care for that list. It is pure money.

As I have shown Colleen, being a good business person means money in your pocket. I do not believe in the theory that artists are sorta stupid with business. I know it is not my way. I take charge of my own income, books, taxes and deductions. Everything counts.

I have had the full audit from the IRS. They claimed I owed a great deal of money because I deducted half of our trip to Australia. We went to the Hobert wedding but, I sent a letter to the Australian Crafts Council and asked for information for Sharlene and I to meet Australian potters and calligraphers. We did that wherever we went while traveling in Australia.

The IRS claimed as a teacher I could never claim travel. I took the case to the U.S court of appeals. The judge ruled in my favor as being a professional artist. I had handed the judge the letter I received from Australia, "Please note the council will do everything possible for you to meet quality artists".

My mantra to Colleen is, "keep records, report income, and never fear the IRS if you are honest. Claiming deductions is a matter of opinion, it can be debated.

A few years back, the city of Minnetonka put a regulation in place that there would be a limit to `garage sales`. One of the council members said, What do we do with Mel and his pottery show?." Another council member said, "That is an asset to our community. They voted 8-0 to let me have all the home shows and sales I could handle. My art is an asset to the community. How nice is that?

A story within a story.

As a growing child I had several traumatic experiences that colored my life forever. During a trip by Greyhound bus to my Mother's home in West Virginia, we visited her dear high school friend. She was the owner of two very nasty Chow dogs. They were used as guard dogs behind a metal fence. Big dogs, 90 lbs at least.

She let one of the dogs into the kitchen as my Brother and I were walking in the front door. The dog bolted and attacked me as I was coming in the front

door. The dog tore into me, with bites on my back and a severe bit across my arm as it covered my throat. I was saved by the husband and rushed to the hospital. From that time on I had an awful fear of large dogs. I was helped by hypnotism therapy when I was forty years old. It worked to a degree.

It is also the reason we bought Golden Retriever dogs. They are the gentlest dogs to own.

When I was in first grade, another event changed me forever. I was sitting at the little red table in the back of the room making a crown out of oil based modeling clay. It was made to fit on my head and I tried it on. The teacher spotted me with my clay crown and roared down the isle of desks and hit me beside my head and I fell to the floor. She screamed, "You nasty boy, putting clay in your hair, go back to kindergarten where you belong." And she put me in the hall and said "get going".

I went right out the door to the school, without a coat in mid winter and ran home. I told my Mom I was not going to school any longer. Well, the phone rang and the principal had my Mom bring me back. I was put in Kindergarten with several neighbor kids in the class. I was devastated, as that lasted three days. Back I went to the Horror show of a bitch. I made up my mind that I would never do anything right. I purposely gave the wrong answer to all the tests. They thought I might be mentally weak. But little did they know, I knew the right answer and gave the wrong one. You cannot be stupid to get away with that. And because of that ugly teacher, I keep about 3 tons of clay on hand at all times.

School was miserable for me until fourth grade. She appeared like a mythic princess. I had Ruth Meske for fourth grade. She was pretty, she wore high heeled shoes and wore silk dresses and she had a marvelous figure. I was struck by lightning. And, it was another miracle, she was ambidextrous, she used both hands to write on the board. She was artistic and creative.

By then I had thick glasses, was overweight a bit, and was left handed. But, I was really big and strong.

She actually took a shine to me, she asked me to be her helper. Somehow she knew I loved to draw and paint and she asked me to take a full

blackboard section and do a mural of ships, or Santa and I also painted all the chalk boxes. Of course I did all the cleaning and washing of blackboards and erasers. I even carried things to her car. And by some miracle, she switched her assignment to fifth grade and I had her as my teacher for two years. I was thrilled.

She recommended me to be the school deliver boy. That meant taking the street car all the way downtown to the school headquarters. I carried films, slide shows and all the school mail and even the teacher's checks. I did that every Thursday and it took a half day. I was flawless in my duties. Remember, I was the biggest kid and artistic and a very nice boy.

One spring day Ruth asked me to stay a few minutes after school. She said to me, "Melvin, I have a friend that teaches at the University and he wants to come and visit with you and do some simple testing, OK?. Hell I would have beaten up a girl in class if Ruth asked me to do it.

The meeting happened two days later. After school I sat with him for almost two hours. Ruth had said.."Melvin, get all the answer right...just for me!" I did. Of course the test was a verbal IQ test. And, I got most all the answers right. She caught me. A week later she told me I was a naughty boy and now I had to get all the answers right on tests.

One morning, years later I saw an obit in the Minneapolis paper for a Ruth Meske, died at 99 years of age. I was stunned. I went to the Mortuary and of course there was no one there. At 99 all of her friends where dead. I stood next to her casket, bend down and whispered in the space of the cover, "I love you Ruth, thank you for making me a whole person."

In May of 1944 my brother drowned in Lake of the Isles. It was a double drowning and he died with his best friend. It was devastating to our family. My Mother went into shock. I was ten years old.

Another miracle happened. Our pastor made a move. He went to Lutheran welfare and borrowed a baby. Yes, borrowed a baby that was waiting for adoption and brought her to my mom. There was nothing like grief counseling, help, psychology and care. As my Dad said many times, "Time to

buck up.” It was the Marine Corps philosophy of survival, and, he lived by the Marine Corps code of honor. In fact we all did.

The Pastor arrived at our house with baby, Similac, diapers and a blanket. He set the baby in my Mom’s lap and said, “This baby needs care, right now, no place for her, and it’s up to you Annis.” He left. And he knew that she knew how to take care of a baby, no one better. Pastor Wetzler shocked her back to life.

When I came home from school I could hear my Mom singing. I knew something was going on. “Melvin, look what I get to take care of, an orphan baby, her name is Joyce, isn’t she adorable?” Even after 78 years, I still choke up.

As it turned out, when the social worker came to take Joyce back I blocked the door and said “you cannot have our baby”. And that turned into the lady telling us they were looking for homes that would care for newborns and we could apply. My Mom wanted to do it and said it was ok. She was paid a dollar a day and would help us a great deal as it was “war time”. It is hard to realize what \$30 a month meant to us.

That event started a lifetime of foster care at our house. As my Mom loved the tiny newborns as they were easier to care for, that is what we had most of the time. Almost all the babies were on a schedule in a few days and we all had a turn holding them and feeding them, it went very well. That turned out to be 180 babies until my Mom turned 67. She finally had to retire.

Having all those babies in our life taught us to love and honor life. Our family always helped others; It was part of our family DNA. Even to this day I have a dedication to others and of course, working hard and long hours was just plain normal.

All during the Second World War, my Dad went to the Ford Motor plant to build M-8 scout cars for the Army. Six days a week, 10 hours a day. Never a complaint, just worry about his buddies that were still in the Marines fighting in the Pacific. With four kids and a wife, the Marines told him to stay at home and make tanks. We lived “God Bless America.”

After the war, the pace of making cars at Ford doubled. In many ways my Dad put in the same hours from 1947 until he retired at 65. That was my example of being a man. Honest hard work, help others and take care of your family and property.

From all I can tell, Colleen has that same attitude. She never quits when there is more work to do. Many nights I have seen her in the studio finishing pots after her day job was done. In the 14 years she has been with me, she has never left a job undone.

It is interesting how my life was always about decades. The fifties were all about education, developing some intellect and trusting it. From the beginning I was aware of my lack of academic excellence. High school and the first years of college were all about fun, sports and dating. The addition of art and craft changed all of that. There was passion studying art.

The sixties were all about developing my pottery, home and work place. I added coaching swimming to that list and that became a wonderful success.

My confidence started to build. I was aware I could make things happen in a positive way.

Another big experience was coming my way. I had been coaching the 9th grade football team at South Jr. High. I teamed with Duane Welch and Larry Hanson at the smallest Junior High in the area. We beat everyone. Duane and I felt that teaching the game was everything to young kids. We put in trick plays, we did tricky punt returns. By teaching the game, it helped our kids feel confident. We did not have fancy uniforms. We built character in those kids. We won all the time; beat all the big schools with fancy coaches. Several of the years we only had 19 kids out for football. Other schools would show up with buses full.

At one of the games I saw Bob Johnson watching. He had started the swimming team at Hopkins High and was winning a great many meets. He was teamed with Elmer Luke an old state champ swimmer from the Iron Range and the phy ed teacher at our school.

I walked over to him after we had won with a walk over one of the big schools. He waved to me and said "my god Mel, your kids are really well prepared. How would you like to join Elmer and Me and be part of our swim program?" I was stunned, I was an average swimmer in high school, and when I swam at Hamline my job was to beat the other team's worst swimmer. I had to work at the Trib and could not go to after class workouts. The coach said; show up at the meets, you swim well enough to beat their scrub. But, take a coaching job with this soon to become power house team was daunting in my mind. What did I know? Bob went on to say that I would organize the divers and work with young swimmers. It was all new to Bob and Elmer and they did not have time for it. And best of all, Bob said "I was a great coach for kids, might as well join the big time."

Sharlene thought I was nuts "you don't know a thing about diving." I told her, "I did not know a thing about kilns either, and I learned, and "from the ground up."

So, I was a diving coach. I inherited two average divers that were seniors. We got along just fine, and they did improve. I kept it very simple. In the mean time I had seen a kid out at the Shady Oak beach diving off the high dive. He actually could dive. He was young, and a basketball player. His name was Herb Miller. I would always greet him in the locker room, we knew each other.

One day as I was going into the pool I spotted Herb at his locker. He was crying. This was the start of his junior year and he was starting on the varsity basketball team. I walked over to him and asked if I could help him. He said "Novak kicked me out of the gym, said I did not hustle in his style." Herb was a deliberate sort of kid, smooth and in control. Novak ran fast break, hubba hubba basketball. Herb would score like 20 points a game, and he was kicked out of the gym?

The door of opportunity just opened for me. I said to Herb, "you are a great diver and I am looking for one, why don't you join me in the pool. Wait here, I will get you a diving suit." He said "great." Bob and Elmer both almost fainted when I walked into the pool with Herb. I had a couple of very average divers in the pool, but it so happened they were pals of Herb. He fit in like a glove, and

the basketball coach never said a word. I had a diver. He was the first one that actually had great potential. He loved the pool, and the swim guys.

I had sat down with Herb and had a long talk a few days later. I told him what I thought, and would he be willing to come in the pool Saturday mornings and have private diving lessons and work alone with me. I would pick him up with my car and every Saturday morning at 7 a.m. He sure could not go out and party Friday night. I met his folks and talked about our plan. They were excited and did not want him near the gym. We worked hard, he caught on quickly and soon he had a full slate of dives for meets. I started to think, "State Meet". And, he started to get points for us in tight swim meets.

Bruce Brown from Rochester was the returning state champ. He won the state meet as a sophomore. No one in Minnesota was in his class. He had private lessons, was going to dive at U of Michigan. Rich kid, medical family, all the perks.

The State Meet finally came along and Herb qualified for the meet. Bruce Brown missed one of his first dives. Herb was on fire and nailed his first five. He was only five points below Bruce. Herb finished second place in the state meet, 12 points behind. And, they were both juniors. What would happen next year? We were a bit excited and four new kids came out for diving, success works. Herb put in two new dives that scored more points. He beat everyone in our conference. I was actually coaching him, and taught him to dive. I was excited, and the new kids had really good goals diving with Herb. He taught them. We had heard that Bruce Brown was taking more private lessons, he was shaken.

Well that state meet rolled around and Bruce Brown was state champ, but everyone was talking about the kid from Hopkins that challenged him. `Herb Miller`. And that really excited my new kids and they expected to win. And they did.

At that time kids could enter the state meet based on wins during the season, no time clock on them. So, as juniors, all four of them dove in the meet. All of them scored points. We had a 3rd, 5th, 6th and 8th. We lost the state meet by 2 points. And the year before we came in second by only 8 points. As Bob Johnson said, "those diving points are making us great." Hmm, I did not know

a thing about diving, but was I learning fast. I did it myself. And, I had spotted an 8th grade kid that could walk all the way around the gym on his hands. His name was Craig Lincoln and of course he was NCAA champ his first year in college. A Hopkins diver.

One of the first days of the new season, a kid walked into the pool with his clothes on, a new kid, he asked for the diving coach. That would be me. He said "I just moved into Hopkins, my Dad is an exec. With General Mills. I am a diver from Michigan; I was 4th in the state meet." His name was Jimmy Fox. I got him a diving suit and a locker. Man, he was a diver, but he had a huge flaw, he got really scared of spinning dives. Saturday morning lessons where in order, just the two of us. His family was behind us 100% as they thought he was pushed too hard as a young diver. But with care, help, understanding and time, he started to spin. And what an influence he was on my young divers. One of them was Craig Lincoln, 9th grader. And of all things a kid named David Walonick was diving up a storm. They had a senior diver to learn from. We again came in second in the state as a team and that was three in a row. Jimmy came in second in the state meet, and got us valued points. He did not do "hard dives" in the state meet, and that hurt him, but he sure made our program strong. He left Hopkins a stronger person, and left diving behind.

I was left with three really good divers, 2 juniors and one sophomore. I actually could see us winning it all. And they did. We scored a 1, 2, 3 in diving and won the state meet by two points. It had never happened in history, a 1, 2, and 3. They all three came back for another try.

Edina got a transfer, a senior from Ohio, and a state champ of Ohio. He got everyone going crazy for him. And he might beat Hopkins. He was the sweetheart of the state meet and got huge gifts for points. He won the state meet, we placed 2, 3, and 4 by a tiny margin, but our team won the state meet by thirty points. Two state titles in a row.

At the time I had a young kid who was in the shadows. He was just like Jim Fox; he did not like hard dives. Everyone was glad when my big three graduated, and they thought that was the end of Hopkins state diving team. Hold on, Saturday mornings started, Greg Rettmer. Perfect dives, no splash and no one beat him in his senior year. One of the other schools had two great divers. But, when the state meet rolled around, they both missed very, very

hard twisting dives. And got low scores. Greg was getting 7 and 8's on his basic stuff and moved ahead with one dive to go. They both got 6's and Greg did a perfect front 1 and 1 ½ for 9's and won the state meet. Our team won by 50 points. Three in a row.

The district opened a new High School and half of our team went to Lindbergh High, and Elmer was the new coach. At that state meet we got second, and Elmer got third, we all loved it and our kids were more than happy.

Bob Johnson died of cancer; I went to Japan and came home to a new coach. I had to be more of a coach for the swim team. And I did part time diving. We did not have any talent in diving. But, did we have a swim team. The new coach walked into a power house. We won the state meet four years in a row. Without brag, when I was in Japan the Hopkins team came in 10th in the state. It was a shambles. We put it back together fast. After winning the state meet for the fourth time in a row, I walked away from coaching. That was 8 State Champs and 6 runner ups. I wanted to be a potter. Craig Lincoln was the best diver in the World, 4 times Big Ten champ, four times NCAA champ and he won the tryouts for the Olympics. The Munich Olympics was a disgrace, Russian judges, and the killing of the Jewish team the day Craig was to dive, and he got a Bronze medal. The Russian diver won the gold, but had never placed higher than 8th in International competition. It was what it was. One meet, loaded judges and many athletes have suffered thru that before. He was the finest diver in the World for six years. We still talk on the phone, and he comes to visit when in Minneapolis. He is 62 years old. He has a Ph.D. in psychology and works for a big firm in Los Angeles and he goes around the country teaching complex software. And soothes the anger over the new software.

Teaching six classes of general art a day with 14 year old kids was a total joy. Kids loved my class; they worked hard and filled my life with excitement about education. I was totally buying into the concept of learning only takes place when trust and learning come together. Kids flocked to my program and enjoyed every minute of it. Hundreds of kids, now adults, keep in touch with me on Face book. Dozens of them have built small studios at home and make pots.

I find used equipment and turn it over to former students who want to work in clay. They are always so grateful.

The seventies were all about JAPAN.

Our year in Japan is well documented. My first book "Pottery, a Life, a Lifetime" has the entire story. It is still available on Amazon. It was not digital, so only in its original cover.

I was desperate to learn how to be a total potter. And, without question, I did not need college study, I needed a great teacher. And, by determined effort, work and sweat and amazing luck, I found Mr. Uchida in Kyoto, Japan.

Colleen has full snooping rights in the studio. She can go through my old letters and writing, correspondence and the like. A year ago she found a large folder with all the materials on my quest to go to Japan. Her response to me was "How in the hell did you do all that?" She was amazed at all the work and effort that went into that project. But, that was another example of my determination to do it all myself. Take charge of the effort and then "do not turn back, finish it."

Our entire family gained a great deal from that trip. Sharlene did not want to go, she was totally frightened. But, in many ways, she gained the most. It was grow up time. She was a huge hit in Japan. Other women loved her as she was humble, quiet, kind and helpful. She was the classic Japanese woman.

Mark and Christine loved Japan. They made friends fast, and they got to ride the street car alone that went into downtown Kyoto. They became very confident and independent. Kyoto, Japan may be the safest place for children in the world. There has never been a thought in the minds of Japanese to abuse children. There is always a set of Grandma Eyes watching children. As our two kids had golden hair they were the love of the neighborhood.

Just by chance we met the director of the "International School." He invited the kids to attend school, at no cost. We jumped at that chance. 38 kids, from 25 countries in one place. But, they had to take one street car, and two buses to reach the school on the northwest corner of Kyoto. And, they went alone each day. And then home again at rush hour. He waived the fee as the kids

would only be at the school for 8 months. It was perfect. Then Sharlene was free every day to run around with local women. She even helped form a weaver's guild. Silk thread weaving on a small loom was amazing.

It must be noted that an adult male, potter, with a Master's degree in education was admired. The artist class in Japan has the highest social position. Just by arriving in Japan with my background in education, and an experienced potter, artist shot me into a very heady social position. Add to that, working with Mr. Uchida a World famous potter. I did have it made socially. It also gave Sharlene a position with other Japanese women. She had instant respect.

Of course we did not carry the stereotype of snotty, loud aggressive Americans. We were very humble, polite to everyone and we were a happy friendly family.

Almost all doors were opened for us.

The concept of living in a Mono Culture like Japan is very hard for Westerners to understand. You see, everyone in Japan has dark hair, black eyes, they dress the same at a certain age, women seem subservient, but in reality, have a great deal of power as they control all money for the family. It is said that the most powerful person in any Japanese home is the Grandmother.

In most cases after a marriage, the new wife moves into the grooms' family home and has to accept the culture of that family. One of the first mantras friends tell a new bride, "may your mother-in-law be kind."

World travel was a common discussion with Colleen. She loved the stories of our family travel, and that was a total of 90 countries. I was always pushing her to travel as soon as she could afford it. She was very frightened to leave Minnesota.

While in Junior college, she had an opportunity to go with a group to Italy. Study in Florence for two weeks. She had the money and the ticket. She cancelled at the last minute and did not go. I was angry, travel all arranged and totally safe and she gave it away. A year later the same opportunity presented itself to her and she took it and loved it. She was thrilled, happy,

drawing the “David”, seeing the sights of Italy. Now we could discuss travel and she understood. I encouraged her to buy a ticket and go alone to Europe, someplace, any place, just go. The ticket was a round trip to Portugal. And she did it.

