

Remembrance for David Lang

In 2012, I called David, whom I had only recently met, and said, “I need help building a mechanism that will make a real horseshoe crab tail move back and forth on top of a photo of a female crab laying her eggs in the sand.” As if it were the most normal request in the world, he replied, “Well, come on over to the shop!”

When I arrived, he dropped everything he was doing and spent the next two hours soldering a complex web of copper-coated steel welding rods, brass tubing and gold-plated copper wire inside a wooden box. A crank on the outside did exactly what I had envisioned. I named the finished piece “Sand Angel,” and submitted it to a show called “Scratching the Surface” at the Cambridge Art Association. It won the Director’s Prize.

“The meaning of life is to find your gift. The purpose of life is to give it away.” I’ve never met anyone who embodied those words more than David. Just as he knew he possessed the gifts of being able to draw, paint and sculpt, he understood his purpose was to impart them – which he did, generously, carving time out to share not only his knowledge and expertise, but his tools, supplies and space – with everyone.

Though our brains limit each of us to managing a maximum of 150 friends, David's neocortex worked overtime: He had 2,248 Facebook friends and was indefatigable – stopping by, calling, e-mailing and texting friends and family at every turn. And if you didn't respond immediately, he'd call again moments later to ask if you'd gotten his text, or text to ask if you'd gotten his voice mail message. I'm going to miss saying, "Yes, David. I got your text of the photo of that chewed gum in the parking lot of Home Depot that looks like Mother Teresa."

He became my mentor and I was lucky to benefit from his instruction and advice. We spoke the same language and laughed our heads off about his pieces made out of bed pans and wiggly, rubber, blue worms, and mine from old teeth molds and battery-operated plastic cats – modified to give our current president a special salute. My favorite phrase of his, which he would say after inspecting the results of one of my newly-acquired skills, was "close enough for Government work."

Barely a day went by in his studio without him pausing, looking around, sighing, and saying, "I LOVE this shop." It was a mess. But it was a great, big, beautiful mess – crammed with machinery, doll parts, old crutches, gears, rusted scissors, pulleys, moss-covered shoes, broken clocks, toy cars and a ceramic plaque that read, "Jesus loves you, but I'm his

favorite.” And he relished being at the center of the clutter. Like Geppetto, he was the avuncular figure who delighted in sharing the wonders of his work, especially with children -- *most especially* his beloved grandchildren. Swapping Pinocchio’s strings for wire and metal rods, he mesmerized visitors during Natick Open Studios – or any time, really – with his motorized, wheeled, winged contraptions that made miniature plastic pigs fly, and clams snap open and shut.

David loved his studio so much that, three years ago, he transported his workbench and as many tools and supplies as he could muster – including half-drunk Starbucks coffee cups – to the Boston Sculptors Gallery, recreating his workspace for a show called “The Shop.”

His last exhibition at the gallery, entitled “Journey,” featured two sets of giant, spoked wheels hanging from the ceiling, rotating slowly thanks to the efforts of a tiny, wooden, bespectacled figure who pedaled away on the chassis, his gaze fixed intently forward. Above him, a pair of large, white, paper wings slowly undulated to a video featuring footage of birds, blue sky and stars. The last thing David posted on his Facebook page was a video of this Everyman and the caption “Forward.” His journey hasn’t ended. He’s still out there, pedaling.