



Reflections Cast in Bronze

Richard Arnold, Sculptor

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They are hardly ever short stories, but sculptor Richard Arnold's stories are well worth the wait. This particular one begins in San Diego, when he was five years old, shortly after his father passed away. Arnold's mother, a school teacher, figured the beach would be a safe place for her son as he grew older, so during the day Arnold hung out with the lifeguards. The group of young men took on the role of surrogate fathers and loaned Arnold their surfboards. They taught him to dive and gave him advice. "Now Richard," they would say, "if you smoke cigarettes you won't be able to dive as deep."

Today, Arnold is a nationally renowned artist commissioned to create pieces all across the country. He spends many hours in his tranquil backyard studio, sculpting with purpose. His work is the product of his heart, first, and then his mind and his hands. He never creates a piece that doesn't have meaning, and this leads back to the lifeguards. "Now that I've made a name for myself, I wanted to do something to honor the lifeguards that were my surrogate fathers," Arnold said during a recent interview.

And so he created a 6'4" bronze statue of a lifeguard holding swim fins looking out to sea. The sculpture was installed on the beach where he grew up. The same surrogate fathers from his childhood helped pay for it. One donated \$100

and so did another and another. Word spread and in the end, the lifeguards raised \$20,000 more than was needed. They donated the extra money to the junior lifeguard program, the same program Arnold participated in as a youth. "It's one of my favorite pieces," Arnold explained.

Working with clay cast into bronze, he tells the stories behind each and every piece sitting on the counter or shelf or table as he leads the way through his home in Telluride. There are many more outside his home that were auctioned off for charity or donated to one cause or another. Every single day, people leaving or entering Telluride pass by his work—the sculpture of the little girl waiting for the bus in front of the public schools is an Arnold creation.

But when he tells about one of the pieces he is currently creating, he has to pause to wipe his eyes. It's a memorial that will be installed in Macon, Georgia. It all began with a phone call from a stranger. The person on the other end of the line expressed a desire for a memorial that focuses on survivor's guilt, a topic Arnold knows too much about.

Perhaps the most poignant sculptures he creates are Vietnam veteran memorials. As a Vietnam vet himself, he pours his emotions into the pieces. "The tears that come up when I have to work with vets who have been there... I try to translate the

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emotion into the final sculpture," Arnold said. "I talk to vets, hang out, let it soak in, photograph the models and interview them. Then I come back to the studio and work on it here."

Arnold never set out to be a sculptor. For 20 years he was a general contractor, then he spent a decade as an aviation flight instructor, a charter pilot and an airport manager. At age 50, with the encouragement of his wife, Dr. Marshall Whiting, he finally embraced his dreams of becoming an artist. He has never looked back.

Through his work, he rights the wrongs soldiers experienced after the Vietnam War. He welcomes veterans home with his memorials. He recognizes and understands the reality of survivors guilt. He paints a true portrait of pain, honor, pride and duty. With every piece, whether it's a lifeguard or a soldier, he pays great attention to detail, especially when it comes to faces. "You can look at an image of a person standing up or bending over, but when you look at the face, you're reading the story. You're looking at the tears on a Vietnam vet's face, or the sincerity of the lifeguard looking to see if someone is okay or a child waiting at the bus stop with a real sense of confidence," Arnold explained. "The sculpture has to be real. It has to be sincere."

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