The first day she called me from her room in Lisbon, crying her eyes out, she was frightened, a new language, “what do I do?” In a very loud voice I said “get out of that room, go down to the street and go in a café and get a big meal, stride down the street and get moving.” She called me back in about three hours...“I love it here.” A traveler was born.

After about a year working in my studio the subject of going back to school came up. I had been planning this discussion for weeks. Her family was well educated. It was planned that she completes college. She did not want to go back to school. So, it became my plan to show her the way.

I suggested she go back through the Community College route. A more gentle way to go to school as there would not be a great deal of pressure. I told her to take academic courses and stay away from art. She had more than enough time with art working with me. She did that, and only had a short drive to school and was able to get a part time job in a grocery store. She took English, history and her first art history course. She was having a good time. She is a fine writer and loved doing papers. She and her Mom worked together on her writing. Colleen was immediately an A+ student.

Colleen added a painting class the next semester. Her teacher was a lovely, intelligent woman that actually taught painting technique and style. Colleen loved the class and did some very good work; in fact her teacher bought one of her fine paintings. Things were moving forward in a good way.

As you can guess, I was plotting the next move. I was going to “make” her go back to the U of Minnesota, twin cities campus. She had to face the demons. She would go back as an art major with clay as her principal discipline. I had a plan all worked out, it was a doozy.

We sat down one day and had a heart to heart talk about education, the next steps and how `we` would do it. I did most of the plotting. I had to repeat to her

that she was well, healthy and full of energy. It was time to face the “big world” and get her degree done.

I told her that we would be using the “British technique”. She had no idea what I was talking about. I went on to explain in upper British culture the best way to get back at people you did not respect, or fakes that pretended to be `posh` were made fun of, but they did not know it. The group knew what was going on, the dorks had no idea. I went on to say “we are going to have so much fun playing games with them, and they will not have a clue.” And then I made sure that she knew not to let on that she was working with me. It had to appear that everything she knew about ceramics she was learning from them. She played dumb.

Like out of the blue, Colleen grew up, she was ready to confront them at their own game and she knew she was going to win.

We went on with the plan that she would use her cell phone to record lectures and comments. She was armed with technical questions that they never knew the answers to. She would call me during the day and get more questions.

So, the basic plan was she would make all the metaphor projects, only she would carry everything to extreme. If they called for `vagina` pots, oh would they be vaginas. They would make a Marine blush.

It must be noted that by planning to make all the projects, it would be amazingly helpful to Colleen to learn all the steps of hand building, construction and the creativity it would take to get the job done, plus she would learn to fire all the kilns at the University. She had that marvelous studio and all the clay and equipment, plus glaze and firing. It also meant she could work in any `scale` from huge to miniatures. And best of all, we were a team.

And one more element to the story is that Colleen had been to our summer camp at the farm. She understood salt firing, wood firing and raku and stoneware kilns.

Off she went to the U. Her first class was basic ceramics. Her instructor had gotten his MFA degree and did naked dancing while rubbing clay on his body, or some such thing. It was all talk and metaphor. There was no instruction at all.

Her first assignment was the basic, make a self portrait with clay. I said to Colleen, "did he talk about clay body, armatures or technique?" Not a word, just make it. I said to her, there will be at least three young women that will make dancers. And that is what happened. The arms fell off; they crashed in the kiln bisque firing. It was like 7th graders making a giraffe.

Colleen came back to the studio and we laughed til we fell over. And then I said, "grab a huge chunk of clay, get that big rolling pin and roll the clay out on the deck."

She made a four foot tube, added an "Easter Island" head on it, and stuffed with newspaper. Tiny stub arms came out the side. She gave it an expression. She said, "This is the Father". Then she made the Mother and 7 kids. And, in a fit of laughter I said "chea-pets" we can then add grass seed and plants."

She got busy and finished the pieces. Of course they were well constructed, solid and made with high temp clay with grog and sand. She was going to "salt fire" them, using the so called broken kiln that did not work at the UofM.

She loaded the dry family into her car and drove them to the U, stacked them in her work space and the next day at class everyone was stunned by the scale of her project. And, it was done, ready to fire.

She told the teacher that she wanted to salt fire them. He said the kiln did not work and was broken. But, she went ahead, without any instruction or professional oversight, and loaded the kiln with her pots and the pots of another student who had talent.

I went over the starting technique, went over the cone to use, cone 11, and how much salt to add. She fired the piss out of that kiln. Hit cone 11 and added pounds of salt. It spewed salt fumes all over the campus. The next day she opened the kiln with many watching and there was a perfect, 100%, dripping

salt and bright orange and gray color. It was a perfect firing. Her teacher said that “Colleen had fixed the salt kiln.” Colleen and I had just pulled off the perfect “British Technique” project.



Colleen's chia pet family. Note the dog on the left

The teacher put the pots out in the lobby on boxes; Colleen then put grass in all the sockets that she had planned in the sculpture, a large plant went into the open cavity of the head. The plant life was the living dendrites and `brain` elements of the sculpture. She then wrote a paper to go along with the project. Colleen and her Mom had so much fun writing the `tounge in cheek` paper together.

Colleen became the darling of the department overnight. She was so happy that she bubbled over with confidence, trust and love. She was now in charge of her own life and a wonderful artist, craftswoman.

She threw pots in an empty throwing studio, she hand built bowls and huge vases. That studio was hers. And, best of all, she was the helper of all the better clay students. They came to her for throwing instruction, how to glaze and fire and what clay to use. When they asked her “how did you learn all this”, she just went dumb. “I picked it up, here and there.”



Colleen and her 70 lb pot.

One day in our studio Colleen said “you should meet Paul Linden; he is the director of technology for the Art Department. “He is a fine fellow, always ready to help me and explain the facility to me. He sure has been a great help to me.”

We went out to lunch with Paul one day when I visited the U. That is how Colleen found out that Paul was a Hopkins grad and one of my super students, and of course a great friend of mine. He is a marvelous wood carver, artist designer and even studied carving in Sweden. He had been Colleen’s ‘guardian angel’ in the art department. She just smiled and shook her head.

Side bar story. When Colleen went to Dunwoody Institute to do a program in Graphic Art, ‘computer’ art, it seemed the Director of that program was also a Hopkins pottery grad. He took special interest in her and she had the most complete study with technical and intellectual guidance for her entire stay. She would just shake her head and smile.

As Colleen joined my studio, I was in the process of finishing a huge and important study in Chinese Hare's fur glaze. (That project is well documented a great deal, and much written about it so I will leave out the fine details.)

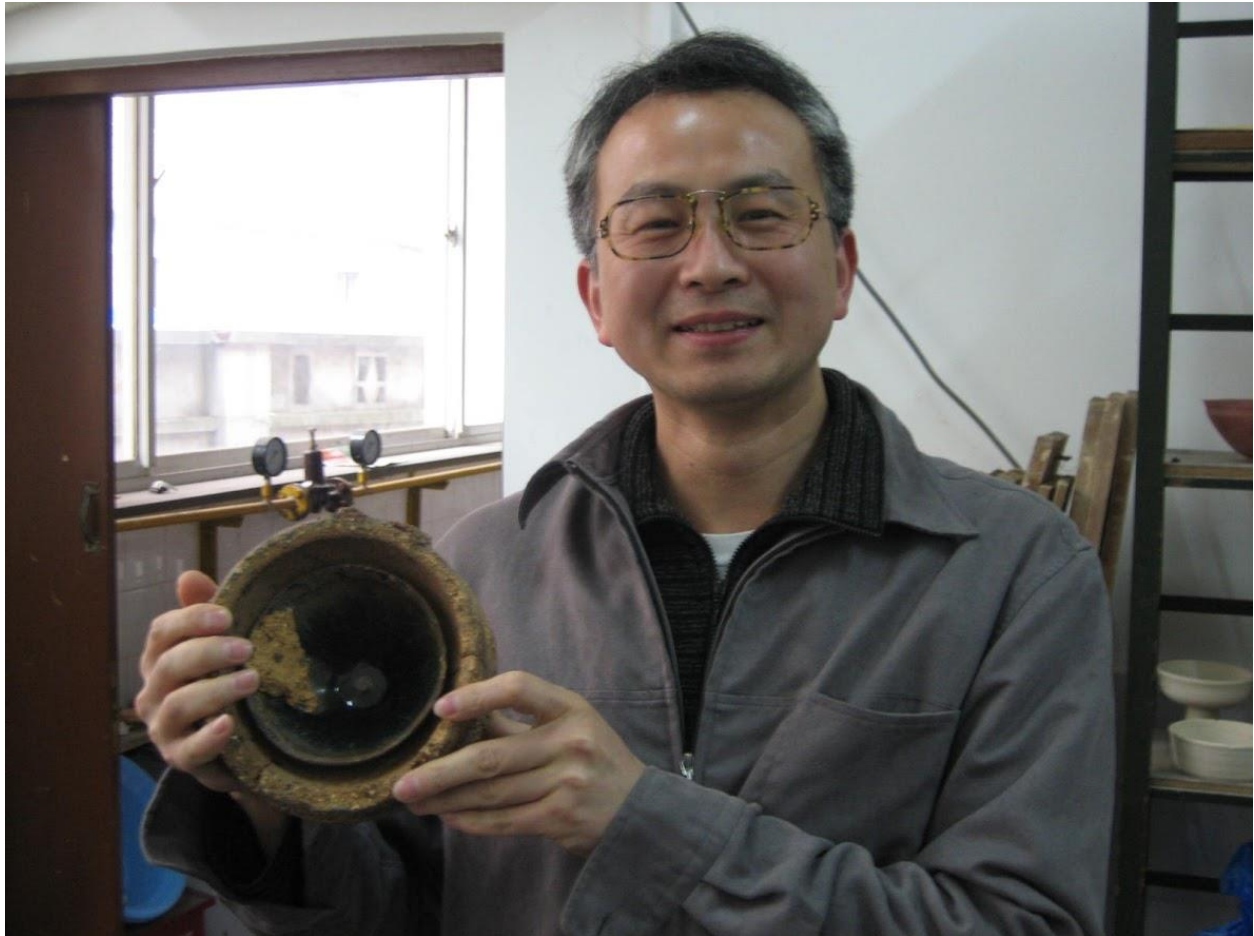
Joe Koons a California chemist and glaze expert had sat down with me at a Clay Conference. He lamented that he had the secret recipe for the famous and amazing "Hare's Fur" glaze from ancient Sung Dynasty. He had worked on the chemistry for 50 years and could not find a potter or professor to fire the glaze. It all turned to junk. He then asked me "do you think you might help me, and fire some pots with my glaze on them?" "Yes I would try."

A bit later I told him I thought I knew the reason no one has ever been able to duplicate the glaze and it was simple. I said to him "KILN SHELVES".

I bargained with him to supply me clay and glazes. I would make 500 pieces and only study his glaze for six months. Joe worked for the largest vendor of clay and glaze in America. He was the technical director of that company. They shipped me clay by the ton.

I commenced with the project. Changed the clay body by adding a huge amount of iron and manganese. I also added some fine grog to add strength as I had decided to fire my kiln to cone 11-12.

Why did I say 'KILN SHELVES'? The common shelf used in high fire kilns was not invented until the late 18th Century. The Chinese Sung potters did not use them at all. They fired their pots in huge, many chambered wood fired kilns that were a series of chambers running up a hill. They fired thousands of pots in those kilns, and it took days to fire. It was obvious that they used a technique of firing each pot in its own clay box, sealed inside. They were called saggers. The boxes of pots were stacked to the ceiling of each chamber. Many rows, almost leaning on each other filled the chamber. The pots were sealed in. The firing kiln was loaded with heat, ash, and a great deal of smoke, or carbon. And, without doubt, those kilns fired hot, like cone 12. The glazes were not affected by the reduction affect, and at cone 12 the glazes ran. The result was a brown and orange to black pot with the quality of a rabbit's fur.



A thousand year old hare's fur pot in its sagger, fired tight in the box. National academy of science of China. The gentleman is a Ceramics engineer that did his Ph.D. in "hare's fur." I had just given my `paper` about that glaze.

The first kiln full of Joe pots was a total success and perfect examples of the Chinese clay and glazed historic pots. Joe cried on the phone when we called him in California, and people at his work place thought someone had died. They rushed to him while I was on the phone trying to explain to him how I did it. Then I put Sharlene on the phone to let him know I was not doing a joke.

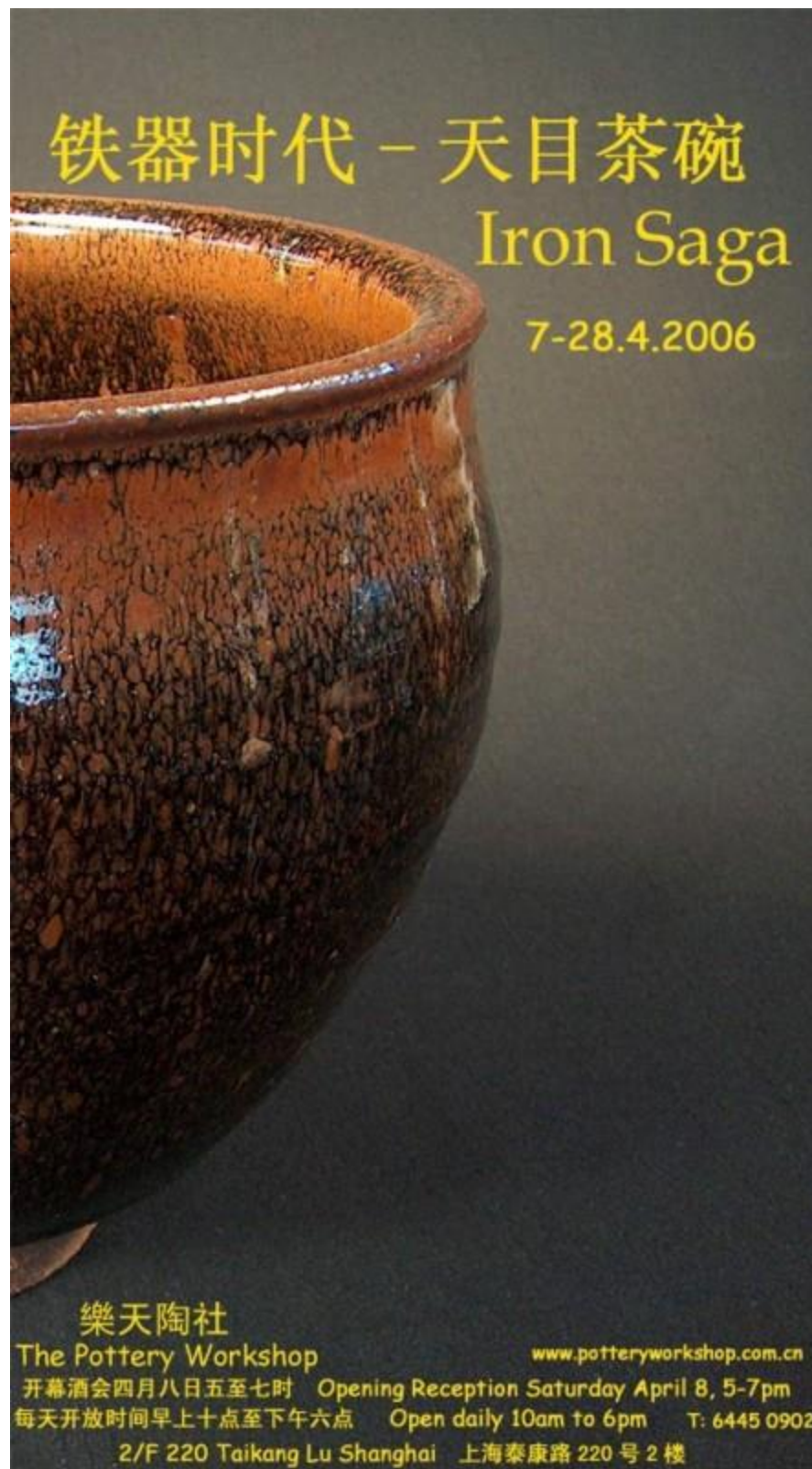
The secret was the atmosphere the pots were fired in. I had made my kiln the same atmosphere that the Chinese pots were fired. It was oxidized and adding oxygen to my kiln made the interior of my kiln the same as inside a sagger. I fired my kiln to cone 12 and that is really hot.

I did make all 500 pieces, and all fired just fine using my new technique. The pots were shipped to California and we opened a new ceramics museum with a show of “Ancient Hare’s Fur Pots”.

Joe had a contact in China at Hong Kong University and he showed the pots around. Then a large gallery in Shanghai asked if they could show the pots.



Mel, outside the gallery, opening night



The poster for my show in Shanghai. All over downtown.
And the poster was 30x40 inches

We did that, and I attended the opening. The director of the “National Museum of China” attended the opening night and loved the work. He did tell me that I had solved the problem and would I “give a paper to the ‘National Academy of Science’ that was in Shanghai?” He left that night with a very special pot with blue crystals that I gave him. He put it in the pocket of his dress jacket. It is rumored that the pot was on his desk in the Museum at all times.

The director of `ceramics` for the National Museum showed up during the opening and we talked in the back room for over an hour after the show closed for the evening. He actually was stunned that I could make “hare’s fur”. He said, “where did you come from, where is Minnesota, and how did you know?????” And I explained Joe’s work with the chemistry, and I had seen hill kilns in Japan and had a working knowledge of them. I knew what a sagger was and how it functioned. I explained to him that the Ming Dynasty blue green celadons were fired in a wood burning kiln and they came from that kiln like jewels. No carbon, no snot or burns, just pure aqua glazes. They were fired in saggars. The kiln only provided heat. And a great deal of heat.



The sought after sapphire blue crystals.

Six of my pots are now at the Museum at the site of those early kilns. I am very proud of that. This project really had no interest for potters and teachers

in America. I even had people tell me my project with Joe was foolish. But, without question, the 7 ceramic engineers with Ph. D. 's in historic pottery and did their theses on the "mystery of Hare's Fur glazes" thought that we nailed it on the wall.

I will take their opinions as one of the finest compliments in my life.

And as a side story, I have seen big flower pots at both Home Depot and Menard's store that had Hare's Fur glazes. Made in China. It did not take those engineers long to make changes and produce that famous glaze. I gave them the total story and the recipes and the firing techniques I used. Great praise was given to Joe, and the timing was perfect. Joe died a few years after we solved the problem. He had worked for 50 years to make that glaze, and I was able to give him one of his greatest gifts before he died.



saggers

I also tell people that we gave back to the Chinese a glaze that was part of their history. It had no monetary value for Joe or Mel. We both invested over a thousand dollars each and it would be hard to value what a six month study would take away from my own production. It all mattered not. We did what we started out doing. It was all for the love of making fine craft and the history of thousands of potters the world over that made a difference.

Just think of the word "China Clay", the birth of porcelain. Pure white clay that was the most sought after and expensive item in world history. The ships of Europe came home with a hold full of clay, and it cost more than all the silk and tea the ship also carried. It is noted that all ships with sails had to have the hold/bottom of the ship filled with rocks to balance the ship so it would not tip over in high wind. When the ships got to China, the rocks were dumped and the hold filled with white clay. That was pure money.

