Finding Peace: A Woodworker Creates

Photos by D'Marcus McDowell / Stone Fort Yearbook

Underneath a golden East Texas sky, an artist with long, dark hair wipes his brow with a gloved hand, taking a break from his project to view his surroundings. He breathes in the warm, fresh air Nacogdoches has to offer on a November afternoon. He swipes away a small pile of wood shavings, dusts his gloves off and, once again, dives into his work.

Dagon Blank is an interior design major from Nacogdoches. He has dabbled in several media, not limited to painting, drawing and sewing; but, his latest projects have focused mainly on woodworking and bringing fantasy to life. Blank draws inspiration from several sources including video games, music and other pop culture. However, the woman who nurtured his artistic soul and continues to influence his artwork was his grandma, Barbara Blank, who, after several battles with cancer, passed away in 2020.

Barbara also put her time into different media, but she would always return to painting. A free spirit, Dagon said his grandmother's house was filled with animal prints – cheetah, tiger and zebra; Barbara also had a love for elephants and Dagon lovingly deemed her "hippy-dippy."

"She beat cancer like three or four times, but it came back. She was like, I don't want to go to the hospital; I just want to be at my house, for my last few… however long I've got. So, we all kind of knew it was coming," Dagon said.

As a child, Dagon would regularly visit with his grandmother, admitting that he would often fake being sick to skip school and spend the day with her. Surrounded by animal prints and elephant figurines, the two would enjoy each other's company.

"I would go over to her house, and we'd pretty much hang out all day and get a – every time I was sick, she would go to Chicken Express and bring some back and we'd both sit there on the couch watching Cartoon Network or whatever, eating, and drinking a Dr Pepper together," Dagon said, reminiscing. "She would always say if I felt good, she would want to draw something with me; and we'd always sketch stuff. She had these little sketch books that we would sketch stuff out in."

"I think it's good to have those things that are an escape. Especially with how bad the world can get at times or how everything seems."

Now in college, Dagon spends his time woodworking in his family's garage at the end of a quiet cul-de-sac. He puts ear buds in, either listening to rock n' roll, country or whatever tune is calling to him that day, and begins his work, careful with the chisels and files his father loaned him. His father, Damon Blank, was formerly a carpenter, and Damon's father also did woodworking.

"If you look at my dad he'll have a toothpick in and have a little Clint Eastwood thing going on. You can tell he wants to be Clint Eastwood," Dagon said, with a little chuckle and a well-meaning smirk on his face.

The first project Dagon worked on was more for utility's-sake – a work bench he could craft on. Soon after, he designed an axe handle to fit an axe head that had a broken axe handle. Dagon carefully filed intricate designs into both the wood and metal of the axe. The design was inspired by "God of War," a video game in which the main character, Kratos, wields a weapon named the Leviathan Axe.

Dagon said he used the extra free time during the beginning of the COVID-19 quarantine to learn the new trade and found that before, some people may have never really thought of their home as somewhere they can truly relax and feel comfortable in. He also stressed the importance of having something in life to help you find peace.

"It was… maybe an epiphany I had over the summer, especially during quarantine. There's so much stuff going on with the world… Like when George Floyd was murdered, and I was going to protests and all this kind of stuff. I was stressed out, and then I'd come home and I'd have an urge to make something meaningful," Dagon said.

"You go to art and sometimes the art doesn't turn out how you want it, so it stresses you out even more. I found myself looking for things that I find comfort in, whether it was movies that I really like or TV shows… Woodworking is one of those things where I found comfort in it, just knowing that it's something my family has been doing for a long time.

"I think it's good to have those things that are an escape. Especially with how bad the world can get at times or how everything seems. I think looking for those kind of things is really important… having some kind of place where you can just be at peace for a little while."

(Top left) Using many tools to construct his projects, Dagon Blank rests them on the work bench he built with his dad. (Top right) Blank works on a project in his wordworking shop. (Above) Taking precautions to stay safe, Blake files designs into the blade of an axe.

Story by Meaghan Morton / Stone Fort Yearbook

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