

Rocky Forge News

Volume 5, issue 5 – May, 2006

This working for a living nonsense certainly keeps you from having any time or energy to get anything worthwhile done.

Next Meeting:

"The May meeting has been changed from Ted's shop to the Independence blacksmith shop. Ted signed up for an advanced blacksmithing class at Conner Prairie on architectural ironwork.

"The May meeting will begin at 9:00 with Jim Keith, assistant forge master. Leading the group. Remember we were going to work on eating utensils to be used when we eat at the Independence Heritage Festival on June 17th.

"For the May meeting you will want to bring a forge, anvil and tools. There is electricity available at the neighbor's house and a water spigot on the side of the house.

"The restaurant burnt out so you will need to bring your own food and drink. Have fun and I will see you at the June meeting."

Ted

Anyone with tools, plans, ideas or experience for making "Eating Tools" bring them. There is a swag block with a spoon shape at the Independence shop.

Last Meeting

April's meeting was an open forge session. John Huffman and his grandsons brought their "Hibachi forge" complete with hair drier. Ted had a clearance sale on leftover estate items consigned to him. Who can resist cheaper "junk"? Not much was made but a good time was had by all.

Upcoming Meetings

The June meeting will be June 17, during "Independence Days" in Independence IN.

The July meeting will be at the Illiana Steam and Power Show, July 22.

There was no August meeting last year and input is needed as to interest in an August meeting this year.

Events

May 27-29 - (Tentatively) I, David Childress, will be demonstrating at Billy Creek Village, Rockville IN.

June 3-4 -- IBA Conference, Tipton IN

August 9-20 -- Indiana State Fair, the IBA may be demonstrating at the Pioneer Village, Board decision not made yet.

August 19-20 -- Skinner's Historic Farm Days. Perrysville IN.

May 13-14 -- Conner Prairie is offering a artistic forging class- where Ted is going.

May 27-June 19 (Wednesday evenings) -- Conner Prairie is offering a knife making class.

Newsletter Insert

I received an E-Mail from Dominick Andrisani, as follows: (Edited for space)

Subject: "A Most Peculiar Affliction"

Please include the attached article in the next Rocky Forge Newsletter. Please list the following source: "The Anvil's Ring, Vol. XXIV, No. 3 The Quarterly of the Artist- Blacksmith's Association of North America, Winter 1996-97."

After much effort and several E-Mails Dominick verified permission to publish the article here. I have included the article and any resemblance between this editor and the author is purely coincidental.

I have not found a good method to deal with scanned articles other than inserting them in their entirety. If you have or know of something to handle these I would like to know how or what software.

David Childress

I will have an article next month on why Blacksmithing "died".

A MOST **peculiar** AFFLICTION

by Don Plummer

It is with great reluctance and even greater embarrassment that I have decided to come forth with this confession. But as I now drift into the decline of a life of otherwise insufferable mediocrity I feel obliged to share my horrid fetish with other blacksmiths in the hope that they may be saved.

I will lay it all out on the table now. I am an obsessed scavenger of scrap iron and steel. It has become an insanity, a travesty against human nature, a terrible all-consuming, purposeless passion. I know all this yet I cannot stop. I must have more. I've been like this for years and it has caused me great grief and pain. I only hope that you who read this tale will heed my warning and save yourself. It is now too late for me.