White clay called Kaolin was found at Meissen, in Germany, 1707 and it changed the World again. That became a famous porcelain pottery center in Germany, the secret then went to Limoges and that became the famous French porcelain pottery.

Then the British got involved. And lo and behold, the entire county of Cornwall, UK was kaolin and that clay was shipped to the colonies so the poor cousins could make porcelain. Then it was discovered that the entire state of Georgia was sitting on one of the largest Kaolin deposit in the world.

It makes me smile to see Chinese Hare's Fur glazed pots sitting in Home Depot. Sent from China, and my life has been so blessed.

Colleen had gotten her own space at the U of M ceramics dept. She had her wheel set up and could hand build and make new ideas come to light. As part of her British Technique she made a huge sign that went across the back wall of her space that read "Art movements come and go, but great craft lives forever."

We had started to fire her senior show work at the farm. She wanted bright Chinese red, Temmoku and Shino, with my black accents. She did not want to trust the kilns at the U. And of course the glazes were not to her liking. She was a spoiled child with very concerned hope for a great senior show. And that show was going to be the end of the British Technique. None of them would even understand her last "metaphor".

She decided to bring her Dad in for the final installation of the show. Butch, our dear friend at the farm had a saw mill. She asked him to make 14 foot rough boards that were 16 inches wide. She was going to hang the show from the ceiling with steel cables. They would support a series of boards with her pots on them.

Bill Baillie is a "master craftsman, cabinet maker and basically smart guy". He designed the cables and helped Colleen install the set up.

Colleen and her Mom built the final metaphor. It was about 30 feet of handmade clay chain bisque fired to a soft orange/red. The metaphor was

that her show was chained to destroy fine craft and well thrown pots. The clay chain was woven through the wooden shelves.

The main shelf had a series of very large canister pots where the front had been shaved off to expose the interior of the pot. We made a very nice guillotine with wire to draw through the side of the pot to make a perfect opening. Inside she had miniature pots, sets of plates, mugs and serving pieces. It represented her ability to make any size pot in perfect form as a set. In another pot she had all of our handmade tools for Japanese technical throwing. She even had a set of handmade cloth items and crochet from her Grandmother showing in one pot. She also had tiny lites in those pots, I think battery powered. She of course had dozens of great thrown and handmade pots on the other shelves.

Sharlene and I arrived at her senior show. I was very nervous and Sharlene had warned me not to “mouth off or be angry at what was being shown.” That was very hard for me to do.

We entered the show to a big painting, bad stretcher painted yellow. In black paint it said “EAT SHIT”. I told the young man that I “hope your Grandmother loves your metaphor.’ He scowled at me. Next was a young woman dressed with low cut dress, breasts hanging out and tattoos and piercing. Her paintings were rather well done...Except that each painting was a self portrait and each figure had blood in bright red coming down her legs. It was a metaphor for her problem of bad and painful Menstrual Periods. The graphics said, “It takes 5 tampons to stop my blood flow.” I told her that my Mother did not allow me talking in public about ladies issues. I then said my “Mother was right”. Sneer.

We walked around the corner and there was Colleen. She was in lovely long dress, lovely heels, her make-up was perfect and her hair had been done for her.

She was a vision of beauty and class. As people went past her show, they would stop and stare. What a contrast. She could have been at the Minneapolis Symphony ball and made a hit. And of course there was that display of fantastic work, knock out glazes and pots. She was the picture of a classy fine Woman Artist and accomplished “Craftswoman”. And not a soul

asked about the chains. But best of all, the final Metaphor, her clay teacher thought that he had created this lovely artist. I just smiled.

In common what Colleen was going through, I also started a series of pot using Japanese Shino glaze. It was the first known pure white glaze in Japanese ceramic history. It is a beloved glaze, and often used for the Tea Ware, for the Tea Ceremony.

I had been lucky enough to have been invited to the Mino area of Japan, and was able to visit with some outstanding potters that used Shino in its historic method. It is known as a “Maverick” glaze. It does not always do what you want it to do. Of course that fit in well with tea bowl makers. It was a mystery glaze.

I had some friends that had been finding black streaks in their shino. It seemed that salts had caused the streaks. Malcolm Davis a great potter had been getting very large spots of black on his orange shino. Along with some others I was painting hot soda ash on my pots with nice results.

At that time I was working on development of my own theory of “Tea Bowls”.

Mr. Uchida had given me a great deal of information about making the actual, real Japanese Chawan T bowl. He had me design my own while in Japan. Of course it had to reflect his studio, so he was on hand to guide me.

However when confronted to make my own, shino, very high fired asymmetric tea bowls in Minnetonka, it was all new. Tea Bowls are very serious stuff. It is not a game or something to be played with. I dedicated months of only working with Shino. And, I wanted it jet black. Yes, an oxymoron, but it was my work, my thoughts and had to figure it out. I had a very maverick horse to ride.

I was also privy to the fact that the University of Minnesota shino recipe had been developed by a young woman, and she never received an ounce of credit. As happened to Colleen, Jenny Wirt left the U of M in great anger and went west and became an architect, graduating from Stanford. A very bright and talented woman.

I had called her, and her brother Tom Wirt was a fine potter and lived in Minnesota and she visited often. I asked her about the shino business and wondering if she had the original note card and the dated recipe. She said yes. I asked her to stop at my home as I was thinking of doing an article for Ceramics Monthly and wanted to put the record straight. The credit was all hers. She was thrilled. We had our meeting and I had the original note card. The big issue was the use of soda ash in the mostly feldspar recipe. The soda ash caused the black streaks.



Black shino teapot

Getting ready for the article “Black Shino” was led by Jenny Wirt and her soda ash breakthrough. The original note card was printed in the article, with the date very clear. That article was my best work for CM. I got a letter a few years ago indication that “Black Shino”, was one of the most read articles in CM history. Another proud moment and thank you Jenny Wirt for your great information.

I started to add a high percentage of soda ash (salt) to the recipe I had. Then came the idea of melting soda ash with water to a thick paste and painting the entire pot. (See photo, black shino) Dannon Rhudy, a dear friend had done this and sent the idea to me to study.

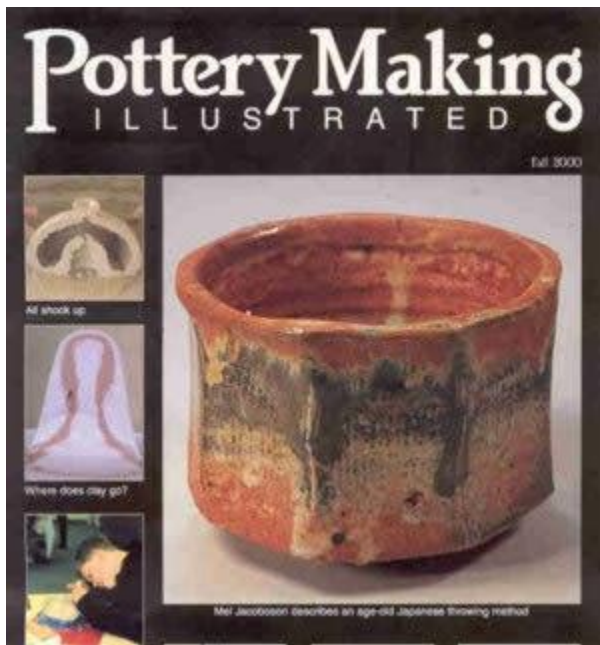
I made a couple hundred pots that became shino in various forms. The kiln was going night and day. It was really an exciting project.

The next step was Chawan Tea Bowls, with black shino.



Black shino chawan tea bowl

I had done a very nice series of Shino Bowls. They were almost classic Shino with orange and brown variation. One of those bowls was very nice and adorned the cover of Pottery Making Illustrated magazine.



The pmi cover

I sent that bowl to the American/Japanese Society in Washington D.C. as a gift. The director and I had become friends at the Clay Convention. At the same time, some of my Shino work was accepted in a Major Shino show in Baltimore during the Clay conference.

The director of the Society had invited a famous Japanese tea bowl critic that was visiting America to come and view the Chawan Collection at the Society. During the viewing she asked his opinion of the bowls. He turned to her and said "you only have one true Chawan Tea Bowl, and he picked up mine and showed her. He went on to say that the other 12 bowls could be used for soup.

The critic had no idea I was an American potter. Mr. Uchida had presented me with a special logo/stamp with a Japanese figure that meant "honorific". The word in Japanese was "Sama". So, I became "Melsama". No longer Melsan. It also granted me the right to be called "Sensei". A very great honor. I never used that stamp on my American pots; I thought it might seem arrogant. I did however use it exclusively on my Chawan bowls. That is how it showed up on that collection.

As long as I was in Baltimore, the director said, "Would you like to meet the man with the Sama stamp?" He said "of course".

She brought him to the Shino Show the next day. They walked up to me and he almost fainted, a "Gaijin", or foreigner. He bowed to me about six times, and I told him about Kyoto and Mr. Uchida. He seemed very pleased, and I know I was, I did not see this coming. I was as shocked as he was. As he left he said "You make wonderful tea bowls".

Bob White my dear friend and a very wise man, told me "compliments are often cheap, they mean almost nothing, but, when you get a compliment from a very knowledgeable person in your profession, then you listen and believe".

That day in Baltimore made his statement come true again.

The black tea bowl pictured above made its way to Taiwan to a World Exhibit of Chawan. I was invited to show. The director of the show said there was a sign near the black bowl that said "do not touch". He said hundreds of people picked up that bowl. It was sold the first day to a Tokyo collector. He` paid` full price.

Colleen and I grew tired of opening Shino firings. So, we put it on the shelf for a rest.



For our last two Christmas sales we have broken it out again. Two years ago a fellow showed up early to the sale and bought all the shino pots I had made, two boxes full. I think he liked them. Colleen had a good deal of her well handled shino and it sold out too. And, again this year's show had good Colleen sales in shino.

The Eighties gave me great opportunities. DUBAI, THE FARM, PIGEON LAKE.

Kurt Wild called me and said he was getting a class started in primitive firing and it would be held at the Pigeon Lake Field Station near Lake Superior. For years the Wisconsin College system used Camps like this for onsite research in science, water studies and biology. He said he was ok'd to run an art class there.

The camp is beautiful. Pigeon Lake was a shallow lake and a great swamp came out the back. For biology field work professors brought up students to study in the wild.

The Industrial arts students at Stout (u.w.) built most of the buildings as a credit class. Every year a gang came up with their prof to build something. It was done really well. (The camp closed and the land and buildings were sold. No one used it any longer. Field work was a computer. And those mosquitoes

would bite; no sense in being outdoors, the snowflakes did not like it up there.)

A group of potters loved the place. We built all sorts of kilns. Build one, take it down after firing and then build another one. Bob Holman and I were excited to be a part of it. It was fun, but the learning was amazing. I learned so much about simple outdoor firing, and then raku, wood fired open pit firing and many others. We met Bob Anderson and Andy Kazukavich, two art teachers from Antigo, Wisconsin. They became lifelong friends. (Andy has had some health issues and is not doing pots any longer.)

We went every summer starting in 1979 but, the numbers in the camp started to shrink and powers at be said “we need more art students and you can do a two week program”.

At that time, Kurt was having a drinking problem and we were worried about him. He asked me to help run the art camp, and I gladly did that. The director ask me to “take over and get some new classes started or they would have to close down. I got busy and started calling around to get some art Profs interested. They had no idea the program excised. I found a glass blower, a fellow from Stout that did metal forging, then a weaver and a fine woodworker. They joined and brought students. I tapped into Sharlene’s calligraphy group and 18 of them signed up for camp. We started with 19 students with Kurt, within three years I had made the camp 165 students. We were over booked.

Of course, it had to happen, College politics. “Why was some high school guy running a group at Pigeon Lake???” Well, because I was the only one that ever did anything to make it work. Some art Profs went so far as to complain to the Director and demanded that only faculty could work at Pigeon Lake. He called me and said his “hands were tied”.

I had helped Bob Holman with a huge problem with his new land and house in Wisconsin. His new wife ran away with a glass blower, he had beginnings of Parkinson’s disease and he needed money, fast. Sharlene received a small inheritance and we decided to save it in the bank in case any of our friends needed a loan/interest free. He knew about that money and asked if I would help him.

I went to the banker that wanted a balloon payment on Bob's land. Bob had only had it for two years, and could not sell the land to me. (Equity) So, I convinced the banker to take the money from me, put it into an escrow account, and I would supervise the money, and take twenty acres in payment. He bought the idea. And then he told me "Mel, you have to protect our investment on that land, and I know you will take care of things". He felt Bob was a bit sketchy and his wife running away did not help. He sent me off that day to Turtle Lake to an attorney that was familiar with Barron County land sales. The banker told him to include several easements. Road, Water and use of property on Bob's 60 acres. Very thoughtful of the banker. It saved our bacon later.

Bob Hobert and I did our own land survey. (Do everything yourself, have you heard that before?) We had an old 1920's book on surveys. We used a military compass, a 100 foot chain and red flags. We found the big steel monument with a magnet in the highway, started to measure 100 feet at a time with perfect compass headings. We marched off a 20 acre section and I took it to the Land Manager at Barron County. He thought it was a hoot. He had never seen a home-made survey. It was legal.

I had built a house, had power brought in, dug a well, and then a friend helped me put in a huge septic system. Ten times larger than we needed. It is a great house.

Can you spell "from the ground up?"

A couple of years later I was able to buy a huge piece of property next door. The house was 100 years old and I was the second buyer in history. The old guy died, the house was vacant, and his family did not want it. I bought it for back taxes. But I had a woman's dormitory and a place for calligraphers and artists plus I had built a great kiln and we had "Bob's" barn for a pottery.

I called the director of Pigeon Lake and resigned. I sent invitations for anyone that wanted to do camp at "Hay Creek", they would be welcome. I skimmed the best people from Pigeon, and they moved to Hay Creek. My camp. We bought beds, mattresses and got bedding at garage sales. We built a great kitchen in the barn and the first year we fed 43 people for two weeks. I did most of the cooking. I think that first year I charged the campers \$150. I told

them I did not want to profit from my friends, but I did want their LOYALTY. And I got it. We also helped Kurt toss booze from his life and he loved the farm camp with all his heart. We had both retired from teaching in 1991 and had gobs of time for building kilns and making the farm a place for dear friends to come and make pots.

Pigeon Lake was miss-managed as you might guess. People stopped going, and soon the entire program was flushed. Too bad, we started growing. The first camp was 2004. And Bob Anderson this year announced that he has been with Mel from Pigeon to now for 42 straight years.

The entire property that housed the camp at Pigeon Lake has been sold by the University System. No one wants to do “field work”; you can find that on u-tube or National Geographic. And those darn mosquitoes really bite. Snow Flakes.

Another interesting thing happened to me in 1981. I was working in my studio one summer day and there was a loud knock on my door. No one ever knocks, who could that be? I opened the door and here was a lovely lady, dark tan, yellow dress with tall heels. Of course she asked if I was Mel. She had talked to a home Ec. teacher at Hopkins that she had gone to college with. She was living in Dubai and wanted to start a pottery studio for ex pats, and she could not find anyone in the pottery business to know how to get the equipment, and what did she need? Her friend Gerry told her to drive to my house and it would take 15 minutes for him to organize whatever you need. And, there she was.

So, she thought I would not know anything about Dubai in 1981, but of course I knew it was one of the Truncial states with a new oil find. And, I told her I assumed her family was involved. Yup, her husband was a VP of Conoco and was a total Arabist and oil negotiator. And, she loved clay and sculpture and pots and wanted to start a studio. So, I called Em at Continental clay and told him to hold on, a big order would be coming in about an hour.

We sat at my table with a big piece of paper and started to write what she needed. I said this is going to be a huge bill, over 15K, and she just smiled. She then said she did not have U.S. money with her, and would have to get a bank draft. I said I would put it on my credit and I would take her necklace as

hostage. And, for the first time (but not the last) she called me an ASS. The piece was pure gold, heavy and butter colored. She said no one ever knew it was pure gold. Even the Airport security never bothers her about it. It looks like fake. She was very impressed, and we got the list done...potters wheels, kilns, tools, glaze materials. It was a load.

I then called Em back, and then asked Anne, what dock was used by Conoco in Houston...again...WHAT? I said this has to go to Houston/Dubai. What dock? She said 21, 22, and 23. I told Em, get Yellow Trucking, this order will be a large container and it goes to dock 21, Conoco, Houston. Have Brent make the wheels electrics British system oh, and include 200lbs of silica sand. SAND, TO THE DESERT?
YUP.

I told Anne Rooney that the container would be in her yard when she got home...and it was. A studio in a Box. She said she had never met anyone that could do what I just did. Thank you. And I told her, remember, I lived in Japan and have traveled, it means something. I flew over Dubai in a TWA airplane in 1972 when Dubai was a primitive Arab country.

Anne called me from Dubai a month later. She said "there is something very important that should have arrived with the container...YOU." And she had a round trip first class ticket, a gift from Gulf Air for me to come to Dubai to teach and set up the studio. Wow. But I had to tell her it would be hell getting me away from Hopkins Schools, I had just had the first ever sabbatical for a teacher. And I went to Japan. "Not to worry she said, I will take care of that." And she did. Three days later `Henry Kissinger` called from D.C. asking our Superintendent to release me from my teaching for some weeks soon. The State Dept would guarantee any expenses the school may incur. The substitute teacher's salary would be paid in full.

Sophie, the snoop in charge of the main office called me on the inner school phone and screamed...`Henry Kissinger` just called and is talking to Dr. Bruning, what is going on? I said in a calm voice, "oh, good, I was hoping he would call."

I ran down to the central office. The old man was sweating. "Where are you going?"

There is trouble in Iran, hostages; you cannot go to that part of the world, its nuts." I said "it will be fine, all taken care of." He just threw up his hands and said "I am sure glad I don't have to go." Sophie thought I was a spy.

I had a dear potter friend that had her degree in education and she agreed to take over my teaching while I was gone. The kids loved her and all went great.

But, there is a down side to all of this. When you are popular as a teacher, get things done and have amazing success outside of teaching the long knives come out on the faculty. In fact, one of the assistant principals told me "to slow down on all the publicity and success, it makes other teachers look bad". Yup, be mediocre and hide in the lounge. Don't make waves. I always had to pay a price for success while being a public school teacher. In fact it was one of the main reasons I was planning to leave teaching at 55 years of age. There was a program called "rule of 90", if your age and teaching years add up to 90 you can retire at full pay. I took advantage of that for sure.

I also heard a lecture by a famous actuarial expert that claimed if one taught public school til age 65 you had 9 months to live. Old teachers were looked at as being "out of the main stream." Your self-worth takes a huge hit. As of this writing I have been away from teaching for 35 years. Still get paid. (More of this to follow.)

Back to Anne Rooney and Dubai. The plane tickets arrived, sub was in place and Sharlene was very nervous about me going. She had to be calmed. My Dad was losing ground with heart trouble. But, the tickets and all expenses were in my hand. I was going. An opportunity of a lifetime. And I thought Japan would be it, a one shot deal, nope, it was just getting started. As to Sharlene, she realized I was going to be paid to do this. Oil money. Hmm, "have a good time. See Yah."

