

## WRITING AND SCULPTING

For the past 15 years I have been writing my “story.” It gives me something to do in my retirement. I look back on my life and try to remember my childhood, my growing up, my friends, my family, my work etc. One of my memories dealt with my involvement with sculpting.

Thinking about sculpting, I began to see similarities between writing and sculpting. They both involve “creating.” You start with an idea and try to shape it, try to form a final product that has substance and that transmits the concept that you had in mind. In writing, you work with words; in sculpting I did, you work with clay.

But there is something more. You think about what you want to create, and plan how you want to go about it. When I begin to sculpt, I first construct an armature. When I begin to write, I first search my memory, trying to pinpoint what I want to recapture. Now that I have the armature, I start to add clay. When I have the idea of the story I want to tell, I start to put it into words. The armature is on a sculpting stand, and I keep turning it around, so that the sculpture truly reflects all aspects of the model. As I write, I keep thinking about the people, the event, the period, turning them around in my head, trying to make sure I am capturing every aspect of the story I am trying to tell.

I then reach the point when I feel I have added enough clay, and have used enough words. The sculpture looks like the model, more or less. The story captures the moment, more or less. Now comes the taking away. The refining. In sculpting, I found myself removing some clay here, or adding some clay there. But mostly taking away. (Sculptors who work in wood or marble are always taking away. Michelangelo claimed that the figure was inside the marble and his job was to extract it.) For writers, the story is inside their head. They put down a lot of words in telling the story. Now comes the taking away, the editing.

What you are now reading started when I realized that the act of editing was much like completing a piece of sculpture. In both cases, you reread, reexamine, reflect, and realize that you can make it better, usually by removing. Some may say, “simplifying.” In writing, I tend to go off on tangents, telling too much that may be irrelevant, that may distract from the story. In sculpting, in trying to capture the likeness, I may have exaggerated, so the work may require softening, more subtlety. Again, simplifying. It is a hard lesson to learn.

I claim to be neither a writer nor a sculptor. I dabble. I have the tools that writers and sculptors use, but that does not make me one of them. I get pleasure doing both, but I am keenly aware of the difference between the artist and the amateur. I hope that my attempts enable me to appreciate good writing and good sculpting. It certainly makes me aware of my limitations.

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