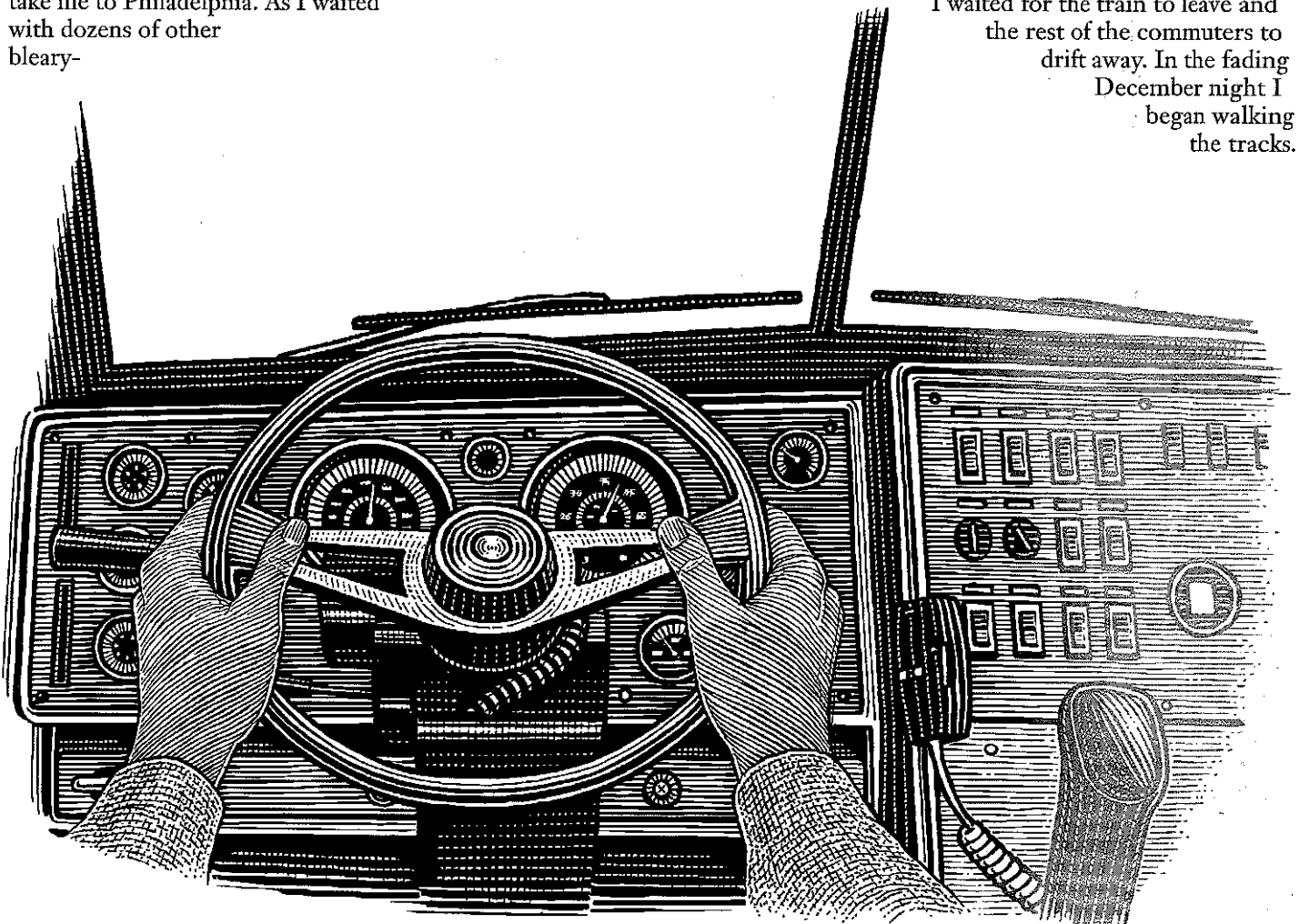
It was such an innocent thing at first. I remember it clearly. I was waiting for the commuter train to take me to Philadelphia. As I waited with dozens of other bleary-

eyed morning commuters my eyes fell to the ground and an old railroad spike lying at my foot. I picked it up and immediately felt an odd warmth that throbbed rhythmically and sped up my arm and through my body. I could not let go of it and stuffed my hand with the spike into my overcoat and boarded the train with intense excitement.

All the way into Philly I imagined the incredible things I could forge from this spike I had just found and which cost me nothing. A knife...certainly. Perhaps a few meat forks and spatulas...easy. Letter openers, dozens of nails, dragons and animals, a banjo, maybe a '73 Studebaker if I could find a few more. The possibilities were endless. I was very excited. I could hardly stay focused on my work in anticipation of getting back to the train stop that night and maybe finding another railroad spike.

Finally the day was over and I was there!

I waited for the train to leave and the rest of the commuters to drift away. In the fading December night I began walking the tracks.



I found one...and then another...and another, yet! My god, it was so exciting. Then I found something else. A big plate that is used to hold the tracks in place. It must have weighed four or five pounds. It was incredible, what a find! I imagined all the things I could make with it.

All too soon the light was gone and the winter night settled in. I staggered back to the car. One of the pockets of my new overcoat had ripped from the weight and had dumped the spikes over my expensive Florsheim shoes. I didn't care. I carried them in my arms. I was delirious with joy. Small drops of spittle rolled from the corners of my mouth and my dilated eyes flinched at the bright lights that had now come on. I was drugged and addicted. And thus did it all begin that evil winter's day almost two decades ago.

The affliction worsened as the years wore on. Soon thereafter I made a discovery that has haunted me more than any other symptom of the disease. I hesitate to even mention this for fear it will cost someone...as it has nearly cost me...their life and limbs. But confess I must.

As I was creeping into work one spring morning, locked in a four mile traffic jam that moved but two-three car lengths at a time, I noticed something in the road ahead of me. It looked like metal. As I got closer I saw it was a small piece of chain. When I was as close as I could get within the three lanes of trucks and cars I stopped quickly and jumped out midst blaring horns and screeching brakes to grab the little piece of iron. Racing back to the car with terrible curses and epithets ringing in my ears I threw it into the passenger side and sped ahead to regain the five or six car lengths I had lost. All the time I stared straight ahead to ignore the fierce glares and digital signals from the cars around me.