So, off I went, 16 weeks of an adventure few have in a lifetime. In fact, flying over the Sahara desert in the dark of night started the trip. Not a light below, not a town or even a fire, jet black night. Then the plane flew over the Persian Gulf, and the oil stacks on fire, burning off the gases lit up the water. It was spectacular. Then thru the customs, getting all my credentials in place was daunting, even though I was working for the oil company. If things are not perfect, they put you on the next flight out; it may be to India, not their

problem. (things are far more customer friendly now, but then, holy hell.) And heaven help you if you had a “Playboy” magazine.

Dubai is a Monarchy, totally. The Sheik decides innocence or guilt. If you commit a crime, and it is obvious, the penalty is death. Stealing yes cut off your hand. If you are a foreign worker who knows? But I was clearly warned from the first day; do not look at any woman in black. Of course there are thousands of them. Never speak to them, eyes front. Always be polite, do not show anger, especially at local people. It is their country, not yours.

One of the first days in Dubai, Pat Rooney, Anne’s husband came to the studio and got me. “Mel, you have to witness this.” A Pakistani house boy was having an affair with an Indian woman maid. They would sneak into a dumpster that was made into a love nest. He was a bit greedy and went into the nest with another woman, and his girl friend spotted him. She called the police; the couple were hauled from the dumpster and arrested. The next day they were stoned to death, yes, stoned. Pat wanted me to see it, it was public. The couple was pinned to the desert outside of Dubai; a Michigan Loader full of rock drove up to them and dumped the load on top of them. A man put a sign on the pile, “public fornication is punishable With death”. Everyone went home. I got a good sample and idea how to act as a visitor to Dubai.

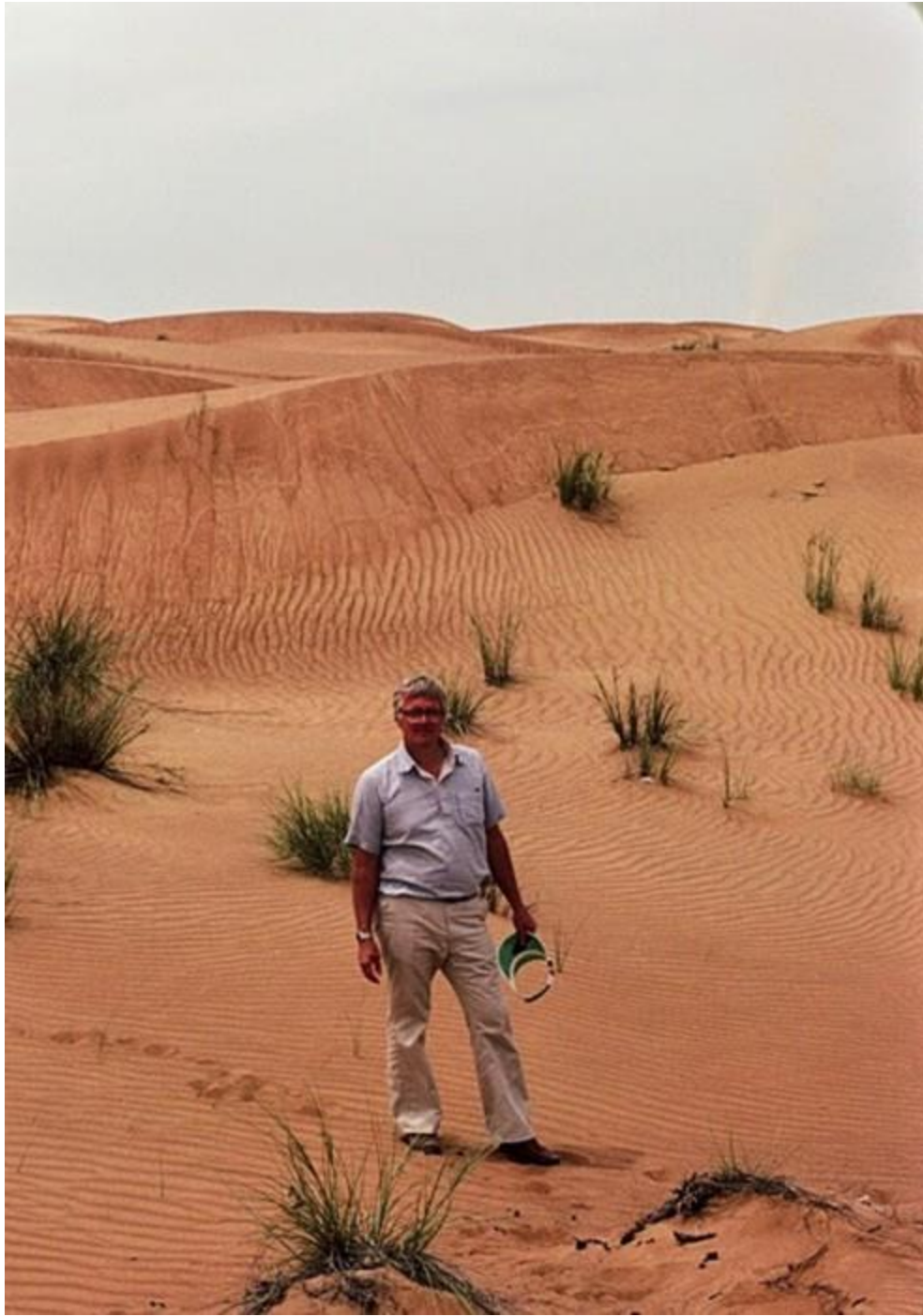
Now, the bright side. It is a country that does not have crime. People walk the streets at night, go anywhere, and have money and great families. You are always safe and I could not have been treated with more grace anyplace on the Earth.

Sheik Rashid was called a benevolent dictator. Oil money was shared with every native Dubaian. If you follow simple rules of behavior, act with honesty you are treated with grace. It was very easy for me to naturally live in Dubai, in many ways it was no different than living in Japan. The concept of “three strikes and you’re out” will never be a part of their culture. It is assumed that humans know the difference of “right from wrong”. It is rather simple.

I was always shocked when back in Hopkins; maybe in the teacher’s lounge someone would say “how was it over in the primitive area of the World?” I never answered. Very few teachers ever asked me about my time in Dubai. It

was really over their heads, they did not know what to ask. (As of this writing, I have been to 90 countries in the world, including mainland China, I have a great deal of experience, but few ask me any questions, ever.) Here follows a perfect lounge story.

I was in the teacher's lounge, maybe 1975 and a group of English teachers were yacking about their trip to Chicago to see the "King Tut" exhibit. "How about you art teachers, are you going to see the show and get some culture" one said. I just went hmm. They got back on the Monday and gushed. Another one said, "Mel, will you go to Chicago?". I said, "No, I saw that show in Cairo, a minor exhibit." A voice from behind me said. "Learn not to fuck with Mel."



The “Empty Quarter” of the Sahara

When I arrived in Dubai I was given a house, an entire house on the shore of the Persian Gulf. Abdul was my man servant, house boy and cook. He was a very kind man, but totally subservient. He only called me “sir” made sure my clothes were washed and ironed, my shoes polished and my every need was met. I felt I was the lord of Downton Abbey on TV



After a few days, I had a heart to heart talk with him. I said “I am a very capable man and can tend to all my needs. You need not fuss over me, but I understand your role, and you must fulfill that role. From now on I will consider you the “Manager of this house and I will respect that. Do you understand?” He said “thank you sir, I respect you.” We got along just great, but for sure, he took care of everything, including clean undies every morning, laid out for me and coffee waiting for me, and a wonderful full breakfast on the porch looking over the water. I felt I was living in a 1930’s movie set. (And, to the reader, if you ever have the chance to have a servant, don’t turn it down, it is marvelous, but treat everyone with respect and realizes it is their job, work and livelihood.) I always treat hard working restaurant workers with great respect. The same for my garbage hauler.

(One of the first persons I made friends with in Dubai was Tom Dowling. He was the State Departments go to guy in Dubai. He was some sort of an Ambassador but I soon realized he was not typical. I soon realized he was probably CIA.

He would come over for breakfast often, He was known by Abdul. We chatted about home, his girl friend had jilted him as he spent 5 years in Iran and came to Dubai a few weeks before the hostages were grabbed. She told him to find a new girl to marry.

He was the one that did all the customs work for me to enter Dubai. So, at a breakfast about a week after I arrived he told me I would be working for him while in Dubai. I was puzzled. He went on to tell me that I would be going to an awful lot of social events while in Dubai. Almost every night was a party, and often Anne would be going and you will go with her. Her husband stays home. Too much after a day's work. He then said he thinks with my open personality, and being a potter, teacher I would be perfect for his work. Listen to all conversations, ask questions and then report to me in the morning. My god, I was going to be James Bond².

It was obvious that at these parties there would be guests from all over the Gulf. He really wanted me to talk to Lebanese, Syrians and the like. Nothing special, just conversations. He said I was perfect for the job. I did it, and he was pleased. I have no idea what I told him, just gossip. The superintendents secretary would have pee'd her pants if she knew.

I looked for Tom in the 90's but he just disappeared from view.

Another amazing story was based on a very funny conversation at a party. One of the part time, hangers on students, a crazy older woman from London. She was talking to Coronel Buckley, a former Brit Army officer that was head of the Dubai police. He was stuffy and funny and we all loved to talk to him. Sally asked him if he knew where we could get some native oxides. In his funny brit language he said. "ox hides, what do you want with ox hides?" No no, chemicals, oxides` cobalt, iron, copper. He had the answer right away, we had to go to the next Emirate and a German mining company was searching for Chemicals.

So, big adventure, drive to rural desert country, 50 miles south/west. We took off the next day, four of us. As we neared the site, I could see that a big tractor was off the road, there was a small crowd of people looking down on a body. There was a huge circle of blood. Being an old MP myself I parked, told the ladies not to look and I would see if I could be of help. When I walked

over there I saw an old Bedouin, sitting on a big rock. He had in his hands a Brit, Lee Enfield, smle, 303 rifle, all bound with copper wire. He had shot the `Boss Mining Engineer`. They had been blasting for copper samples and a landslide happened and killed 6 of his best breeding stock goats. The crew said he came storming into their area waving the rifle and yelling about his dead goats. In German fashion, the boss told him to go to hell, get away from him and see the Sheik as they had permission.

Not the thing to do. It was his desert, his flock and they did not belong there. So, he shot him in the chest. DEAD. No cell phones at the time so we raced back and called Buckley. Not his Emirate but he took care of it. The Sheik of Sharja gave the old guy new goats and the body was flown to Germany. I said there should have been a note on the body that said..."Don't screw with old Bedoo goat herders." I had the shakes for a half a day.

It was a firsthand experience where justice was taken by the local governemnt; the Sheik agreed and gave him new goats. Not his fault the foreigners were stupid and had no sense of decency. Case closed. How do you tell that story in the teacher's lounge? YOU DON'T.

Anne and I set up the studio in her garage; it was big and roomy and had a good power source. I hooked up the kilns, got 6 wheels going, and had two donated for us to use.

I was blessed with 16 totally lovely women. Some had some experience, most knew nothing. Six of the women were from Oklahoma and had some collections of New Mexico Santa Clara pottery. It was very expensive and lovely. Again, my luck held out. Kurt Wild had been working on Native American pueblo pottery. He adored the black ware of Maria Martinez from San El Defonso. He learned to duplicate her work and taught me.

I mentioned that I could make black ware and the ladies laughed, "Yah, sure you do." I said, "really, and I can make the jet black bears." There was total silence, so I did a demo, made a few of the bear shapes, went to the shore and found a shiny sea shell and burnished the bear to a very glossy shine. The piece was the size of my palm.

The women got clay and started making bear sculptures. It was really fun working in Dubai, hot breeze off the sea and we sat our work on a stone wall around the yard and the pots dried in no time.

Of course the natives in America used cow paddies, dried in the sun to burn for fuel. I asked Anne to see if we could find camel or goat manure. Of course she called the main office of the Sheik and inquired. "You want what?" Silly Americans, but sure enough a truck load of camel dung arrived. It was from the private race camels of the Sheik. Good Luck. It was totally dry and burned like a gas jet. I decided to make a party out of the firing.

I had to have some metal two quart cans to fire the bears. There was nothing, so I went to a dump out in the desert and found some Maxwell house coffee cans. Perfect.

So, I had bears, some cans to fire them. Totally dry dung and a fire started. We used washed up wood from the beach to go with the dung. I had a fire for sure, and it would be hot. The breeze off the sea was perfect.

We gathered a large group of folks, had food and drink and I loaded the bears into the cans with saw dust. Placed the cans in the center of the fire area, lit it and away it went. (The saw dust would create carbon as it fired and coat the bears with black carbon.) We had a big tadoo, and dumped the cooled bears onto the sand. Totally perfect, jet black, a shine like new shoes and screaming women. Some cried they were so happy. They had made black bears, and Mel was a hero. My pedestal was real. I was one lucky boy.

From that group of 16, one got her MFA degree in New Zealand and became a fine ceramics expert and teacher. One became the director of the Baltimore MD civic art center. And two of the ladies carried on their life making pots.

I went on to find local clay and made a series of pots that I fired with the primitive method. They seemed to be the same as pots I saw in the Dubai Museum. Anne had sent four of my better fired pieces to the Sheiks office. (Fired in dung from the Sheiks prize camels) She did not hear back from them.

The students had great fun using local clay and making bon-fires. We really had a great time, and most of them could throw well, and understood how to glaze.

I used the Hopkins high glaze that was a two part glaze made with volcanic ash and gertsley borate. We did not have the proper scales and measuring tools as there is not a hardware store in all of Dubai. I used volume as our guide. We found sea shells and used them to measure oxides. As with two pink sea shells of cobalt makes our blue glaze. Remember, I was leaving and they had to learn it all and Anne had to feel confident. We did that.

To end my stay in Dubai it was decided to have a huge party and with French Champagne and the works. Anne had in mind a big empty display area near us. She made invites and had a huge opening. I was very pleased as many wanted to buy pots of mine as memories. But, as often happens, something very strange happened. Just as folks were coming in a tall Arab man stepped into the room. Pure white and gold robes, Rolex watch, gold pen. He told Anne he was the special assistant to Sheik Rashid and the Sheik had decided to buy my entire show. He said he admired Mr. Jacobson for his work with native clay and his Great Grandfather was a potter and fired with dung. I was stunned again, it seemed to never end with wonderful things happening. We closed the show a week later and all the pots disappeared. Nothing else was ever heard of the pots. But, I had the money. Oil money was rather nice, and made Sharlene very happy. Anne paid me as expected and they paid in dollars stuffed in my luggage. I went home first class and no one inspected my luggage. I got home, totally pooped out. But one more amazing thing happened the week before my departure.

I received a call from Ann Larson, one of my first students at Hopkins. She was the director of the Peace Corps, living in the next country, the Sultanate of Oman and I was invited to spend three days with her. She had read about my teaching in Dubai so she pulled a lot of string. She said I would have to fly as there was no road and the Peace Corps would pay for the half hour flight. No one gets to go to Oman, it is a closed country. Even Pat Rooney had never been, and he was really stunned. "How do you know these people?" Lucky I guess. A courier came with my visa. It was a really nice quick trip and it delayed my departure from Dubai, but who cared, I was first class. On the trip home I thought to myself, well you just had a lifetime experience that will

never happen again. Little did I know that Sharlene and I would make two more trips to Dubai. And, at 88 years of age, sitting alone in my homemade house in Wisconsin, it brings tears to my eyes. I think the words are “I have been blessed.”

After resting and getting over that huge trip to Dubai I got started on building my house at the farm. My high school had closed, the district shifted the staff all over and I got assigned to teach 7th grade general art. My pottery teaching was done; they threw the biggest program in the district out the door. As I have said, being popular, doing a great job and having outside of teaching success meant I had to be punished.

I was devastated but it was a no win, the district could shift staff at any whim, and I was one of many that got moved with great disappointment. As one would guess, the ones that climbed the ladder were the most “nothing teachers” in the building and would do the bidding of the administration.

I had retired from coaching with four straight state championships. The program went into the toilet and Hopkins never finished higher than 15th in the state. I just smile, coaching matters. No, rephrase that, building a program matters. There are many parts to a program.

I had made two personal commitments to myself going into North Junior High. I was going to be a great teacher and not punish the staff or kids. I had to take care of business, but I had a plan forming how to get my program back.

The other thought was that I would take out my frustration with hard work. I was going to build a house at the farm all alone. They both came about.

The principal at North was an old pal that started at Hopkins the same year I did. He dropped all association with his buddy teachers. He was now an “officer”, we were enlisted men. He was arrogant, Italian and spoiled from birth in a mining town on the Iron Range. We all knew his parents as we stopped there going on fishing trips. He would wear cowboy boots and hat to school. He lectured the staff during meetings. The staff did not participate. That knowledge was a huge break for me. I was going to professionally drive him nuts.

The first day of school in the new building he started lecturing the staff and get all puffed up about what a great school he had. He did not introduce the 5 new staff members. I stood, walked to the front of the room, said to Frank, "Sit down Frank I want to introduce the new staff." He sat down, shocked, the staff was shocked.

I proceeded to tell the staff about others and then my history in coaching and art and pottery and that I was a "Japanese Master Potter". I said "I will do everything in my power to be a great fellow teacher." I sat down. Not a sound in the room. I just started my new program, from the ground up.

I was partnered with a great friend so, that was easy. I realized however that there was no phone system at North for the staff. If you needed a phone call or message you had to stand in the office with everyone listening in. It was awful. At the next meeting I stood and asked for department phones. He said there was no budget..Yah I bet.

So, I went home, called the phone company to have a private line put into the art room at North Junior High. I had to go through 3 supervisors, but they said an installer would be there tomorrow at 10 a.m. A phone guy knocked on my window and said he had to "ditch witch" a line from the street. I said "go ahead." Frank came running into my room..."what the hell is going on?" I told him I was buying a private phone; I would pay for it as it had nothing to do with school. I got the phone.

Starting at North was like the first day of a beginning teacher, as I knew no one, and the kids did not know me.

My plan was to have all the kids fill out a note card with name, age etc. I had them add "Father's work number." NO one was going run over me, especially a 12 year old.

About a week after the phone was put in, a class of all boys came into my class screaming over something. A small Jewish boy was screaming at the top of his lungs. I walked over and told him to get in his seat. He said "fuck you."

I went to my card file, saw Judge Goldman, and the number. I simply called. Asked for the Judge, I had an emergency call from his son's school. He was in

court. "git him." He came on the line. "Sorry to bother you Judge, but your son just told me "fuck you". I said I thought you should know. "He what, fuck you to a teacher????"

Yes Sir. Put him on the line." The kid turned pure white, every kid in class was dead silent and you could hear the Judge giving him holy hell over the phone. Yes dad was heard about ten times. He handed the phone to me. The Judge said "I know who you are, the potter and coach, it takes balls to get me out of court, but man do I ever respect you." NOT ONE 7TH GRADER EVER CHALLENGED ME AGAIN. I WAS LIKE A MEAN DOG, DON'T MESS WITH HIM. HE WILL CALL YOUR DAD AT WORK. THE TOM TOMS GOT THE WORD OUT.

