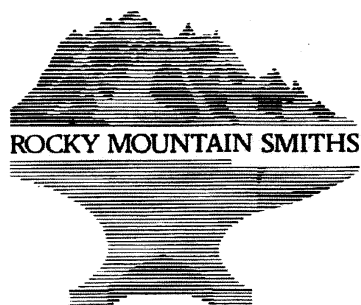


FORGE FACTS





EDITOR'S NOTE

Forge Facts is published quarterly to help RMS accomplish its main objective, educating its members. Forge Facts aims to educate and encourage blacksmiths of all skills and interest levels. It is the member's job to provide much of the material for each issue. Keep in mind that there is no such thing as a stupid submission! All ideas, articles, photographs, and letters to the editor are welcome. *Submissions are accepted at anytime!*

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Next Deadline: May 1, 2013

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Joe Burleigh is our featured artist this month

On the cover is “King Maker” by Joe Burleigh. Below is a detail of the eye.

Joe Burleigh is the quiet guy you see at every conference. A man of few words and a lot of good iron work. Introduce your self if you haven't met him yet, you won't meet a more congenial smith.

This is his story in his own words about how he became a professional Carbondale area blacksmith.



I grew up in Grand Junction Colorado, the son of two pioneering southerners who were looking for the good life out west. I was number 5 of 7 kids .There were a lot of large families in GJ in the sixties. My father was an MD but he made sure us kids had plenty of experience with dirt bikes and horses and trampolines and boats and the like. I went to parochial school through the 6th grade, after which I was flung into the public school system. In high school Vo-Tech was still well funded. Among the classes I was able to take besides woodshop, was machine shop and silversmithing. For some reason I skipped welding and Auto-body. I had always loved drawing and painting but the metalwork was especially satisfying. I really enjoyed that kind of hands on work and the gratification of making new objects of my own design. I made my dad a giant ball peen hammer on the lathe which he was very impressed with. After high school I was accepted to CU Boulder. I was still very interested in art and design, taking fine art painting and silversmithing but I just didn't have the confidence that I could make a decent living as an artist.

I finally declared for a degree in what was then called Environmental Design. Most of the students in that program were planning to go on for a degree in Architecture or Landscape Architecture or some type of Urban Planning. By graduation I had managed to borrow enough money to make me a bit nervous about ever paying it back. It didn't help that the year was 1982 and the economy was in a bit of a down cycle. So rather than go on in school and thus further into debt, I moved to Florida and foundered about for a while longer trying my hand at landscaping, rental cars, and solar hot water systems. The latter seemed to be in my field and I learned quite a lot about plumbing hot water systems with copper pipe. Whilst doing this my mother alerted me to a Colorado Mountain College program in Glenwood Springs teaching solar applications. This seemed like a very promising field rife with good jobs so I signed up. I was now back in Colorado and after the one year solar program I landed a job weatherizing low income houses and after that I got a summer job as a fish squeezer(creel census) for the DOW.



When that ended I noticed that an outfit called “Myers and Company Architectural Metals” had a running ad at the Job Service Center in Glenwood Springs for blacksmiths. I was not a blacksmith but I was sure willing to learn. I remember seeing some of Albert Paley’s work and thinking I would love to be able to do that kind of stuff. I got a job interview and took some of my silver work up to Basalt. They liked me, especially the fact that I was willing to work cheap to learn the trade. Bob Myers himself called me back and told me I could start right away. It seems like I was grinding pipe rails for the first two years but the Blacksmithing shop was open after hours for anybody who wanted do their own projects and I spent a lot of time there. Even though a good grinder is hard to find Ken Hambel got me transferred to the Blacksmithing Department where I was given plenty of interesting work, including lots of forging with coal and gas and with the little Kuhn 50lb or the Nazel 5b which is the biggest hammer I have ever worked with.



The Mid-Continent mine in Redstone produced some of the finest metallurgical coal in the world up into the early 90’s and I was charged with going to the mine loadout in Carbondale to get coal for the forges. I was allowed to scoop coal off of the railroad tracks to fill up our coal bin. At that time it was going for \$70 a ton but they gave it to us for free.