But I had the piece of chain. And it was much bigger than it looked from inside the car. It was over three feet long and all hardened 3/8" links. This was good. The experience was exhilarating in its danger. And then it hit me: might there be more? I began scanning the highway intently. I saw what looked like other good stuff but I couldn't get to it. Besides, the same people were still all around me in the jam. I became so intent in looking that I failed to notice the stopped traffic—twice! Twice I ran into the back of the same lady. No real damage, but I would have to say that she appeared to be a little irritated. Also a little nervous. She never took her eyes off the rear view mirror, waiting for me to run into her again. Unfortunately, while trying to watch me she ran into the car in front of her. People need to learn to keep their eyes on the road.

Anyway, that started a whole new scavenging regimen. It is incredible the amount of iron and steel lying along our nations highways. But all too soon of course, this innocent pastime became part of my obsession. It has become a terrible, terrible thing. I often drive the roads for hours

looking for stuff. I know where all the major rough spots are, within thirty miles, that can cause truck springs to break, chains to fall and poorly packed items to bounce loose. I cruise them regularly, sometimes twice a day. It consumes all my time.

Whenever we travel I am constantly watching the roads for scrap iron. I am a dreadful hazard out there as I drift from lane to lane, make sudden stops and abruptly speed up and slow down as I think I see things. Try to steer clear of me if you recognize me out there (badly banged up, feces brown, '84 Ranger). Also, I've noticed in the last few years that scanning the road as I drive makes me kind of dizzy and I'm often not as sure about what I am doing or where I am going. It's not as bad when I am with someone, but by myself I increasingly have trouble finding my way back home after one of these sessions.

I know I am in trouble here. Professionals have *told* me I am in trouble. Yet I must tell you with a certain amount of pride, that I have become very good at this thing...this disease...this torment. I can find iron where no one would think to look. Two years ago was a landmark for me. Buried deep in the weeds off of Route 202 (in southeastern Pennsylvania) I found two 1200 foot rolls of 1/16 inch by 4 foot. Yes, that's right—over 2400 feet of this strap. I had to come back with heavy shears and cut it into 10 foot lengths to get it into the truck. There was so much of it that I did something completely out of character. I decided to share it with a few other blacksmiths and several of us gathered hundreds of pounds of the stuff. Much of it remains there yet. I did the best I could. So far I figure I have used seven, maybe eight feet of the hundreds of feet of this stuff. But someday I will surely need it.

And so the sordid story goes. I now have tons of the stuff hidden under huge black tarps out back. (I also found the tarp after it had blown off a 22 ton stone-hauling rig along a major interstate). Much of it has now begun to sink into the ground from the weight of the tons on top. Generations of blacksmiths, yet unborn, will be able to work from this pile. And yet I must have more, always thinking I will need it for the next project. But of course there is no time for the next project. I am too busy scavenging iron and steel to have time to use it.

This is a cruel obsession. A dreadful, dreadful disease that robs one of mind, body and even morals. I have become a terrible person, evil and unmindful of others should they get in my way when I am sorely afflicted to get after the iron. Just one or two examples should serve to show what you might face if you don't catch this thing immediately. If you think you have it, call me right away. I can't help but if you have done some similar terrible things it would make me feel a little better.

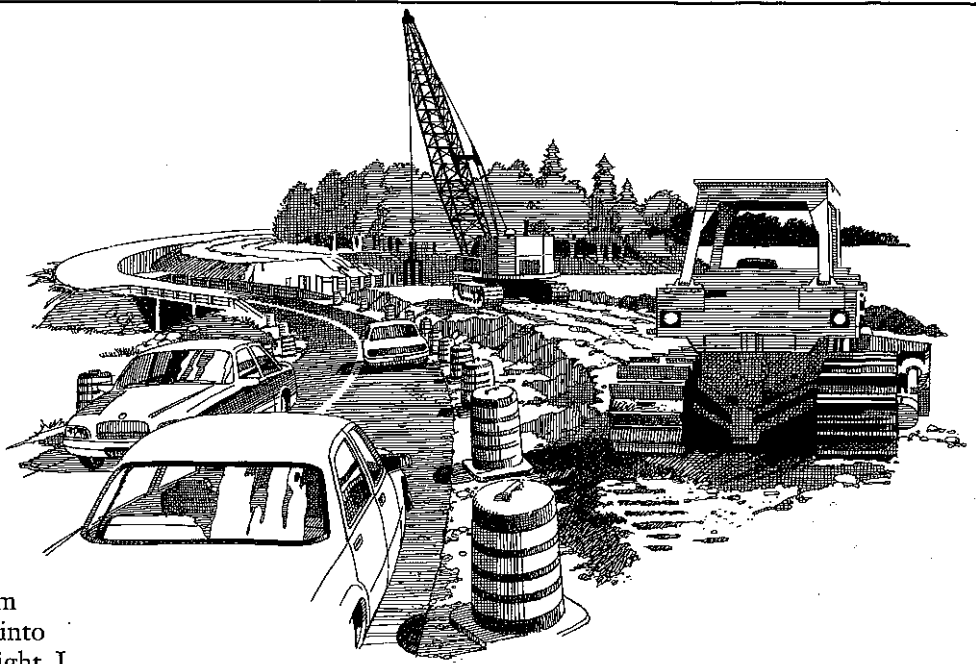
I was on my way to work exceptionally early one morning hoping that—before my boss arrived—I'd be able