(Do you realize that teachers in the system can no longer call parents? Hmmmm, why did I leave education at 55? Can you imagine if you let the kid get home, tell his story about the abusive teacher makes your explanation impossible. I went to the source, and won all those fights.

Learn from the ground up, I was not stupid. I built an amazing 7th grade art program with those kids. They loved art class, and I even had Sharlene come in and teach calligraphy to my all girl classes. They loved it.

At the next faculty meeting I stood again and told the faculty that there was a private phone line in my office. If female staff had to call a gynecologist over a yeast infection the office staff would not listen in. The phone is yours anytime you need it. It is a gift from me. You could have heard a pin drop. I sat down but within minutes 26 female staff loved me. Easy, be graceful.

At the same time the high school was in big trouble with pep fests and homecoming. The queen was hit in the head with a rotten musk melon. Of course she was the Queen picked by the Principal, not the kids. All of the programs I had started with great success where in the toilet. At a faculty meeting to discuss the disruption and student violence a teacher said from the back of the room "where is Mel?". Silence. That was the day the admins realized they gave away the bank, of peace and harmony. Now they had to deal with it. Bigga Mistakaaa.

The next fall I was assigned two classes of ceramics at the high school. It was just across the parking lot. I was back. The high school principal showed up

and North and asked me to help get things straightened out. Can you spell “eat’n crow?”

Be graceful Mel, and be professional. “I would be pleased to give a hand.”

In two days, school would start. My plan was to have an opening day sort of Pep Fest before school, first hour. I called about 15 seniors that had been with me at Ike high. I told them to get the word that seniors would gather in the mall, and not enter the gym. They did a great job and had it all arranged. Our high school was now the “Royals”. I went to the Burger King offices and they gave me 400 paper crowns.

I had my old mike with the 50 foot cord installed in the gym. The seniors were out in the mall, all the rest of the kids and all the faculty was in the gym and there I was standing in the middle of the gym with the mike. I had a kid trumpet player give a very loud LOUD salute. The seniors marched in with everyone with a crown. In a demanding voice....I said “sophomores and juniors stand in honor of one of the finest senior classes in Hopkins history.” In they marched in perfect order. The biggest smiles I had ever seen. I then introduced the Principal, with a huge round of applause then I had the faculty stand and the entire student audience stood and applauded them. Grace and Dignity was back. I told my favorite seniors that they would be in charge of a fair election for Queen. No more fruit thrown at kids. The next year I was full time at the High School teaching six classes of 35=185 kids each day. The red phone in the art room was removed. Can you believe, no one would volunteer to pay for it.

The last decade of my teaching life was a total joy. I never had a problem.

In my second year full time at the new high school a former student that was now a rather important architect stopped by school with a great project. His firm had been commissioned to re/design the central court of our local Ridgedale shopping mall.

He was interested in a large fish sort of pond they had designed and wanted sculptures to fill it. There was a \$2000 budget and the professional designs submitted were just terrible. He wondered if the art /clay kids could make fish and sea animals to fill the pond. Wow, that would be a huge project and lots of publicity if it was done correctly.

He was excited to have the local art touch rather than some New York artist. I said we would have to be careful as the money would be an issue for the school, but there would be ways to make it happen. It would have to be approved by the board of education. He was willing to give it a try, and man, was I excited. But, it was going to be tricky.

I presented the idea to all six of my classes. We would have to take weeks off our throwing and personal projects, we would have to include everyone and work in teams or solo, or with parents. But for sure, all designs and construction had to be done by the kids...big kids.

The architect thought the best way to do it was have the kids make models and small images and designs. Then a dozen folks from his firm would come and judge the work and pick the direction, and then the project would begin. He said the decision one way or the other was for the kids to do it. We won the competition.

I went to the superintendent and sought his council. How can it be done with all the legal ramifications? He said, take the money and buy all you need to make the project, clay, glaze, and tools. All the equipment would belong to the art department. The board approved the project with resounding yes.

I made sure the kids decided among themselves that they work with friends in teams across class lines, or with kids in the building not in art. Parents could help and those that wanted their own idea just did it. Alone.

We ordered all new red lower temp clay. Quarts of very colorful commercial glaze like pure red, green etc. We got a new clay roller, other tools and the firm paid the bills.



In no time at all we had dozens of varying sized fish and sea animals and turtles and even things for the bottom of the pond.

The gang of architects came and we had the models all over the floor of the gym alone with about a hundred parents. They put red markers on their favorites, gave suggestions and said they loved it all and get started. I brought a big lawn chair to school to sit in to watch and away they went. It was all theirs. And in typical fashion the faculty wanted to know what the hell is going on? Sorry, you would not understand so leave us alone. They did.

It was amazing what was appearing every day. A group of boys made four foot fish, a school of them. Some were just heads out the water. Clams and sea animals were being made by the dozen. Construction went on for weeks. Some pieces cracked and had to start again with learned knowledge. I started to fire the pieces and could fill the kiln with two pieces. We fired fish every day. They seemed to never tire. New ideas came as old ideas faded.

We finally had a great deal done. And judgment day came. The entire firm came back and picked the pieces they wanted. Kids who did not have their work selected got to keep the projects they made. (Many of the kids did not want their pieces picked, wanted to keep them.)

I worked with the wonderful wood shop teacher to make cradles of Plexiglas for the fish. The work then went to the shopping mall and we actually silicone glued the cradles into the bottom, set the bottom fish in place with glue and they filled the pond with water. It was gorgeous.

The next Sunday we had a grand opening at the Mall, TV filmed it all and the Trib sent a reporter and photographer. The school band played, the mall was filled with families and the community. All the kids were there dressed up. I chose not to speak so one of the great young men in the project was MC and did a great job.

Several of the kids were interviewed as I refused to be filmed. It was not my project, like my swim teams, the medals went around their neck, not mine. I was so proud of them all. They grabbed that project and would not let go.

Sadly about five years later the mall was sold and the new owners removed the pond and fish and built a Starbucks in the space. We sent out a message for kids to pick up their projects but many went in the dumpster at construction time. I took about ten of them home and sought the builders.



In 1984 Anne Rooney called and said we had to come back, and bring Sharlene, she can teach Calligraphy.

Anne had a huge idea going. Partner with a huge 5 star Hotel in Dubai and have art workshops for people all over the Gulf. It was going to happen and Mel had to lead the craft side. I did not have to have the state department call.

She had a marvelous famous couple from England come and teach painting and ballet. We would live in the hotel, use their wonderful facility and they would get great advertising and good will from the project. Win Win.

I called my favorite sub and she was excited to come and work with the kids. I had to get Sharlene organized as she thought people in Dubai would be really

fancy and she could not compete. Silly girl. But I finally won her over and our tickets arrived to fly PanAm first class, guest of the airlines tickets.

All went well, and we even had a couple of days in London on our way and got tickets to see "Cats".

We arrived and all was smooth, as I was at home, and knew the ropes. Many of my students had made great progress in the pottery and all was exciting.

Anne went through the program and it seemed like it was very doable. The Hotel workshop would start in two weeks and we had plenty of time to get things organized. We had to move the entire pottery to the hotel. We had a lovely glass walled half outdoor facility. Trucks came from the oil company and extra men moved everything. We even wired up one of our kilns in the room.

Sharlene had a lovely room with tables for calligraphy. And the teachers were scheduled to arrive soon. The painting teacher was coming from England and his wife would follow in a week. She was teaching a Master's class in London. She was a famous ballet dancer and teacher. Dancers from all over the Gulf were coming to be in her class.

Peter and Olive Norton was the most exciting couple we have ever met. It was total magic to be with them, and we were going to live in that hotel together for 5 weeks.

Peter regaled us with many stories while waiting in Dubai at my house, now `our` house.



Olive, Peter and Sharlene having breakfast in the Dubai house.

Peter was a retired British naval Commander. He had lost, had sunk four cruisers while fighting in ww2 in the Mediterranean. He was the adjutant to Lord Mountbatten who commanded the fleet. Peter's Mountbatten story first told was a doozy. The ship was sinking and Peter found a piece of plywood and he and Mountbatten hung on for dear life. The sea was full of oil. A small ship gathered them both up and Peter remembered all oil and lying on the deck of the ship. Lord Mountbatten had been rushed off. He returned about a half hour later all clean and with a brand new uniform on. He said to Peter, "Norton, Norton, appearances". That is when Peter realized that his boss had a dress uniform stashed on every ship floating. Royalty has its moments.

Olive went to Moscow in 1939 as a ballet dancer picked to dance with the Russian National Ballet. She is 18 years old. She was the dancer that was the swan in the "Swan Lake" ballet.

Then the German bombers came, all was in chaos. The dancers were told to "go home". She was all alone, stunning beauty, a figure made in heaven and ripe for rape or death.

She was on her own. She found peasants dresses, cut her red hair like a boy, bound her breasts and got an old pair of boots. She walked, took horse carts, trains and buses. She had some money and could buy food as she went. The war was raging around her. And of all things, she found her way to Dunkirk. There she was with thousands of British soldiers. She went to the shore and helped with the wounded. By then the small boats were coming into pick up the sick and wounded and she helped a sail boat sailor to put two wounded men in the boat. The sailor said "you are a girl, you cannot stay here" and he tied her to the flat bow of the sail boat. Hours later she was in England. Her Mom and Dad found her, brought her home and cleaned her up. A week later she showed up at the National Ballet Hall. The other dancers were stunned. And the famous dancer Dame Margo Fontain was livid. She just lost her number one standing. Olive was now number 1.

Peter Norton was engaged to Margo. He took one look at Olive and knew who he was going to marry. Dame Margo Fontain went to Hollywood, and, became world famous in movies.

Olive married Peter and after the war they became the naval attaché to Lebanon. They lived in North Africa for about ten years.

Peter was a graduate painter from the National Academy of Art in London. He loved boats and became a big hit with his paintings of famous ships. His commissions were overwhelming. Olive wanted to start a private school for kids 9-14, elite kids that would be going to Eaton.

The couple moved to Portsmouth on the southern coast of England, they bought a post office that was empty in a small town. She opened her school and Peter painted.

The children lived with them. It was only about 12 kids. Peter cooked and cared for the kids when out of class. Olive was always tutoring, or running a ballet class. It worked out great. Peter painted about four hours a day.

Peter always wanted to paint in France, the area of Van Gogh, Monet and such artists. They found a farm in that area and bought it. The farmer then worked for them, and share cropped and did not have to leave his home. Olive had an idea for a painting school for Peter to direct. They would do two week study with Peter and they lived at the farm. Olive cooked and cared for everyday things. Peter followed the painters into the field and then did final critiques every afternoon. They were overwhelmed by applicants. They did four sessions every summer.

Olive insisted the painters dress for dinner, and they served amazing food, all grown by the farmer. The farmer also made wine. There was a wonderful courtyard at the farm, and Olive had tables brought in, and white table clothes and napkins. It was formal, outdoors and lovely. Then the idea was born for the painters to put on a ballet at the end of class. So every evening after dinner she had them write the ballet and start to learn to dance. The ballet was performed the last night of class and townspeople came to watch and drink wine.

AND GUESS, YES GUESS WHO ENCOURAGED ME TO MAKE MY OWN ART CAMP AT MY FARM.???????? PETER AND OLIVE. AND THE FOUR OF US WERE SPENDING A MONTH TOGETHER IN DUBAI. WHAT AN AMAZING TREAT. We became lifelong friends, but that was a short life. Both Peter and Olive died

soon after our last trip to Portsmouth, England. We had gone into London by train and went to the opening night of "Swan Lake" at the National Ballet. Olive was dressed in black velvet with four inch heels and a cape with bright red lining. Men on the streets whistled at her. And she was near 80 at the time. Again, we were so blessed to have them in our life, even for the short time.

Our second trip to Dubai went very well. It was fun and the students came from many parts of the Gulf.

Of course, Sharlene was a huge hit. Everyone loved her and she taught great calligraphy. Her favorite student was a fine Indian architect. He wanted to learn to make hand done calligraphy a part of his original plans. He was thrilled he was actually able to do it...He adored Sharlene, and asked me one day if he could escort her to lunch in Dubai and show her first hand two very famous masques he had designed. He took her during prayers, and she was so well dressed in long sleeves and long dress with a pretty scarf men smiled at her. It was thrilling for her to be inside a lovely masque during the time when about 500 men were praying. Grace and beauty wins every time.

At the time I was very worried about Anne, she was showing signs of depression and then awake and run wild with ideas. Her father had died of Bi-Polar disease and I knew she was following down that path. It was rather frightening.

We left Dubai and stopped in Frankfurt and rented a car and drove to Florence then Venice. Money in our pocket and being in Sharlene's favorite cities on the Earth.

Back home and back to reality.

I had a house to build at the farm and was about halfway done.



The first cut to get the land ready for my house at the farm

I was determined to build a house all by myself. It was nagging at me, and now I had a great 20 acres of land, no restrictions in our community, and I had cash. And in small farming community, cash is king. The only suitable space for the house was in the front right corner of my land. A huge hill was the first part of my property, so I had to build into the hill.

The first order of business was to have Marv, who worked for cash, make a series of terraces down the hill to the building site. As the Chinese do in hill construction the terraces moved the water away and down the hill. In our case the water ran right into the Hay River. Everyone connected to the farm said it would not work. But, I showed them.

I made a transom and telescope and used a marked stick to set the height of the foundation. The hill was about 50% sandstone, and that made a great stone base to build on.

We had sort of traded about six mammoth oak trees to the sawmill and had him cut the timber into 5 quarter, 18 inch boards 14 feet long, then hundreds of 4x4 /8 foot studs . 4x4 oak studs are really strong. He also milled many 2x12 oak rafters. We also milled 4 inch x 12. They were all 14 feet long. The center beam that ran the length of the house was 4x18 inches, solid oak. All the wood was rough cut and I left it that way. At present it is hard as rock, lovely color, and warm and quiet. It is like living in a sound studio.

Had the power company run an underground line to my construction site I had simple power tools and a hammer. The oak was not so hard to nail and hammer as it was still a touch wet. But my left arm sure got strong.

I was blessed with another “character”. Lyle Weeks had a small cat, and helped me now and then for cash. He had a dirty mouth, f you all the time. He smoked Luckies nonstop. He had a nasty temper so I treated him well. He hated anyone that cheated or was not generous. He actually likes me, as I never pimped him. He was an expert builder, and mentioned time after time to do it his way. I would and it turned out well. He was a wiz electrician, a great plumber and made septic systems that he boot legged in for friends. His brother made septic tanks behind his barn.



The foundation of the house, the first step

My yard was all messed up black dirt and he was going to smooth it with his cat. He said to me. “Hey, watcha gonna do for septic?” I did not know. He said “I can do it for you.” Really. He had a back hoe and went home a got it. Drove it over to my yard. He dug a base for the drain field. Huge. He sent me to Menards and said to buy all the plastic pipe I could get in my trailer. I did that, a mass of pipe and the glue to put them together. He said his brother would bring the tank on Sunday Morning and put it in. So no one would see us doing it. No inspectors ever saw my system.

I put in 11 lateral pipes about 18 feet long, all connected with an air inlet going up. Most cabins had 2 laterals 12 feet long. He said “make the f er big, no problems for the rest of your life. I then installed all the heavy plastic pipe to

the sinks and toilet and shower. Ran the pipe downhill to the septic tank. Lyle said he wanted the turds to be going 30 miles an hour when they hit the back wall of the big tank. They sure did travel fast, and the drains just suck water down them. Never had one clog, or any part of that system fail. It is now going on 40 years old.

We covered the drain pipe with straw and then brought in two big truck loads of rock and then he filled with dirt and made the entire system invisible. The entire price for the entire system was \$800. The lumber yard, saw mill charged me \$600 for all the wood cut up, they cut up two oak trees for themselves.

I found a Montgomery Wards long armed saw, and used it all the time. That was 40 bucks. My skill saw went through about ten blades. I even used a long string with a weight on the bottom to check straight up and down lines. Had an old level, but the wood was never perfect as it warped even during construction I just ignored it. It moved for about 6 years. The entire house was covered with oak boards. I often hit hard parts of a board and had to drill holes for the nails.

The framing went well, then the boards, then the inside framing. I ran a 200 amp box for electricity. Put in dozens of plugs in the walls a ceiling and outside. And then I installed all the fixtures for sinks etc.

I had to hire a well driller, and he went down about 180 feet into pure water that was filtered through sandstone over hundreds of years. A pure water well. Amazing.,



The house in about 1987, note wood stove stack, flat roof, all changed.

The house has been a long term construction site. It has morphed several times. I am still working on it as this has become my permanent home. The things that I threw out, 1 wood stove, messy and the stack was always falling over with huge snow storms. A wood stove is costly as insurance rates go up dramatically. I added a propane furnace, and now have a totally safe new furnace that vents out the side wall of the house. No smoke stack to fall over and gas me.

In so many ways I have an ideal home for one. It takes care of all my needs and I am close to neighbors, have great safety systems in place and a short 6 mile drive to a hardware store and groceries. My phone system and wifi come as a fiber optic 5G system. I buy and pay for my propane each fall, so I own full tanks.

As I write this, it is -26F. Sunny and no wind. A great day. My church is 3 miles away.



My house as seen in the early spring from the back.



The top of the hill, 2021, Four hundred acres of native trees.



My yard, 2022. The house, the studio/with car park and garage



The Engabretson house

In 1989 I was able to buy the neighboring property, house and barn. It was a bargain I could not resist.

Mr. Engebretson was an Old Norwegian farmer. He was born in the above house and died in the house at 96. When he died, none of his family wanted the old place as it was crumbling down. The barn was leaning left. The taxes piled up.

Byron Bird bought all the fallow land on top of the hill; all that was left was 20 acres that faced the county road. It was for sale for 65K. Way out of my range.

One day driving past on the road I saw an old guy pounding in a new for sale sign. I stopped, backed up and got out of my truck. "What's going on?" He said the place was for sale at a lower price, one of his son's had died, the other one was in a rest home. "How much?" He said "make an offer", I said 10K cash. He said "you just bought a farm."

I became the second owner since the Government sold the land in 1883. Grandpa Engebretson bought it and gave it to our neighbor. Another Norwegian bought it. It was a god send, as I was land locked into the Holman property. Now I surrounded him. And later, as things go, it was perfect for me.

We burned down the barn, another building was hauled away, and I started to fix up the house. It had a septic system, a good well, and the electricity had to be re-done, and I did that. I added a 150 amp circuit box, surface mounted wire and put plugs everywhere. We had a new studio. It could sleep at least ten people upstairs in the four bedrooms. The shower was old, but worked. When you flushed the toilet it went away, we just did not know where.

When the taxes arrived I was a bit shocked, it was for the 65K house. So, I went to the tax meeting and as always, I got a big break. The meeting was 5 local farmers sitting at a table. A guy pulled in and stormed into the meeting yelling he was not going to pay the taxes on his place. He dropped a few f bombs, some GodDamIt's and made the boys mad as hell. They voted to increase his taxes by 2 percent. He stormed out.

