



CROSSED HEART FORGE: LET HAMMER ON ANVIL RING!

by David Morrison

"The country blacksmith has left behind him the memory of a strongly individualistic, boasting, swearing, noisy man who associated mostly with other men and worked with percussion tools." - J.C. Dupont

This excerpt from The Canadian Encyclopedia's history of blacksmithing entry evokes images of a certain type of male once engaged in the ancient trade of working with fire and steel. Dupont's curious concluding overview paints a picture of a bigheaded, macho brute – a grizzled old boy toughened by innumerable hammer swings, only able to relate to other sweaty men who 'understand.' This nostalgic perspective also implies that the blacksmith is long gone and forgotten, now merely a memory, his services no longer required by the modern world. Indeed, it is sadly true that blacksmiths are a comparative rarity in Canada circa 2013, but there are certainly still some around, most obviously in rural communities. In fact, not far from where you are likely reading this, a talented young man is unknowingly doing his damndest to challenge Dupont's notion and stereotype, contemporarily blacksmithing up a storm out of a friend's barn in Errington!

Dave Friesen (a.k.a. 'Davej') may be just 35 years-old, but he has already been blacksmithing for over twenty years. As a true artist he definitely possesses the individualism of which Dupont speaks, but that's pretty much where any parallels end. Friesen might be a blacksmith – a brilliant one at that – but he is also an articulate, super-intelligent, cool, modern, skateboarding guy who designs and builds stunning websites, his own (URL below) being a prime example.

While Friesen can craft pretty much anything imaginable from metal, his specialty is knives, many inspired by traditional Japanese design aesthetics. The famous Japanese TV chef, Masaharu Morimoto, once said: "Japanese chefs believe our soul goes into our knives once we start using them," and when you see Friesen's knives you will believe that his soul has gone into creating them. He uses only found materials, and when I met him at his small forge on a damp Saturday morning in March, he

continued on page 10

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continued from page 6

was working on a knife made from a piece of old metal, an old silver spoon, partially fossilized cow bone, spalted pear tree wood and stingray skin, all held together with rice glue and tree sap glue. Even in pieces, awaiting assembly, it was magnificent.

In explaining his *modus operandi*, Friesen says: "I take discarded pieces of old rusty steel from farm equipment, sawmills etc. and turn it into functional and/or collectible art knives, mostly handwork right from the making of the charcoal from construction scraps to fuel the forge, all the way to the final polishing and assembly." As an advocate of creative recycling, you will imagine I am excited by Friesen's working methods and creative processes. I was also very interested to discover how it all began for him so young... and why metal?

"Since I was a boy I think I've always been a maker of things in general, so I was trying lots of stuff," he begins. "The nature of working with metal is different; when you cut a piece of wood, you're done, but when you bend a piece of metal you can always readjust the bend. Stone carving is subtractive, but when you're forging

it's a metamorphosis. You're just taking what's there and changing the shape, not taking away or adding.

This process seemed to attract me, and I like making knives because they're some steel, some other kind of metal like copper or brass, and some wood, all together. And when you're fourteen it's not, 'I gotta do this,' or 'this could be a job,' or 'I could do this,' it's just all the same. It's about the age you're supposed to try all sorts of stuff, and you're not afraid to fail."

Key to Friesen's development was a brief, yet profound period of study under the tutelage of career blacksmith, Emmanuel A. Schrock (1924-2003), in an Amish community in Fredericksburg, Ohio.

"I was interested in knife making and Japanese knives because of a social studies class, so I was already working with metal. I'd got to the point where I could not do it cold anymore; I had to learn the hardening and tempering and needed fire to take it to the next level. My parents thought I'd been doing it long enough that I was serious about learning, so instead of a big trip at the end of Junior High, they arranged for me to spend a couple of weeks with this guy, who was a friend of a friend of theirs. I can't imagine if you wanted to become a blacksmith how you'd do it; could you even find anyone? But this guy was dyed in the wool, a blacksmith his whole life.

Because this was an Amish community they still needed a blacksmith, they needed horseshoes and things fixed rather than replaced, so he was working similarly to a blacksmith from a century ago. It was amazing to find someone like that who was willing to take on a 14 year-old kid and show him how it's done for two weeks. After I'd learned with Mr. Schrock, I came back and started my own little business and for almost ten years I was fortunate to work with a handmade furniture shop in Calgary that turned my hobby into a business, helping me to pay for university tuition and such. I was also going to university getting a teaching degree, thinking teaching may be more long-term than being a blacksmith!"

Long story short, Friesen ended up teaching for many years in Japan, where he met his wife, Tamaki. "The thing with Japan is that I never knew how long I was going to be there," he explains. "It was tentative for the first few years, so I didn't want to start shipping tools over – 2,000lbs of steel! – and workshop space in Japan is so dear, so I never thought about blacksmithing there."

Returning to Canada the couple relocated to Vancouver Island and, after finding a suitable space for a forge, Friesen picked up where he left off – passing on some skills to his wife in the process. She now makes beautiful metal buttons as a natural extension of a longstanding hobby, and it has become another aspect of the 'creative agency' that is the Crossed Heart Forge. "I wasn't making buttons before I met Dave," says Tamaki. "I always liked collecting regular plastic buttons, but he's a blacksmith and one day we had a copper piece so I asked how I could make a button with it. He taught me how to do it and it was fun, so I kept doing it!"

Watching Friesen at work in his forge is a fascinating experience, undeniably amplified by an unavoidable nostalgic joy at seeing him create such beauty by employing centuries-old methods, just like the late Mr. Schrock and so many before him. And the heat, the sparks, the sound of metal on metal as the red hot knife blade takes shape under the hammer - it's all compelling. "There's something about blacksmithing that intrigues people," nods Friesen in appreciation. "When we do a demo it's fire, it's metal, it's... how do I put this? It's... elemental, I guess!"

For further information about Dave and Tamaki's work at Crossed Heart Forge, please spend some time exploring islandblacksmith.ca. Dave's knives and Tamaki's buttons are for sale at various Central Vancouver Island outlets, including the Salish Sea Market in Bowser, T.O.S.H. in Qualicum Beach and Smashin' Glass in Parksville. Work available for sale can also be viewed on the Crossed Heart Forge website. Dave and Tamaki can be contacted at info@islandblacksmith.ca



NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

You are cordially invited to the Annual General Meeting of the Oceanside Hospice Society.

The board will present financial statements for the year ended December 31, 2012, as well as March 31, 2013, in readiness for a change in our year end.

AGM packages can be emailed or will be available to pick up at our offices after March 31, 2013. Members will then be asked to elect the Board of Directors for the 2013 - 2014 calendar year.

Memberships are available through the office.

Dues are \$15 each. Only paid members are eligible to vote.

We look forward to having you join us for refreshments after the meeting.

Date: Thursday, April 25, 2013

Time: 7:00 - 8:00 pm

Place: Valhalla, 210 Crescent Road West, Qualicum Beach, BC V9K 2L7

Please RSVP

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