to fix all the stuff I screwed up yesterday. There, in the very middle of the two-lane highway, was a truly fantastic find: a full 35 foot length of 3/8 inch chain. It was beautiful. I could hardly lift it into the trunk while trying to keep the rust and grime off my suit. I was so excited that I never even noticed the flatbed trailer furiously backing down the shoulder of the highway until I was back in the car and starting to speed out. A man jumped from the cab as I blasted by. His screams and futile, two-handed gestures meant nothing to me. I laughed it off in a crazed frenzy. I saw him jump into his truck and watched it lurch into the road as I sped over a hill and out of sight. I careened off the highway two exits early and never saw the truck again. I now have the chain. I've never used it but I'm sure someday I might. It makes me sick to think of what I have become.

There was also this incident. While vacationing in northern New Hampshire a few years back, I found that some of the small mountain communities still dump trash in local dumps. Of course, I had to go look. I told my wife we were going to look for bears, who often scavenge around the dumps. And there, just as I suspected, lay hundreds of feet of used wire cable. We were right in the midst of heavy logging country (north of Berlin, NH) where they use, break and discard tons of all sizes of cable used for hauling trees. I began stuffing it into the car. In the back seat, in the trunk, everywhere. But I kept finding more that was even better than what I had already loaded. I had to have it. Finally I decided to throw out the suitcases. We were only about two days from home and I decided we could easily wear our underwear that long. My wife was furious, of course, but occasionally sacrifices must be made. When I think back to that day I am really disgusted with myself.

As if this roadside scavenging isn't enough, there is the Shyrock Bros. Scrap Iron and Steel yard where they now let me rummage freely. I just weigh my truck in when I come and weigh when I go out. I go there often. It is a treasure trove. I have bought thousands of pounds from them. No, I haven't used it yet, but I know I will someday soon. And when I am ready it will be there. They have mountains of scrap. Some piles are 30-40 feet high. I get so excited when I am climbing them that I fear I am going to urinate. When I hit the lottery I am going to buy their yard.

I once spent two full weekend days using my truck to yank out bits and pieces of wrought iron buried throughout a huge mound of debris. I ended up with about a thousand pounds, maybe 4 to 500 feet, of really crappy iron probably worth two hundred bucks. It cost me six hundred to replace



the clutch and all. So far I have used eight inches to make a suffolk latch. But when I need it...

I've mentioned just a few of the tragic effects of this illness. The really bad, really evil, really sick things I have left unsaid. Better they not see the light of print. I hope and pray that those of you just starting on this seemingly innocuous, innocent path will take heed. Stop now, before your souls are sold to the devil for thirty pieces of iron.

I gaze now over my precious pile. I only see the surface. I have no idea what may be inside and beneath. I see steel water tanks that I was going to use to make forges and weather vanes, hundreds of feet of pipe of all dimensions, pieces of railroad tracks to slice into anvils, 55 gallon barrels of old railroad spikes and many more buried, remnants of old road signs, the shells from old kitchen dishwashers and washing machines, leaves and leaves of truck and car springs, axles sticking up from hither and yon, wheels, coil springs, rods of indiscriminate lineage, buckets of jackhammer bits. The list goes on and is a reflection of our industrialized society: H-beams, girders, I-beams, channel iron, curbing forms, old rivets, brakes, gear shifts, coils of wire, garage door springs, pieces of all sizes of plate—and all this from just viewing one side.

This scavenging thing...this scrounging...is an inherent part of being a blacksmith. But it can become an evil in itself. It can claw away at your mind and flesh like some never-sated fiend. It can become almost as bad as...dare I even mention it?...tool collecting. But that's another disease to be discussed at another time.

If you think you may have scavenging and scrounging symptoms, I urge you to get professional help right away. You have to get a grip on yourself immediately. Maybe you can still be saved. If it is already deeply embedded—if you think you are riddled with the affliction—I can only suggest that you look into having your family or friends put you to sleep.