

Lowdown on the Lockdown

By Rod Fraser



Socializing in the Early Days after 'The Big Stop'.

It's a pity I didn't take this picture in March, when Ken Beckberger and I drove up to Brooklin once or twice a week, to sip lattés and chat in the Tim's parking lot, often for two or three hours. Clearly we were starved for conversation and company. With winter coats, hats and scarves, we each sat in our respective cars, holding court through the driver's seat window, until our bladders told us to head home for a washroom break.

This happened shortly after 'The Big Stop', that day in mid-March when the world decided to put

millions out of work, in the hopes of slowing the spread of Covid-19.

While there are many opinions on the wisdom of that policy, let's leave that for another time. Today, I'd like to write about how three elderly woodcarvers (and one whippersnapper) coped with the lockdown.



Ken and I were regular luncheon partners before 'The Big Stop'. Every Wednesday, after carving at the Port Perry club, we would walk over to *The Pantry Shelf* for lunch and conversation.

When the Port Perry club closed down for Covid-19, I asked Ken if he was up for some 'rogue' activity. I suggested we meet at Tim's in Brooklin, park our cars to face in opposite directions, open our windows and chat, all while observing the social distancing standard of two metres.

It seemed to work very well. Refreshments at Tim's added to the occasion. And it felt so '*damn good*' to get out of the house.

As the weather warmed and the restrictions eased, we decided to relocate to a small park nearby. There was a picnic table available, and we were soon carving once a week. By this time, Tim's had opened a washroom, so that solved the bladder problem. Washroom facilities, breakfast biscuits, donuts, lattes, a venue for carving and

companionship. What else matters?



Rod Fraser with his carvings in Brooklin.

Ken told me at the front end of our meetings in March he was nervous about the virus. He is over eighty years of age and has a tendency to pick up colds easily. His natural inclination was to stay home and be safe.

But when he saw how well visiting through our car windows worked, his social side kicked in. He wanted to 'Get Carving Back Again'. As the weather turned warm, and we discovered a little park near Tim's, Ken pushed to start up our little carving club of two. I was only too willing. It worked out great.

We met each week, usually on Tuesdays, at 9:30 am. Ken was most often there when I arrived. Then while I ate my breakfast and sipped my latté, Ken would regale me with all his news of the week.

Soon we were at work carving away, chatting intermittently. Ken worked on his golfer shown in the picture below. I carved my four inch little guys, shown above.

After three hours, we packed up and left for home. But not before noting what a treat it was to be out and carving during the lockdown. "Can't wait for next week," Ken said.



Ken Beckberger working on his golfer in Brooklin.



On March 14, 2020, I met with Ray Popkie for coffee at the Oshawa Mall food court. The world was still operating somewhat normally, so we thought nothing of it. Two days later, the province announced 'The Big Stop'. Ray cancelled our Wednesday coffee meeting. "Too dangerous", he said.

Ray and his wife used the shutdown to go birding over the next few weeks. He would bird for a while, then head back to the car to rest and carve. He used a towel to catch the wood chips, put Rush Limbaugh on the radio, placed a water bottle on standby and picked up a piece of walnut to carve into a cowboy. If you look closely at the picture below, you'll see the cowboy on the table.



Ray Popkie carving at Lakeview Park.

I didn't see much of Ray in those cold days of March and April, but I kept in touch by telephone. As the foliage developed in the trees and the birding season came to an end, Ray also expressed interest in carving outdoors.

Ray can be a difficult guy. So it wasn't easy to agree on our approach to this modest form of 'civil disobedience.' But with a little prodding and

reasoned debate, Ray soon agreed to meeting at Lakeview Park in Oshawa, sitting in lawn chairs (all the picnic benches were locked away), and bringing along a small table to hold his carving tools.

I brought along a latté and donuts. Ray usually ate breakfast at home, so he carried a water bottle to sip during the morning.

Now when Ray goes out to carve, it is more or less a 'figure of speech.' He doesn't actually carve anything. He uses his carving time to talk of politics, his early days in Eastern Ontario, his interest in art and music, carving shows and winning ribbons. Sometimes he chats about his wife and children, and the odd time, I hear a little about his years at General Motors.

It is a comfortable form of conversational banter. I am used to it and it makes the time pass quickly. Before long, three hours are gone and it is time for Ray to get home for lunch. We pack up and make arrangements for another meeting next Wednesday.



During the lockdown, I received an email from my grandson, Peter Meszaros. About six years ago, I gave him and his brother carving kits, consisting of a couple of gouges, glove, strop and a carving knife.

Peter has always been busy with music, school-work and part time jobs. So he thanked me for the

carving kit, glanced at it from time to time, but showed no interest in pursuing carving as a hobby.

So it was a great surprise when his email included a picture of a 'boot' he had carved during the lockdown. It was nicely done, as you will see from the picture below. Peter explained he didn't have much to do recently, so he picked up his carving kit, found a cut-out of a boot I had given him and proceeded to finish it.



Boot Carved by Peter Meszaros.

I was pleased with Peter's initiative and his skill carving the boot. His experience shows that many people might well turn to woodcarving when they

have available time, opportunity, a few tools and someone who has shown them the basics.



Peter Meszaros with Carving Tools in Stratford.

I'll finish my article with a picture of two carvings, one of each done by Ken and Ray. I suspect the only reason they agreed to this article was to see their carvings nicely displayed in the next issue of *Ontario Woodcarver*.



Cowboy Carved by Ken Beckberger.



A Work-in-Process by Ray Popkie.

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