“Mr. Jacobson, what is it you want?” I said, in rebuttal to the last guy, “I am happy to pay my taxes and help the school kids out to learn to speak French. But, you are taxing me on that old wreck of a house. It is not a 65K property any longer. “And I added, when quizzed about why I did not burn the house down. “I promised the young Engebretson family they could visit the old house and picnic there and be a part of that ancient piece of land.” One of the local’s said, “how nice to do that.” So, the sorta mayor guy said “Alice, how much do we get for that old Nelson place?” She said ‘\$800.” He said to me “how does that sound for your place?” “Fine with me” and I sang all the way home.

I had an old commercial sprayer and got ten gallons of white paint from the re/cycle place and after washing the walls and cupboards I sprayed the entire house white inside. All of it, ceilings, walls, cabinets, everything and it looked nice. I bought state fair mattresses, and added blankets and sheets from garage sales. Put old dishes and cooking pots in the kitchen, and found all sorts of tables that we could use for working that place as a studio. It cost next to nothing to fit out that old house. And as would happen, when I left Pigeon Lake, I had a woman’s studio and bunk house all ready. And the best part, it was totally private for women. They adored the place, even the small animals that wanted to live there.

It was old, but clean and had fresh well water and toilet. It was an antique house. The girls called it the “chickshack”

We used that place for a number of years, but finally it fell apart. We were having a nice party with dancing and the living room floor fell in. Everyone ran out the doors, but the floor only fell 2 feet onto a sand subfloor, but that was it. Time to build new and the Hay Creek gang all pitched in and we built a new classroom and bunk house with a commercial kitchen. Camp has always been very inexpensive. The first years I charged \$150 for ten days. As I have said many times, I did not want their money, I wanted their loyalty. So when things happened, they all chipped in money to build a new facility that they all got to use for many years. This will Bob Andersons’ 43rd year being together with us. Many more have 35 years together.



Good bye Engie House



The new bunk house and class room

When my son Mark died, I was determined to finish many projects that he started. I sold his house and had a few extra dollars to do projects with, whatever I wanted.

He had used duct tape to take wood ticks off his Golden Retriever. It was very clever. He just made a funnel from the tape, stuck it on the big old tick and it lost oxygen, died and fell off.

I decided to try and patent the "Rid-a-Tick, as we called it. A friend sent me to her father. He had invented the `heart pump` and he thought the idea very clever and great for those frightened of ticks. You put tape on the tick, pressed it to your skin and waited twenty minutes. Pull off the tape and the dead tick could be wrapped up and thrown away. No touching the tick or cutting it off, or heat from a match.

He helped me find a good attorney and away we went. In a year we had the patent. I found a bandage company and they made it. We had a simple package and started to sell it. We used a very high quality tape from 3M that was used in surgery. We did not have to do a study, it was pure.

A friend wanted a crack at selling it, and did a good job, but with only 10 percent going to the owner of the patent it did not bring in much cash. It slowed and the Pandemic sort of ended the project. Like so many singular patents it came to a dead end.

Using legal tax deductions we never spend any real money to get the patent, I learned a great deal and am proud of digging in and actually getting a patent on a medical product. It was great fun, and we made a few dollars. It was an adventure. And many people learned that duct tape was great for removing ticks. So, it became a public service from me.

The third trip to Dubai fit in-between all the farm projects and Pigeon Lake issues and starting Hay Creek Camp.

In many ways, it was sad. The Norton's could not make the last trip, Anne was very sick, and without doubt, she wanted us in Dubai to run the last workshop. It actually was easy for me as I now knew all the players, students

and staff at the Hotel. The third trip should not have happened. But, loyalty is an important asset to have in your human arsenal.

Sharlene was involved in a big American Embassy party for the Sheika of AbuDahbi and it was a grand affair. The Sheika is the wife of the Sheik. It was an all female night. No men could be near the party. At least a hundred American products were shown like the state fair. And the biggest hit was the "Hollywood underwear." (Fredricks). As Sharlene found out, under those black robes is a gorgeous woman dressed in the most expensive clothes money can buy. And, they have all the money. Even McDonald's had a booth, as did Macy's.

Crowds gathered to see Sharlene write calligraphy. She did demos during the evening. As I have said, She sure was admired.

During that evening I had dinner with Percy Lumston, the official ambassador to the Middle East, housed in Abu Dhabi. The embassy was newly built and really a splendid place. They lived in the Embassy and had a great collection of modern American art. Sharlene went to the big party with Mrs. Lumston.

The dinner was for two. I ate off official USA porcelain, and was able to take off the wall two different "Rothko" paintings. He has been one of my favorites.

Any American Embassy can borrow Art from the National Gallery. Most have 18 and 19th century paintings. Old stuff. Not Percy, he went for new artists of fame. It was refreshing to meet him, and Tom Dowling. Both were a credit to the U.S.A.

I was very pleased that Percy asked me many questions about my observations in the Middle East. He took notes on what I had to say. All in all, it was a splendid night as Sharlene and I were guests for the night, and we all sat down for a 5 course breakfast. As always, Philippine kitchen staff is common in all Embassies. It sure was fancy and classy. Yes, we did feel special.

Soon after that the workshop closed for good. Anne was home most of the time in bed. Her depression lasted a long time. It was sad, as that beautiful lady died a few years later.

Those three trips to Dubai was a great highlight in our lives. Sharlene preformed like magic. She was loved and admired. I was very proud of her.

So, for me, back to school and back to reality. My teaching and student activity work went better than ever. My classes were loaded and I had started to take painting at the U.

When teaching with my pal John Engelbart and North Junior High, he had encouraged me to join him at the U for a night painting class.

As the school would not grant me any college credits past my Masters Degree, and of course nothing was said about credits for my Dubai time, it was up to me to gather 90 credits. This is the story in more detail.

The school district had a program call rule of "90". If your age, time of service matched 90 you could retire, as said here earlier. I was locked at the Master's level on the salary schedule. Having 9 shows and exhibits in Japan did not count. My shows in Dubai did not count. No one on the entire faculty had a resume' like mine, but it did not count, I did not have credits from a major college. Being a Professional never counted for anything. I could have won the 'Nobel' prize and they would not have budged.

So, I went with John, signed up for "problems in painting 400." A graduate course and it was 3 credits. The school paid for graduate credits. So, I took the course over and over every quarter. As I had already had about 30 credits of work past my Master's they counted too. Painting with graduate students was a blast. It helped me understand how much I knew about painting, and I did excel. I painted all the time at home and at school. I built big stretchers at school, and made wonderful big tight canvas stretchers. I used gussets in the corners and painted all the way to the edge and around the sides and top and bottom. I could have taken those paintings to any New York Gallery and hung them. I had a painting at the Walker Art Center show for Minnesota Painters, and one at the Art Institute. No other art teachers had

paintings like that. Add to that my one man exhibit in Japan at the Matsuya Gallery, Ginza, Tokyo; the teachers at the U were impressed.

I had told them when they asked “what in the hell are you doing here?” “I am doing it for retirement credit and I want to learn the modern language of painting.” So, they said I should do all the critiques at the end of the quarter. In other words they made me a professor visiting. I just loved going to the U. It was professional growth and fun as can be. I gave very tough and honest critiques. As John and I had a little extra money, we would buy two big bottles of booze, and chips and make the critique night very nice for the grad students. (That was controlled within the room with no guests.) But often it was 30+ students. They did love the old guys.

In 1991 I had my 90 credits done. Had the University send a transcript to Hopkins District and my Salary Schedule said. Master’s degree, 90 graduate credits equivalent to a PH.D. I was at the very top of the salary schedule as I had always taught 6 classes a day for my entire career and I was always paid for the extra class. When I turned in my 5 best years of teaching salary to the State Retirement Assoc. they thought I was a principal.

I had a huge show of my paintings at a friend’s frame shop and gallery. (We had loaned the ten grand to her, from the inheritance.) I invited all the University folks to attend my “Senior Show”. Five Profs showed up and they almost fainted. There where red dots on most of the thirty paintings.(sold). The Profs gave me a small plaque. It was an honorary “Master of fine Arts” degree. So by using the system as it was in place, Hopkins paid for my 67 credits, I made a great deal of money selling the paintings. I jumped to the top of the salary schedule and beat them all at their game. I retired.

In the mean time I had been doing workshops in pottery all over the country. It was very lucrative, and helped my professional standing. I started writing articles for Ceramics Monthly magazine and really got a dose of the hard work of writing. Windows 95 came out and it changed my life. I would use note pad to rough out an article, then switch to Word and do the final corrections. It helped my spelling and basic grammar. Ruth Butler was the editor and she helped me a great deal. She said I should never change my style as it was like listening to me speak. And a few years later the American Ceramics Society asked me to do my first book. And, boy was I ready to roll.

Writing a book overwhelmed me. I had to get over the fact that I had to do research, footnotes, all the things that drove me nuts as a student at the University. It was my story and mine alone. The story was in my head, all I had to do is organize it in a thoughtful way. It was not a novel or a research paper, it was my story and I had to tell it. The commitment was made, now do it.

I remember telling in my dear friend Bob Hobert at one of the last lunches we had together when he asked “what do you want to do most now that you are retired?” And I answered him “write a book with my story.”

Bob had a bad cough that day, it turned out to be lung cancer and he was dead six months later. His twin brother had died a few years previous and I think Bob knew it was going to happen to him. To lose both of them was brutal to me. We grew up together, talked and dreamed as one. I was literally thrown against the wall. When Bob finally went to the hospital for good as he was “terminal”. I wrote him a note every day. Just memory notes, photos and drawings by me. Every day I went to the post office and dropped it in the box. It was about 40 messages.

Tom Hobert called me and said “get to the hospital, this could be the day.” I shot out of the house and when I got to his room he had just died. I sat on the bed with tears and I noticed a crumpled piece of paper in his hand. It was my last note to him. It said, Dear Bob, it is time to give up. That day gave me the inspiration to start planning a book. It was like a month later that Ruth Butler from Ceramics Monthly called and told me she wanted me to think about doing a book of my life as a potter with my Japanese story to lead it. Irony, or fate, we do not know, but it all came together. And, I know I was not going to let Bob down.

The nineties was a time adjustment from a schedule with teaching, home, and pottery going full blast. I did have to find time to relax and let the world come to me.

I did increase my studio time a great deal. The farm gave me many projects to work on, and building and studying kilns was very close to the front of my mind.

It was about this time that Kurt Wild and I started to attend the NCECA meetings

(National Council of Ceramics) held all over the country. I would also meet up with my friend Nils Lou and we had lots of talk about kilns and firing technique. Nils' book on firing was published and he had used a number of my writings about firing. There were many discussions about how to fire and what would happen.

It was also the time to rub shoulders with some of the top potters in the country. So many fine potters with new ideas became very important to me. Nils became the "go to" guy about kilns. I met Joe Koons and of course that started the Chinese project. I was able to meet some of the fine vendors of clay and kilns. Arnold Howard from Texas came along and he became a lifelong friend. He worked for Paragon Kiln Company in Dallas. His knowledge of electric kilns is amazing. David Hendley was a Texas potter that was the epitome of doing clay work from the ground up. A very smart fellow, with a great deal to offer.

In so many ways Minnesota was stuck in some very old ideas that were called Minnesota Mingai. In Japanese it means "farmer pots". I did not ever belong to that "club" of Warren MacKenzie followers.

Kurt Wild was off on his own teaching in River Falls, Wisconsin doing very exciting work based on SW Native American pots. His Black ware was amazing. A very experimental wonder was Dannon Rhudy. She was one of the most inventive potters I have ever met. She helped me a great deal with "Black Shino".

But, perhaps best of all I met the staff of the magazine "Ceramics Monthly" and that started my writing career. Ruth Butler was the editor in chief, Bill Jones was an editor and their trust in me leads to the beginning of "Clayart". The online Q and A that ultimately became my property. Two college professors invented it, set up the system to send it out to the world on the internet, but they both tired of "running and moderating it". Invention was fun; working the program to reach thousands of clay interested people all over the world was daunting. When they decided to drop the program Ruth Butler said, "I know Mel can do it, he is very organized". And of course it worked out

just fine. Later, Arnold Howard arranged for Paragon Kilns to be our sponsor and corporate entity. Off we went.

The American Ceramics Society owned the Magazines `Ceramics Monthly` and `Pottery Making Illustrated`. It was called ACERS; NCECA was the National Council for the Education of Ceramic Art. ACERS was all about the education and research into industrial ceramics. They were in the front lines of the nose cones for rockets.

When the production of ceramic ware went to Mexico and China for production, the society started to lose members and money. The Magazines for potters and teachers has kept them afloat. NCECA was a college teacher based organization and had little to do with public schools and community clay organizations. So, without question, it was a snob organization in the early years.

One amazing fact, when "Clayart" was on the block to be discontinued, it was offered to both Acers and Nceca. Acers took the program and ran it on an old computer server in their offices. It was constantly breaking down for days on end. As I had become the moderator I was pulling my hair out constantly to keep it running.

Luckily I had made a CD of the entire 4000 customers we had online. We had their Email address and name. When Acers finally informed me they were shutting down the clayart computer I called Arnold for help. Between the two of us we found an ISP in Australia that would carry the program for very low cost. Listserv was the software we were using. It had become very expensive and is now in the thousands of dollars a year to use.

Acers had sent the very old, old computer server to Arnold, and it did us no good. Finally I decided to sift the entire email list by hand, all 4000 of them into a simple data base and sent it to the folks in Australia and they had a program called "mailman", added my data base to it and we had clayart running in no time. It has never broken down. We sent the old Acers server to the dump. I alone have moderated clayart for over 30 years. I have to be on my computer about an hour a day, every day, 365. Arnold has been at my side the entire time. He is a valued friend.

The last bit of cleaning we did was to send an email to all the folks around the world that we had addresses for. They had a choice to cancel clayart, or stay with us. As it was simple to just return the email with yes or no, we were able to streamline the list and not send the Aussies a bunch of dead email addresses.

Clayart is not as busy as it was early on. There are so many sites on the net to acquire information, and people want a site that they can show their work. We do not do pictures.

Our list of clayart friends include dozens of very smart people, and they do have answers to questions. Ceramic engineers and both electrical and commercial engineers help us a great deal. We have several doctors and nurses with vast experience in toxicity and general health. But, I might add, the strength of clayart is the vast technical knowledge combined with glaze ideas and recipes at many temperatures.

Several of the best books for potters have come from clayart. Ron Roy and John Hesselbreth combined to write a book about glazes that has become a classic. Vince Pitelka has written a great book on studio management and tools. My book "twenty first century kilns" is all clayart based as I asked 35 American potters to write a chapter each on their special knowledge of certain kilns. So, rather than plagiarize the work of my friends I gave them top billing and included their email address' so they can be contacted by potters to get more detailed information.

I think that one of the best things I did in the forward to my book was to tell people to copy anything they wanted. Xerox pages and share with others. Copy and print pages to take to their kiln site as working plans. The book was not about keeping secrets, it was about opening up all the information available. And then telling folks to share it. It is the reason that after we sold out our original paper copies, it was all given away as a download to anyone that wanted it.

I have placed on the download page four of my books on certain areas of ceramics. One is the basic idea of how to teach high school kids to make pots. It is loaded with stories and examples of motivating kids to love clay. Two other teachers added their experiences of teaching clay.

We also did a small book on 'down firing'. It is without a doubt the newest theory of firing to achieve crystal growth in glaze. A great deal of credit goes to Hank Murrow for his wonderful study of the effects of re/lighting the cooing kiln when the temperature reaches 1900F. The kiln is held at that temperature for 1 to many hours to let the crystal grow. The potter has to judge the time to down fire that matches what they want. The kiln is re/lit with one burner and the damper is adjusted to let the kiln stay at 1900F.

Carol Marians has done work in this area for years. She has two PH.D's from MIT in both chemistry and physics. She has been a clayart friend for years. Brilliant woman. She stimulates potters with the pictures of her many glazes she designs each year, with a free copy of the recipe.

For example, questions come from everywhere. We are able to answer the question and the asker gets to share that answer within the community of potters they are associated with. Again, for example, you are working in Bombay, India, and need a pink shiny glaze for cone 7. It is possible to send a request to clayart and have 4 or 5 recipes the same day you sought the answer.

Because I monitor every email coming in, we never get spammers or trolls just looking to make trouble. Un-moderated sites on the internet are ruined by drunks, kids and others that seek to undo the best there is. We all have seen it and experienced it. Hackers, makers of virus' who want to pass on damage are not given a place to do that with clayart. I refuse to post anything to do with political movements, religious zeal or personal pathos. It is a site to learn about all things ceramic.

Having an email based Q&A was very easy to do. The footprint for both the computer and sending that message was very small. For those living outside of a major city would have trouble with websites and large files. A person in Poland could read clayart in a coffee shop. In the early years it was difficult to get folks to understand just what a broad sweep clayart had if we kept it simple. I was even able to help a young woman build her own wood fired kiln in the Orkney Islands off Scotland. She had a slow computer upload and download, but my emails got to her quickly. She built her kiln into a clay hill. She used two kiln shelves for the roof and added a thick layer of clay on top. I

walked her through the plan. Local potters in the area told her she was crazy, it would not work. We fooled them, it was a great little kiln fired with scrap wood and branches. And she was using her own dug clay and fired it to an earthenware temperature. I even sent her a base glaze recipe. All with email.

Another small book was written about my philosophy and techniques for good teaching. It is very specific about teaching clay. In 2023 it would be considered very controversial. It worked great for me, as student and teacher were together with honesty and trust. Regimentation never works.

I have been building my own computers for many years. As usually happens I ran into a very smart fellow that helped me learn. I had seen an article in the newspaper of a company that rebuilt used computers and sold them to small businesses. The workshop was near my home. I went over there and did not find the front door and went through a big roll up door and there were piles of computers and boxes of parts from every computer ever made. Behind all that stuff was a big desk with a guy named Steve working on a computer. "How can I help you" he said. I was just looking. And we started to chat while he worked. The main office was up front and I met the owner. And then I found out they sold anything you needed at about 74% less than a store. At the time I was worried that my my IBM was losing the hard drive. I said to Steve, do you have a hard drive for an IBM, Aptiva? Of course he did, a huge box of them. It cost \$25. And then he showed me how to install it. A couple of screws and a cord plug in. I went right home and took the back off the computer and listened to the hard drive. It was making noise, so I removed it, and installed the one I got from Steve and it worked like a charm.

I went back several times just to talk to Steve. I said to him, "Would you teach me the basics of computer remove/replace repair?" He said "all you need do is sit in a chair and watch me. I must keep working." I took him to lunch and gave him a nice mug. (It works like a miracle.) That was early 2000. A great many things happened to me during that time period.

I had a severe Pancreas attack, and a near death experience. I was out of commission for about 4 months and then went to a local club and started to swim to get my strength back. It was great fun and I met a lot of retired people. Most of the group was 70 and up women. And without doubt they

were a group that did not do computers. I got a question every time I went swimming. There was one gal there that was 90 and she wanted a computer but, no money for one.

