

Five Guys Leave Home

By Rod Fraser



Five Easy Pieces

In the past, I've sold many of my little figures while carving near the lake each summer. If I had any left over, a fellow named Pervez was always willing to purchase them for a bargain basement price of \$5 each.

Here's the way it worked. When I accumulated ten or more carvings, I'd call Pervez to let him know. Then I'd meet him, he'd take the carvings and I'd take the money. Easy peasy.

Pervez told me he drove a school bus part-time and gave (or sold) my carvings to the teachers at his school. In turn, they distributed them to the children. I don't know if they were given directly to the kids to take home, or if they merely were among the toys and artifacts that were part of their 'learning through play' program.

From my point of view, it didn't matter. I was happy to part with the carvings. I carve quite a number each year, so selling them (or giving them away) is my way of keeping my work space clean and tidy.



Carving work area in Basement

I confess I'm a minimalist. That's why I was attracted to carving lil' guys in the first place. You only need a few hand tools, the wood used for carving is easily stored in a USPS

flat rate box and your work area can be limited to a small table in the basement (as you can see in the above picture). If I move to an apartment at some future time, an easy chair in the corner will be my workshop.

My wife claims my minimalist ways are annoying. She once accused me of ripping each page from a book, once I had read it, in order to keep my clutter to a minimum. "Don't need that page anymore", she would mimic.



This year, curiously enough, Pervez wasn't interested in buying my carvings. And Covid-19 eliminated my sales at 'Carve in the Park'. So throughout 2020, my inventory has accumulated, as I cast about for a means of clearing my shelves.

Fortunately, my daughter teaches kindergarten at a school on the outskirts in Stratford. When I asked if she was interested in some of my little guys, she replied enthusiastically to send them along.

I packed them in a small box (three layers of five carvings), each layer separated from the other using an old tea towel. Then after paying \$18.61 for postage, the box found its way to Stratford three days later.

The carvings turned out to be a hit, as you will see in the pictures below. Lisa told me the kids had quite a morning; it

was the first time her class had ever received a package to open and explore, let alone one containing a number of small figures for them to play with. Here is a summary of how Lisa described things,

Our school, 'Mornington Central Public School', is about 30 miles north of Stratford. There are 9 classes this year, and about 170 students.

Our numbers keep changing with some students switching to online learning, and others returning (after a time) to attend classes at the school. The studentry is largely rural, with some kids from smaller towns and villages.

Our students are mostly Old Colony Mennonites (not to be confused with Old Order Mennonites) and Dave Martin Mennonites. I am still learning about the different sects of Mennonites, so I'm not really qualified to describe them yet. I'll send you along a couple of good articles to read about them, if you are interested.

The kids really enjoy playing with your little guys, so if you ever feel like carving little Moms, Grandmas or young Kiddos, my kids would love those too. It's always fun to play 'house' with a 'family'.

All in all, I love being at my school. Being transferred here was the best thing that could have happened to me.



Lisa's students with my box of carvings.



Flushed with this apparent success, I wondered if older carvers might find this story of kids playing with small carvings interesting. Would it make them nostalgic for their yesteryears — when young peoples' lives were full of authentic wooden toys and artifacts? Would it make them curious about life in a small Mennonite community?

To test this thinking, I decided to post the picture shown below — along with a little rhyme — to the '*Woodcarving Illustrated Forum*' to see the reaction of carvers.

Two weeks after posting the rhyme and picture, and providing a supplementary explanation of the whole story, I received three likes, 140 views and 15 responses. Not a bad response as these things go.



Five Guys Leave Home

These lil' guys are cute and quite cool.
But they'll soon be sent off to a faraway school.

I have too much stuff, so it's clear they must go.
To find a preschooler, either a Carol or Joe.

Kids love lil' carvings, they'll treat them quite well.
They'll be put on a shelf in the house where they dwell.

The school will receive them by the end of the week.
To cheer up the preschoolers, when the weather's so bleak.

Most carvers were interested in the story and a few thought they might send some carvings of their own to a local school. One carver said, "Makes cleaning up the chips worthwhile."



So there it is. This is just one story of how my life changed (albeit modestly) during the past year. I don't think I'm alone. I suspect older people everywhere have taken up the burden of adjusting their lives — perhaps in only minimal ways — to new realities. I'm hoping you have done just that, have a story to tell and might like to share it with me.

I can use this website to write a few of these stories. And to the extent they appeal to the readership, I'd be interested in writing one or two for the *'Ontario Woodcarver'* magazine.

History is being made in the year 2020, You should be a part of it. Your stories may well be of interest to family, friends and others in your community. I expect they will be a small — but vital — part of the historical record.

Here is a thought to spur you on. Stories that aren't written are soon forgotten. Why not get it down on paper — now? What have you got to lose?

November 15, 2020.