

## Hand work

(Written 9Dec2019)

The first thing I ever carved was a set of nested lifeboats for a model of a sailing ship I had built. My sister's cat had snacked on the plastic lifeboats that came with the kit and I was determined that my U.S.S. Constitution would be complete and correct in every detail. So I searched the woods by our house until I found what seemed a suitable fallen tree branch, sharpened (well, sort of) my pocket knife on a stone (okay, on a rock I found in our back yard) and set to whittling.

It took me a couple of after-school evenings to produce three – I think it was three – little boats, the longest of which was maybe two inches in length. The work involved a level of careful craftsmanship that at first I thought was beyond my ten year old reach. And sure enough, my first attempts produced null results, unless you are impressed by the fact that I still bear the scar on my fingertip from an errant knife stroke. But the false starts were learning experiences and eventually, I found myself able to transform a piece of wood that would float into a piece of wood with one pointy end and hollowed out shell that would also float.

Fast forward six decades and I find myself carving wood once again. Carving with actual sharp tools on basswood blanks and trying my hand at more intricate designs, but the learning process is the same.

Counterintuitive as it may seem, carving wood by hand is one of the activities that is not much hindered by essential tremor or my seriously arthritic left thumb. Because carving, if you're doing it right is less about force than control. And leaning my wrist on the workpiece when I need to is part of the plan. I hope to become reasonably competent and not only because it's an area of craft that will continue to be within my reach (yes, pun intended) as I continue to age out of so many things. But also because I truly hope to include carved ornamentation in some of the furniture projects on my horizon. A nice arcade on an armoire, perhaps or a shell motif on a center drawer, a la Frank Klausz.

But even if my competence never supports such grandiose achievements, I will continue practicing. Because at my age, it's all and always about the process.