I went back to Steve and said, "Can I buy one of these used computers for an old lady. I will fix it up and set it up for her. We went up front and talked to Chuck who owned the company. He said "if you are doing good Christian work with the elderly I will give you a deal on anything you need. Just don't charge them anything." I sure agreed to that as my intent was give it away.

We picked out a used Dell and got a mouse and keyboard and a small monitor \$50.

I took it to her apartment and set it all up. She had worked in a law office and was really sharp. She caught on fast. I gave her two lessons and she was emailing her daughter that lived in Florida. About a month later at swimming, she said "what is better, the Nikon or the Canon digital camera?" Her daughter was going to pop for a camera for her.

I think I got 6 computers for older women at the swim group. They were thrilled and of course showered me with love and affection. It was the perfect trade.

Of course the big beneficiary of that project was me. Yes, me! I had to repair, take apart and diagnose computer problems. Steve would pick out a computer that was like new, but there was always something wrong. I had asked for instruction and that is how he gave it to me. I also did a lot of reading about hardware and computers. It was from the "ground up."

When the IBM got out of date, was slow and the modem was junk I decided to build my own, Super Computer. I had to get the processor and memory from a computer store, but the other stuff came from Steve. It was a great computer and lasted for some years, but always it was time to upgrade, get new, faster and faster. So I would make a new one. Steve never touched one of my computers, but what he would do when I stopped was hand me a disc with a repair program on it. He also gave me a program called TP, for toilet paper. It would totally wipe out a hard drive and made formatting and like new. I have now moved to SSD drives and make my computers double fast. (Solid State Drive, no moving parts.)

About that time a former student that was teaching at Minnetonka Jr. High stopped at my studio and said "Mel, you have to learn how to make your own website. Here is a program, on a disc that will help you. It is a copy of the original program." It was an Adobe program and it turned out to be very easy to do. In 2023 I still use it and I can change things on that website in minutes. No fancy spinning pots with flames shooting out, but basic. It gets the job done.

My Brother Jim went into the Air Corp in 1952. He had gone to the U and had enough credits to apply to officers training. When He left the house he gave me the keys to the 1940 Ford car and he said to me. "Listen, on Monday go down the Star and Tribune build, go to the 3rd floor and ask for Nick." He just gave me his job as a copy boy at the trib.

That was when I was a Junior in High School. I found Nick and he had go down to the first floor and go into the door marked personnel. They signed me up and I was a copy boy in a major United States newspaper office. I was an errand boy. I was scared out of my pants. I worked three nights a week, most shifts where 3-10. But, one night a week I had to work until 11.

People were kind to me, showed me around and I got the hang of it fast. I had to clear the teletype machine, read the copy and then take the copy to the different desks like city desk. News desk, sports etc. I ran errands to the office library to get pictures and information. I got coffee for people in the lunch room. I sharpened pencils and put ribbons in Royal typewriters I worked around school functions and often worked Saturday and Sunday nights. I soon realized that the copy boys could go home after the first city edition ran. The paper was done, and only re/writes went on. The 3 o'clock copy boys would scoot out any time after 8:30. I had a car so could drive by Sharlene's on my way home. I there was a cool editor after ten he might shoo the copy boy home. Nothing for them to do. So, it was a great job while still in High school.

Being a fast visual learner the job became very easy and I was often praised for having things done before they asked for it. I also liked to please people and that fit in well. Those reporters loved to be served fast. Everything was on "Deadline".

Often the news room was hysterical. Breaking news all the time, accidents to run to, and the teletype machine went on and on 24/7. But, I was never under stress and I just went around smoothing the water..”how can I help”, It was always appreciated as the other boys did not hop to it most of the time. A little dull in the head, basically kids. My general confidence grew rapidly as I was working for all the important names that were on people’s mind. I never talked about my job at West High. They would think I was BSing them. Many thought I was a ‘paper boy’. The air got really thick when a huge national story broke. Like the end of the Korean War. Everyone went into overdrive. I loved those nights. Elections, the death of an important person, it was crazy time...”hold the presses.” Very important came to the newsroom to be interviewed. A press conference was not invented until 1959. TV controlled press conferences.

I would have to meet the famous person, have them sit in a glass office and get them a coke. Often I would sit and chat while freeing up a reporter. Can you imagine going to cab and helping Elizabeth Taylor from the cab. Sit with her and get her a coke. It happened to me every week. Some famous person was in the newsroom giving a story.

These next paragraphs are hard to believe. It is all true. About once a month Hubert Humphrey would glide into the newsroom to schmooze for a story. He would fly in from Washington D.C. and take a cab to the Trib. It got so normal that he would come in ask for me to sit with him. That went on for six years. He hated to sit alone and he would always jabber with me. He gave me reading assignments, human advice, encourage my studies at Hamline, then the U of M. I had to read all of Steinbeck on summer break. All the books. He would test me.

Hubert Humphrey had `total recall`. If he asked me something, a month later he might quiz me on the topic. After a year he was actually a friend. Reporters would say “what did your friend Hubert have to say”.

Skip this story ahead to 1973. Hubert Humphrey was Vice President of the United States of America. A family of friends came from Japan and wanted to go to a festival. So, the Aquatennial parade was coming up and I asked them to go with us. We went down early and brought chairs to the corner where

the parade came out of that stadium. Hubert was the "Grand Marshall" in the first car. I waved at him and said, Hello Mr. Vice President". He stopped his driver, got out of the car and waved me over. He said, "Mel, how are you, I have been following your career at Hopkins and know of your great diver in the Olympics and I am so proud of your work in pottery. Are these friends from Japan?" I said. "Hubert, the parade". "OOPs he said," just wanted to say hi." And off he went. Sharlene was ash white. I was not surprised in the least. He was that sort of a person. He died soon after that event and I could not go to "Lakewood Cemetery" with the crowds. I went alone two days after, and sat at his grave and cried.

One night at the Trib I was at the "A.P. teletype machine. A story came over; Carl Rowan has won the Pulitzer price. Carl was at his desk at the trib. The first black writer for the Trib. I called out as I came from the small room. "Has anyone heard that Carl has won the Pulitzer?". I waved the copy. The room erupted in cheers and applause. I walked over to his desk and said in a loud voice, "do you want to edit this story?" and handed him the AP copy. This happened at dead line. Everyone went back to work and Carl said..."can anyone go to dinner with me and have a drink?" Deadline, no one got up, so he looked at me and said, "Come on Mel lets go to the "Wagon Wheel". It was truly amazing. He was just a fellow employee and no one every treated me any different than a news editor. In fact the face of the newsroom changed a great deal. Writers came and then left. Editors moved on to a bigger job, maybe New York. So, in many ways I had seniority. In fact 3 copy boys quit the first year I was there. So, I had to train in new boys on a regular basis. Nick came to me one day and said, "Mel, you have to be lead copy boy." Two more kids are leaving. I had made pals of Jerry and Ron and they were glad I was going to be lead boy. They did not want the extra work, like keeping the roster in place, who worked when. I could make the schedule, but I got to place me anywhere on the list, and I got to work four nights and could leave early. I would zip over to the Trib from the U, and start at 2, then skip out at 7:30 when the first edition was put to bed. I had the entire evening to myself...and could always take Sharlene out.

I lived at home; Mom made me a good lunch to take with me to school. I could always have a bite in the Trib lunch room. Often Sharlene and I could go out for a burger. I always had a first hour class at the U as I was a get up early guy. (Still am). Almost every day I picked up Bob Hobert for ride to the U. He

was an All-American tackle for the Gophers, was a straight A student and he minored in French. He was brilliant. We took psych 1 together. He was thumbing through his psych book on the way to school. We had the final test that morning. I was sweating for a low B if possible. The grades came out and Bob got 249 points out of 250. I got a B. He was storming. "Come with me Mel, gotta see that Prof, I should have 250 points. Of course Bob had the highest score in the class, but something was wrong. We raced to the Profs Office. Bob had on his football letter jacket and walked into the Profs Office and said "Doctor Washburn, you made an error on the final." The prof was stunned. "Who are you, Hobert, you are the all-star tackle, what would you know about my test." Bob said "look at question 183, you wanted the answer to be B, the answer is actually A." I should have a 250 score. I don't make mistakes like that." Bob had the book with him, opened it to page 197 and showed him the paragraph. The prof said "shit". Bob smiled and the Dr. Washburn said to Bob, "I won't change your grade because it does not matter and You Will Be a Psych major and as Department head I will be your advisor!" Bob, like Hubert, had total recall. He graduated Magna cum Laude. He never got a B in any class except "tennis". He got a C and was livid. Bob became a Psychologist. And Bob and I both got our advanced degree on the same night. His was PhD; mine was a Masters in Education. He was my best friend on the earth. He and Lucy even flew to Japan to visit us for 5 days. It was magical. I always told people if he had stayed a month, he would have been fluent in Japanese. He was brilliant, kind, considerate had a good Lutheran faith and took great care of his family.

As an Industrial Psychologist he was unparalleled, very highly regarded by his peers. As I have mentioned, we all lost a part of ourselves when he died early.

Paul Swenson was managing editor of the Tribune. He was a great boss, and everyone admired him. One day he called me over to his desk and said, "I would like for you to be my personal errand boy. I will have special letters that must be hand delivered in the building; It may be to Mr. Cowles, or to a reporter. They are totally private and I have to trust you will not peek at the notes. I trust you completely. "Thank you Sir." I never peeked once. He even wanted to know if I wanted to stay at the paper rather than being an art teacher. "Thank you Sir, but plans are made, and I was moving with Sharlene to Ely, Minnesota to teach art."

Sharlene hated Ely. She was home sick and pregnant with Mark. She wanted her Mom and Dad near her. Teachers as social friends was very "in house". She did get a job with an attorney in town. She was a legal secretary. But, Her doctor asked her if "she used an IBM selectric typewriter". Of course she did, and he wanted her to take over his office and bring it up to date and getting everything on the IBM. He told her she could work for the baby. He would take care of her visits, and pay the bill at the hospital for his birth. She was happy to do it, as it gave her something to do of value. And that was a big bill paid in 1959, no insurance then.

Sharlene could not get out of Ely fast enough. Mark rode home to Minneapolis in the back cubby hole of our VW bug. He was 8 days old. We left the day school was out. And because of her, we did not have one debt in Ely. And I had a contract to teach at the Hopkins Schools. One of the finest school districts in America at the time. (it went downhill fast a few years ago. Can you spell diversity?)

It was about mid January at Ely. I was teaching and the office called me down for an important telephone call. I ran down and it was the Superintendent of the Hopkins Schools, L.H. Tanglen. He offered me a job teaching art at Hopkins. I had not applied yet. I said "yes". I had practice taught at Hopkins, and did a good job, but that would hardly qualify me for a job offer from L.H.Tanglen himself.

(Side story) One night while working at the "Trib I went to a stag party. It was a big celebration for someone getting a job at the New York Times. It was drunken silly. The photographers at the Trib had made a 16 mm film of all the women around the building telling them it was for a promotional film. What they did was splice that film into an awful porno film. It was terrible; I was pissed as I hate porno stuff with a passion. I bolted and went out in the lobby. A few minutes later Paul Swenson sat next to me. He said "you too". "Yes sir, those women are my friends and that was a disgrace." I later found out that Paul Swenson was the president of the school board at Hopkins. He told L.H. Tanglen to hire me, and don't let him get hired by Edina or Minnetonka as they both had openings in art. He will be the best you can hire.

Being honest, a great employee at the Trib, and a rotten porno film got me the best job we could find. Sharlene was insane with joy. She was going home. We bought a new house in New Hope, started our life with our new baby boy.



Our brand new house 5325 Sumter av. New Hope

By the way, I loved teaching in Ely. Our tiny house was across the street from the school. Our house was in the backyard of an old Finn. His mother lived in the tiny house after his Dad died.

I was totally green as a teacher and I was paired up with Jerry Korte who had started teaching at the Junior College that had most of its classes in the High School. It was a tiny Junior College, just starting out.

Jerry broke me in, and showed me the ropes of the school and filled me in on the good teachers and the bad teachers. Everyone hated the principal, but loved the Super and he had hired me. I learned fast, don't send bad kids to the office. You will get punished, not the kid.

The first day of school I was out in the hall by the art room, I had posted a bulletin board with art that was left from last year. Four rather tough kids came up to me and the leader said, "What is this shit?", and tore down one of the paintings. The big test for the new guy, and he is probably a fag. My mind went right back to Junior High and Lake Street. The challenge by a bully.

I said, "pull down another one and see what happens. He did, and I threw my wicked left hook right into his nose. (I am left handed, he never saw the punch.)

He fell to the floor, blood all over and his buddies picked him up and ran for their cars in the parking lot. There were about twenty kids with their mouths open and looking at me. "Who is that guy?" No one said a word. My class was starting and I went out with a mop and cleaned the blood. When I went back in class they looked at me like I was a Rottweiler. I walked home for lunch and told Sharlene that I may be fired the first day for smacking a kid. "Oh my god."

I went back to class and a teacher walked up to me and said, "You just blasted the worst kid in this school and you are the art teacher. Way to go, no one will say a word. You are now a hero."

The next day the kid walked into my room before school. He said, "Sorry about the crap I pulled." He had a big welt on the other side of his face. "My Dad smacked me when he got home from work". Dad said to me, "Don't ever screw with a`Man` that is left handed you stupid kid. Go tell him you are sorry." The story had found its way to the mines where the old man worked. I was famous. Small town America news travels fast.

It seemed that all the discipline in the school was given out by a group of about 6 coaches and "real" men. I was in the club, the first day. I soon found out that the outgoing art teacher was a total wimp. The kids were out of control and even locked him in the closet one day. There was pizza scraps in the old electric kiln.

He had been fired, and the tough guys thought I was another wimp art teacher. Sorry to disappoint them.

No doubt that I was a "made man" but it could have been terrible, including an assault charge, jail and a lost job. I have always been lucky, it held up well. And I never pulled that trick again in my teaching career. "Thank you tough Slovenian miner for taking care of your kid." And "Melvin, never lose your temper, be in control always. Lesson learned.

While attending Hamline University I was supposed to take a course in "World Religion." I played football and was on the swimming team. The course was taught at 4 pm. I could not get to the course. And of course I had to be at the Trib 4 days a week. I was stuck. Dr. Kenyon was adamant, I had to do something. So, I had the thought that Rabbi Minda at Temple Israel Synagogue might help me. I went to see him and asked about the course in

Judaism for converts. "He said, we would love to have you and the course starts next week. Rabbi Shapiro is here from New York and will teach it." I asked him if he could call Hamline and Dr. Kenyon and offer me 3 credits. He did that and I was in like Flynn.

Our High School had a population of Jewish kids. In those days we were all pals and we did not even know about anti-Semitism. It was not unusual for some of us to go to Temple with our friends. That is how I got to know the Rabbi.

A few years ago at a West high gathering I quizzed some of my Jewish friends about feeling hate or rancor. "We never felt anything like that. And our parents encouraged us to mix and be a part of neighborhood activity."

I was 19 when I went to the Temple for my study. It was enlightening, interesting and inspiring. The last night of class we had a very nice party and our class was 26 of us, so it was fun. I was the youngest.

Near the end of the evening Rabbi Minda called me up front. He said "it has been a delight to have our neighbor young man join us. He gave a Hebrew chant, Then placed his hand on my head and said "Mel, you are now one of us, you are a Jew."

All the people shook my hand. There were tears. And then Rabbi Shapiro our teacher gave me a gold pen to recognize my bar Mitzvah.

My entire life I have been proud of being a part of the "Family of Man". It has made me a total, complete person. And when we lived in Japan it was marvelous to be a part of Shinto and Buddhist belief. I loved the call to prayer in Dubai. These many experiences have made it possible to love people of all faiths and color.

As a child we lived next door to two black sisters. They came to Minneapolis during the war and stayed. My Mother insisted I call them "m'am" they would call me to the fence and say "Malv'n, do you want lemonade and a cookie?" "Yes m'am." We would sit on their porch and one would say. "Malv'n what do we do first?" And we would sing "Jesus loves me." This I know, for the Bible tells me so. I loved those happy lovely faces.

In the house on the other side of us lived the classic “Red Neck Ass”. He got his daughter pregnant. I disliked those people with a passion.

When we played cowboys, I wanted to be “Tonto”. He could track anyone and had a plain horse and was the smart one. And we knew that Kemosobey meant friend.

Hopkins High Eisenhower, had a rich group of fine Jewish families. Because of my involvement in Temple Israel, many of my students had grandparents that I knew well. I worked at ‘Stillman’s Market’ I was friends with the family that owned the largest artist supply company in Minnesota. Three times in my teacher career Jewish families invited Sharlene and me to “Passover dinners”. I was asked to read the Seder or read the questions. What a complement. I taught the kids how to make clay “Dradel” tops with Hebrew symbols. Then all the kids wanted one too.

One day in the lounge, a teacher asked me “why do all the Jewish kids take ceramics?” “Just lucky I guess.”

When working as a copy boy the gang from the copy desk would go out for a drink and supper during the down time after the paper went to bed. One night we went to “Auggies” it was a strip joint, good food and Auggie was a character. One the guys with us told Auggie that I had gone to Temple Israel and taken the Jewish course. He perked up and said, “Did you go to West High with all my relatives?” “yes” is said. Auggie was friends with Rabbi Shapiro.

Little did I know that Auggie was head of the Jewish Mafia in Minneapolis/St. Paul. When we went back there about a month later he pulled me aside and said “Jews stick together, if anyone ever bothers you, hurts you in any way, you come and see Auggie, and we will take care of it.” He then mixed one of his famous “Manhattens” for me and then followed was “on the house” a corned beef sandwich. I was 19 years old. And then he introduced us to his new singer, Peggy Lee. Her story was she came to Minneapolis from a small town and there was a huge snow storm and she was lost in downtown near the bus depot. She walked into Auggies and he took her in, protected her and she did a tryout and he kept her there to sing. One night the top Mafia boys from New York came in, and they took her to New York and the rest is history.

A few weeks ago I took a drive down Lake Street, in Minneapolis. We lived just off of Lake St. for most of my childhood. It was so sad to see burned out buildings and a Police Station, Grocery Store, Target and Walgreens gone. The excuses sicken me. What do the fine older black women do for groceries and a drug store? They have to take bus miles to find shopping. I walked those streets for years and never afraid. It does sicken me. No wonder I find contentment living in the woods of Wisconsin, in a house I build from the "ground up" with my own hands. Yes, it was very hard work, but at the end of the day there was great pride in what I had accomplished. When I open a kiln full of pots that same feeling hits me. "See what I made, by hand and with mind and a creative sense."

When Colleen graduated from the U, I gave her a Winchester Model 94, lever action 30/30 rifle. She was thrilled. However, it came to her taken all apart. With the rifle came a diagram for assembly. She did it, only had her Dad come over once. She shoots that rifle better than any of the boys at Hay Creek. I tell them, "don't get in a shooting match with Colleen, she will take your money." That is a good indicator that she is a "Total Woman". She is confident in her gender. She is a woman.

Colleen and I spent 14 years together, learning, having fun and being life long friends.