Besides Myers and Co employing many talented welders and fitters and fabricators from throughout the valley, also brought in all sorts of talented blacksmiths whom I got to work with, including Ralph and Gunter from Germany and Boris from Russia. Gunter taught me how to forge pipe and tube, which I still consider my specialty. I like being able to get the volume without the weight. Another thing I learned at Myers was good record keeping as far as how I did something and how long it took, and personal protection. I cannot work in the shop until I have my glasses on and earplugs in. Actually I should probably thank OSHA for the ear plugs.

Around 1989 (not positive about that date) Francis Whittaker moved his shop from Aspen to the Colorado Rocky Mountain School. That is also the year my wife Debra and I moved to Carbondale, where we raised our two kids Hannah and Raleigh and have lived ever since.

Francis presented his first conference in 1990 and I was there for that one and all of the rest while Francis was alive. That is when I learned that Bob Myers had worked with Francis at the Mountain Forge in the 70's in Aspen. I think that Francis was our last living link to the old ways of creating beautiful iron in the traditional ways. He had worked with old masters like Julius Schramm and Samuel Yellin in his youth. But he did it all, even teaching welding to the men and women who put together the Liberty ships during WW2. Before the Liberty Ships the big boats were always riveted together, but in the interest of speed they tried welding and it worked. In a way Francis spawned Bob Myers who spawned me and countless other competitors. If I hadn't answered that ad, who knows where I would be now.



Joe in the background with Francis at the forge

Francis let Bill Dawe teach blacksmithing classes in his shop for a while through our local community college, Francis even taught a couple of the classes himself and I was lucky enough to take them. My uncle told me he was the city attorney for Carmel, California when Francis was on the city council. I asked Francis if he remembered Uncle Bill and he did. That was the end of the conversation, but I thought it was kind of neat, small world.



Joe's "Bird Watching Bench"

“Whirl Hot Steel”



And the propane tank ends it was made of.

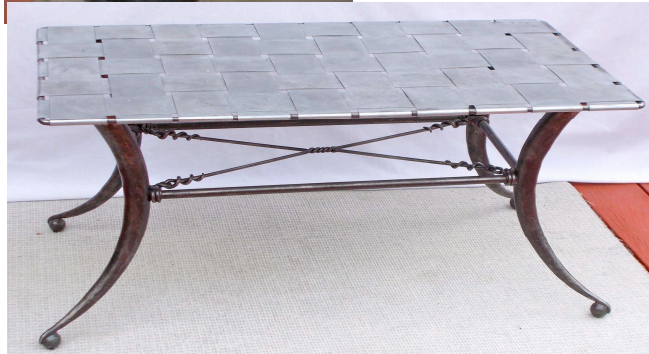




After moving to Carbondale I ran across an outfit called the Roaring Forge which was run by John Hoffmann. Right on the door it said "a Cooperative". It sounded like a dream come true to me. One day while I was casing the place I noticed that they had purchased a Sahinler pneumatic power hammer. That was all I needed to do my favorite thing, which was forging pipe, so I asked John if they had room for one more and he said that they just might. I lobbied the other members and started there in 1994 and I have been there ever since. Luckily the economy was on an upswing so there was work for everybody. We paid the rent for years on the sales of our "Natures Abundance" chandeliers. Which we all worked on. It has worked very well for me. while there is plenty of room to grow the mind and spirit and the overhead is about as low as it gets, the possibility of physical expansion is limited just because there is no space either for lots of large tools or lots of inventory or employees. If I need help there is usually someone there to lend a hand or an opinion. If I need more help the going rate is \$50 an hour. So I am pretty much a one man operation and it does not take much to keep me busy. Most of my work is return customers or word of mouth or random luck. But when I do find myself with time, I try to make art. Many of the towns around here have street art programs where they will pay an honorarium for durable, safe sculpture which can be displayed outdoors. usually for one year. Everything is for sale and even if it doesn't sell I look at the public exposure as my advertising. Being accepted can be a challenge, though. Even if I have the greatest sculpture I have to sell it with my pictures and artist statement and the like. Rejection can be tough, but I try not to take it personally. It only means my sculpture may need further refinement or I need to try a different venue or my sales job wasn't good enough or maybe my sculpture looks like an arm breaker. The important thing is that I like it and there is still room in the back yard for more. In any case, the art is something I can do my whole life. And that is something that Francis taught me. Art is long, life is short, get going.



More of Joe's work





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