The electric kiln has come to dominate American ceramics. With the growth of home potteries and the movement of women joining the craft, it becomes very easy to add an electric kiln to the home.

A few years ago, Ruth Butler did a survey of the people that ordered CM magazine. It was discovered that women had 65% edge over men. She claimed tongue in cheek that women read the magazine and men looked at the pictures. I think she had a truism on her hands. It was amazing to me as the leader of Clayart that my basic customers where women, working alone at home. I wrote at the time that "the finest potter in America is a woman, working alone. We have not found her yet". I now amend that statement to include many women have been found that make great pots.

Ron and John's book on cone 6 glaze again changed the entire field of ceramics. They were able to bring dignity to the electric kiln and those that made pots at home, men or women. The biggest problem was the vendors of clay did not keep up with a great clay body that could be fired in an electric kiln. They were making school clay, it was not high fire or low, it was in-between. And did not serve anyone very well.

A few years back, I had been asked to drive out to Buffalo High school and do a demo and help them with their ceramics program. A fine woman that had practice taught with me, and pretty good potter told me that "she had lost her touch, and her throwing was poor." She was a long term sub in a brand new high school. I drove out and she had a in-school field trip so I had a gang of kids. There were boxes of brand new clay stacked in the back of the room. Two boys brought me clay, I had box of handmade tools and set up a wheel. The kids were very excited and a good group of polite kids.

I started to throw the boxed clay and said, "This is crap clay, it is hard to throw well." I looked at the teacher and said, "You have not lost your touch you have "baby pooh" clay." I told my helper boys to go out to my car and get the two huge bags of clay I brought with me.

Of course my clay is handmade, it throws perfectly. I told the boys to each get a ball of clay and do a demo...they were kind of nervous. But they did it and one of the boys turned to me with a great sentence. "This is self throwing clay." I took over the demo and threw some great pots and explained about clay body etc.

I got in my car and was livid. How can anyone make clay that bad? I had to pass Minnesota Clay Company on my way home, and pulled in. They made the clay that Buffalo High was using.

Mike the owner is a good fellow; I have known him since he was a kid. (family company) I said, "let's go in your office, we have to talk. I just came from Buffalo High and used your box clay for a demo and was totally embarrassed. I could not throw that clay. Let me see the secret recipe book." (clay companies never tell their secrets.) He said "hold on, wait, we don't show the recipes." I said, "what is in it, do you think I don't know it has four ingredients, and two recipes you use I gave to your Dad." He showed me the master book,

and there was the `mid-range` base and it contained 30% talc. WHY? Talc does nothing for throwing; it is filler and a flux to make the body melt early. It ruins the clay body for any working quality. And it is cheap to buy. He claimed that all the companies were using talc in clay bodies. I told him it would soon be a law suit as `Eastern Talc` was thought to cause cancer.

So, the reason for talc was so the clay would fire to cone 6, to match the new glazes and be vitrified. (Vitrification means the clay and glaze melt together and will not let water pass through. Water Proof. I just shook my head.

He said “what do we do?” I told him that I would design a new clay body for him, but it would not be pure white.” White clay had become the standard for home potters and school kids, and was made to seem as porcelain. It is a high fire recipe with talc added to make it mid-fire range. The history of stoneware clay was a rich brown clay fired with reduction to achieve a country look, earthy and primitive. It suited the design world from the 50’s to the 70’, and then white became the new thing.

That warm earthy look was missing in electric firing as the kiln could not be reduced. The atmosphere in the kiln was high in oxygen, and no smoke, hence to carbon.

I told him that I would go home and come up with an answer. I had been making clay ideas for 60 years.

Years back I had met David Shaner, a wonderful potter and a really good fellow. We were not pals or anything, but we did have coffee at one of the conventions and we were both shocked to find out that we were both born in 1934, graduated from college at the same time and taught Junior High as our first job.

I said to him “what did you use for clay” as we both had early gas kilns. And of course He mixed school scrap clay with A.P. Greene fire clay. We both laughed, it was really odd, and we were like twins. (Dave Shaner was working for Dan Rhodes to write his new book as he was in Rhodes grad program at Alfred University. It was Dave Shaners “Rhodes 32” that made me famous.)

Dave and his wife had moved to Montana as Dave hated teaching college ceramics and being in those political art departments. He worked at a foundation, then moved to the rural area and built a pottery. His luck ran out as a power pole exploded near his house, caught the tinder dry grass fields on fire (like a forest fire out of control) and burned his house and studio to the ground. It was then it was determined that he had Lou Gehrig's disease and he died young. That hit me very hard.

So, back to white clay crap. I went home and sat on my deck, my mind went to Dave Shaner and believe it or not, my mind thought that David said "reverse the recipe." I jumped up and said to me "we added earthenware clay to high fire clay to make our great throwing clay. Why not add earthenware clay to any stoneware clay body at 30%. Take out the talc and add `Redart, earthenware clay`? I had a 60 pound bag in the studio I had not used for years.

I literally ran to the pug mill, estimated how much clay was in the mill and added about 30% redart clay and some black iron oxide to deepen the color. This process was the same I had to do for the "Hare's Fur" body, add color, deep brown color.

After the pug mill ran for about an hour to get that clay totally mixed I started throwing pots from that clay. I got the pots out in the sun and totally dried them in two days; bisque fired them and then found a really old recipe that was for cone 6 black. I had the base recipe and it was so simple 5x20, or 20% of five ingredients. It was all in buckets in my back room. I used volume measuring. One small coffee can full five times. I added some zircopax for opacity.

I glazed a batch of pots, put them into my small electric kiln and fired them to cone 6. They were totally gorgeous, and the first nice pots I have ever made at cone 6, electric. (I never fired my pots with school kids, or use there new boxed clay.) One could not tell that they were not made in a gas kiln to cone 10. The added black iron had stained the clay to appear reduced.

I had made bars of the clay body to test for absorption. (vitrified) and the day I opened the kiln I did a digital weight check of the bars, then boiled the bars for an hour in water and re/weighed them and no water seeped into the clay. It was totally vitrified. The clay body threw on the wheel like a dream. In fact

Redart clay is very workable and it helped the stoneware body that already was perfect. I named the clay Mel6 and the glaze recipe fit the clay body perfectly. It dried on the bisque ware like cement. I was very excited. This event turned me over to become a potter that used an electric kiln. Now I had the same problems that home potters were having all over America. As the owner of Clay art, I could get the word out to everyone.



The first black and white cone 6 pots, with Mel6 clay. The trout like oil spotting was a happy accident, but really added to the new glazes mystery.

I drove the pots out to MN Clay, and gave them to Mike. He said, "so, cone 10 reduction". "No, cone 6, electric, totally vitrified and no talc, just Redart." I said keep the pots, but fill them with water and put them on your desk for a month and keep filling them with water. It will not stain your desk. The pots did not sweat, but they evaporated the water. The clay body was as tight as cone 11 Porcelain.

Many potters are making their own Mel6 and loving it, but even after 5 years no vendor is making it. Talc is now illegal and it is off the market, but the vendors are stuck on white clay for electric kilns are afraid to try a new idea.

I now fire the electric kiln as much as stoneware and it sells like crazy. It has also been very interesting to take the cone 6 glaze to cone 7 in both electric and gas fired reduction kilns. The little bit of extra heat for sure does not affect the quality of the glaze or clay. My argument for years with vendors is there is no such thing as broad range clay like "fires from cone 6-10. It is like one size fits all underwear, it fits no one perfectly. Mel6 is what it says, cone 6. It can be fudged a bit to cone 7 but cone 8 is bad. And without doubt, cone 5 gets a weak clay body. The difference in the 5x20 glaze is that it starts to run at cone 7, however, that streaking at 7 can be very handsome. But if the kiln over fires to cone 8, glazes run on the shelves.



Mel6 clay, 5x20 glaze fired in my gas kiln, cone 7 soft reduction.
Four hour firing. With a one hour down fire.

I am very stubborn with the concept of one size fits all. It does not work in cooking, underwear design, or clay and glazes.



Jet black mug with a band of pure white with perfect brown body. Cone 6

2001 to 2012 was marred by illness, family deaths and then recovery. It was a rough time for me, and my family. Mark's death was almost impossible to recover from. Sharlene was devastated, but we made the effort and did recover.

We took alcohol out of our lives and started to eat healthy food, and lose weight. And I went to the club everyday and swam. Then Grandma Carlock died, and we grieved all over again. The events of 911 then put us all in the blackness for months.

Time does actually heal. And we got on living our lives. My pottery picked up, I got some new projects like the "Hare's Fur" and a trip to China and Japan for me.

It was marvelous to walk the streets of Kyoto and see old friends and neighbors. The children had grown to adults and were running the stores and shops that we loved when we lived there.

The farm property expanded and the facility for Hay Creek was marvelous. New kilns that fired with excellence arrived. All of them hand built.

It seemed like all my friends were dying. And Sharlene showed signs of dementia and it was a slow disease, but it was obvious. We cared for her the best we could.

She finally gave up her pens and ink. We all missed those wonderful art pieces that she did.

The last ten years of teacher in Hopkins High was a delight. I continued to teach 6 classes a day, and then an opportunity to teach at night came along. The principal had read in some magazine where a school offered teachers and kids the opportunity of coming back at night, like 6-8 pm and take classes that opened up some space in a very crowded school.

At a faculty meeting the principal gave faculty the opportunity to try it. Not a member of the faculty would do it. I sure wanted to and raised my hand. He said he would talk to me about it. It was agreed at the change of the semester I could have my advanced students come to school Monday and Tuesday

evening and have two hours +of class. I would have to recruit the kids and organize it. And of course get permission of the parents.

I asked the kids and had over 40 volunteers the first day. As I expected, being at school at night would mean an empty building. Kids could bring dinner or snacks and of course soda. And, I got to teach in an empty building. NO HUB BUB. And best of all, I went home at noon and made pots every day. It was all win for me.

I had four straight classes and went home. Even TV was lousy on Monday and Tuesday, so might as well be at school. Sharlene liked having me home at noon; we had lunch, sat of the deck with coffee.

The only downer was they wanted to stay at school til 10. So we compromised and they had to be out of the building by 8:45. When the door of opportunity opens, I run through.

Mr. "New Wen" was my janitor my last years of teaching. He was a Vietnam immigrant. He was very polite and very very quiet. I often came up to the high school and did repair work, or load a kiln etc. We were only a ten minute drive from home, so the high school pottery room needed a great deal of work.

I started to make tea for the two of us and I would ask him questions about his life. One night I asked him if he went to college. He said "Saint-Cyr". That is the famous Military Academy of France and I knew that, and was very impressed. He graduated number 3. When in Vietnam, he was a Colonel in the army. His major at Saint-Cyr was Law. He was a military attorney. Not a person at Hopkins High knew that fact. They talked about the little janitor that his wife help him. Geeez.

About once a week we had tea, and I got his entire life story out of him. He was very impressed that I had been to Japan and was a "master potter".

One evening I asked if I could help any friends that he still had in Vietnam. He was shocked. I gave him a \$100 bill. He had tears in his eyes; at least six of his pals were still in prison in Vietnam. He said he could do miracles with that money. About five months later he handed me a small blue air mail letter. It said."Dear Benefactor, we cannot ever thank you enough. Your money his helping six of us stays alive. And we may never see freedom again. I offered

more money, but he said it is hard to smuggle money, so next Christmas we will send another \$100, added to what he sent. I have four of those heartwarming letters.

A couple of years after I retired, he and his wife spotted me in Target. He said, my friends are out of jail, and are now in America with family.

I asked Mr. New wen about his daughters that had graduated from High school near us. He said Kimmy is a senior at MIT, physics. His second daughter is there too as a freshman, mathematics.” But, Sussie is a black sheep, we are very unhappy with her. She is going to go to “Cal Tech”, electrical engineer.” “A funny little janitor that has to have his wife help him.” Hmmm, I think not.

Over the years I never once sent a piece of equipment in for repairs. I had four big kilns and changed coils etc and they ran all the time. We had 32 potters wheels and they needed attention, all the time, they ran full speed all day. Kids had to help me with repairs.

I did not have a repair budget. All other activity classes had money. I did not need it. I could not afford to have a wheel missing, a new belt took 15 minutes. I kept spare parts all the time.

A year after I retired I was at Continental Clay for lunch with Em. He said, come in the work room for a minute, got something to show you. Geez, I did not want to see as I had an idea what was there. Much worse than I thought. 9 potters wheels that were ruined. It would cost the school \$800 bucks to fix. He said to me, “Mel how many years have we been friends and you do business with us, like 25?”

Yes, maybe even more. He went on to say “you have never had us repair anything from school or your pottery. And you never grind us down for discounts. And, again, you buy more clay for Hopkins than any program we service including the U of M.” I said “friends do not grind down friends.”

It was Em that in a heartbeat had everything shipped to Dubai. Friends are Golden.

Speaking of Vietnam families, one of the last years at Ike high one day one of my most lovely young Vietnam girls knocked on my office door. She wanted private time. She said "my girl friend is being sexually abused by her father etc...etc". And I said "are you sure, or is it you?" She cried. It was her adopted father. I was really mad, get me a hammer. I was stunned, if I called the counselor it would be wild, in the air, cops etc. She wanted me to help her, she trusted me. What could I do?" This was a tough one. I pondered. Then said "do you have idea who your real dad was?" I knew her mother was dead. She said "he was navy, I think airplanes, and he had gold on his uniform. I think his name was "Steve, and maybe Anders." I said I was going to look for him, now!. And I figured, gold, that meant "Commander "and that meant `Newport News, VA. Big aircraft naval base.

I got an outside line, called information and got the Naval Base and asked for "Commander Steven Anders." Wait, Wait, and then the operator said. "He lives off base I give you New Port News information. I called the number, and a woman answered. I told her I had a private conversation for Steve, and she said he would not be home for a half hour. What is this about? I gave her the story, She said, is it a girl named Jennifer?" yes. "YOU FOUND HER; WE HAVE BEEN LOOKING FOR TEN YEARS!" Her husband would be on the very next flight to MPLS.

We plotted where she would be. He would rent a car and meet her in the main concourse of Ridgedale Shopping Center. She gave her number to Jennifer and they would set a time. It was noon in Minnesota, and he had to get a plane. Jennifer gave me a hug and said. "You just saved my life." Then she said. "If I am not at school tomorrow you will know why." It seems that Steve Anders called the local father and said. "If you even raise to your voice to find her, the cops will be summoned and I will really hurt you." About six months later I got a short letter at school in the mail. It said, "I am ok, and I am happy." And a heart.

Well done Melvin. Act, don't scream for authority. Solve the problem, save the child. I did that. No one in the Hopkins schools knows the story. Jennifer, no forwarding address. Even her girl friends did not know what happened to her. After college she moved to SanFran and became a clothing designer. A good one.

My daily teaching schedule was mostly the same. Every Monday I would do demos, lectures, stories. For example I would make tea pots the entire day. Talk about prepping clay, measuring tools, throwing technique. While lecturing I would tell stories about my life in Japan, other great trips, It was always sort of new, and the kids loved to sit and be entertained. And, because so many of them were visual learners, they watched and they would move around me. Some would even stand behind me and watch my hands.

Whatever I did as a demo the kids made all week. So, I was always starting a new pot series. I used my own re/cycled clay for demos, then I would finish the pots on Tuesday, and the kids could handle them, carry them around. They were not sacred pots. After a few days I would load them in a kiln and bisque fire them and take them home. That is how the school paid me for all the repair and Saturday work I did. I even built shelves and storage units.

Tuesday was a work day. Kids got on wheels and made stuff. We had a great stereo system in the room for music. On Tuesday girls got to bring tapes and pick the music. No one could touch the stereo, only me. It was locked in a cupboard. So the girls would give me the tape and it would play for an hour.

Wednesday was work for kids and classical music played. I had four tapes, Mozart, etc. The classics. Actually kids loved the mellowness of Wednesday.

Thursday was boys day. It was loud, new bands, and it was changing every week. All the kids liked it. (One has to remember that each kid thought they were the expert on what others liked. Totally not true. They all thought they had the best knowledge and taste. Human nature at work.)

Every Friday was finish it all up, and then the last ten minutes they had to totally clean the room. Every kid had a four foot square of the room. It was their place to clean and polish. With over 180 a day, with six sections, it only took ten minutes and the room was like new Friday afternoon. And of course Friday was heavy metal, loud and crazy music.

So, how did I punish bad behavior, and on occasion there was bad stuff. Fighting over wheels, breaking pots of a kid they disliked. Sort of gang fighting, only very mild and almost funny. "Who stole my pot?". I would say in a loud voice. "Damn those international art thieves were here last night. They

grabbed your pot and ran. Darn them. I suppose it is in China by now.” Then I would say “look in the kiln room I moved pots last night.” “Oh, here it is.”

If they started to slip tapes in on the wrong day, or complain about ‘crappy music that `carol` brought. I went into action. Out would come my Lawrence Welk tape of crazy polka music. I would turn it up loud and keep it going for the entire day. Then I would hear. “GDit, Gary, keep your mouth shut, and stop complaining. Mel, we are sorry, gonna take care of things. It literally drove them all nuts. Their supposed perfectly tuned ears were abused. It was the best punishment one could do. Lawrence Welk and the band, was worse than being “horse whipped”.

Actually the environment in the clay room was about 90% good all the time. We laughed most of the time. Kids were comfortable, happy and they could all see progress in their own work. There were stories, demos, music and success. The big kids helped the new kids. If a new kid threw clay on the wall, four senior boys would go over and pick him up. Set him down and explain that they threw clay onto one of the boys clean up space. The next time you mess the room, you will have a bloody nose. After the third week of school they all knew the rules. The rules of the kids that ran the clay room. I never had to do anything. They owned the clay, the wheels and the kilns. It was their property, not mine. I had a great studio at home. When you give ownership to the kids, they take it and care for it as their own.

One of my great visual memories was the “homecoming queen “of Hopkins High sitting at a wheel and being taught by a “special Ed kid” that was severely dyslexic.

Reading was not needed in the clay room. He was an A+ student. There are so many ways to be “Brilliant.”

My life as a teacher was total joy. If there was trouble, Lawrence Welk showed up and helped me. Laughing was my tonic all the time. And my best saying is, “I loved working with kids, laughing with kids, being a teacher of kids. I hated schools.”

A great metaphor. I had a very nice red tool box in the back room of the clay room, and it was filled with fine hand tools. Socket set, pliers and hammers and wrenches. It was the stuff I need to fix things in the room. I bought that

tool box in 1953 when I was at South Junior High. I kept adding fine tools to the box.

Often a boy would come to me and say. "Mel, can I take the toolbox home tonight as I have to repair my bike, and we do not have tools at home." "Sure Mike, just have it back in the morning." It came back. Hundreds of kids took that box home at night. Sometimes for the entire weekend to work on an old car. The kids loved that tool box because there was only one toolbox in their life.

When I left teaching in 1992 I took the tool box home with me, it was mine. And not a thing was missing. That ½ inch socket was still there. That slip wrench for plumbing with the blue tape of the handles was still there...30 years old.

What is the answer to the question of WHY? "TOTAL TRUST"

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