

Carder hones the art of knife-making

Stone Soup provides nourishment for the soul

BY MARTHA WORTHLEY
LEADER STAFF WRITER

Maikel Carder's work making knives is for him a mixture of "play and prayer, bringing me joy and fulfillment while at the same time infusing the knife with the energy needed for it to play its part in the alchemy of cooking, the transformation of food into nourishment for body and soul."

He came to knife-making as a cook. Before that, he was a modern-day gypsy, and before even that, a professional working on population issues at the United Nations. With the craft of knife-making, Carder has found the work of an artisan is best-suited to his particular skills.

"Making knives is not only a means for me to live an independent existence and an outlet for my creative self-expression. It requires discipline and persistence and serves to remind me that *how* we do things matters just as much as what we do."

Carder was born in England and came to this country to work for the United Nations. He had written a book on population control and worked in Geneva and New York "writing reports and speeches" for the United Nations. Carder, a political radical, said he wanted to work within "the system" to effect change. But he found it a difficult task when the system was driven by economics and power.

"I began to butt heads with people there because it seemed like economic and social conditions were what was really preventing family planning. Third World countries were impoverished by their connection with the wealthy countries. The breaking point for me came with China's policy of forced family size and sterilization." Carder did not want to be part of turning a blind eye to human rights.

When he first quit the United Nations work, he set up an "alternative think tank" and sent out information to Third World countries. Information on experimental birth-control methods was

sent to countries like Thailand, where drug companies were testing their drugs and intrauterine devices such as the Dalkon shield on populations less-regulated than the United States. The alternative think tank was funded by the Quakers.

"I did that for a couple of years, and then I decided to explore the country [United States]," he said.

Carder discovered that he enjoyed being a gypsy. He worked in restaurants along the way and even settled to work for a year cooking in Bellingham.

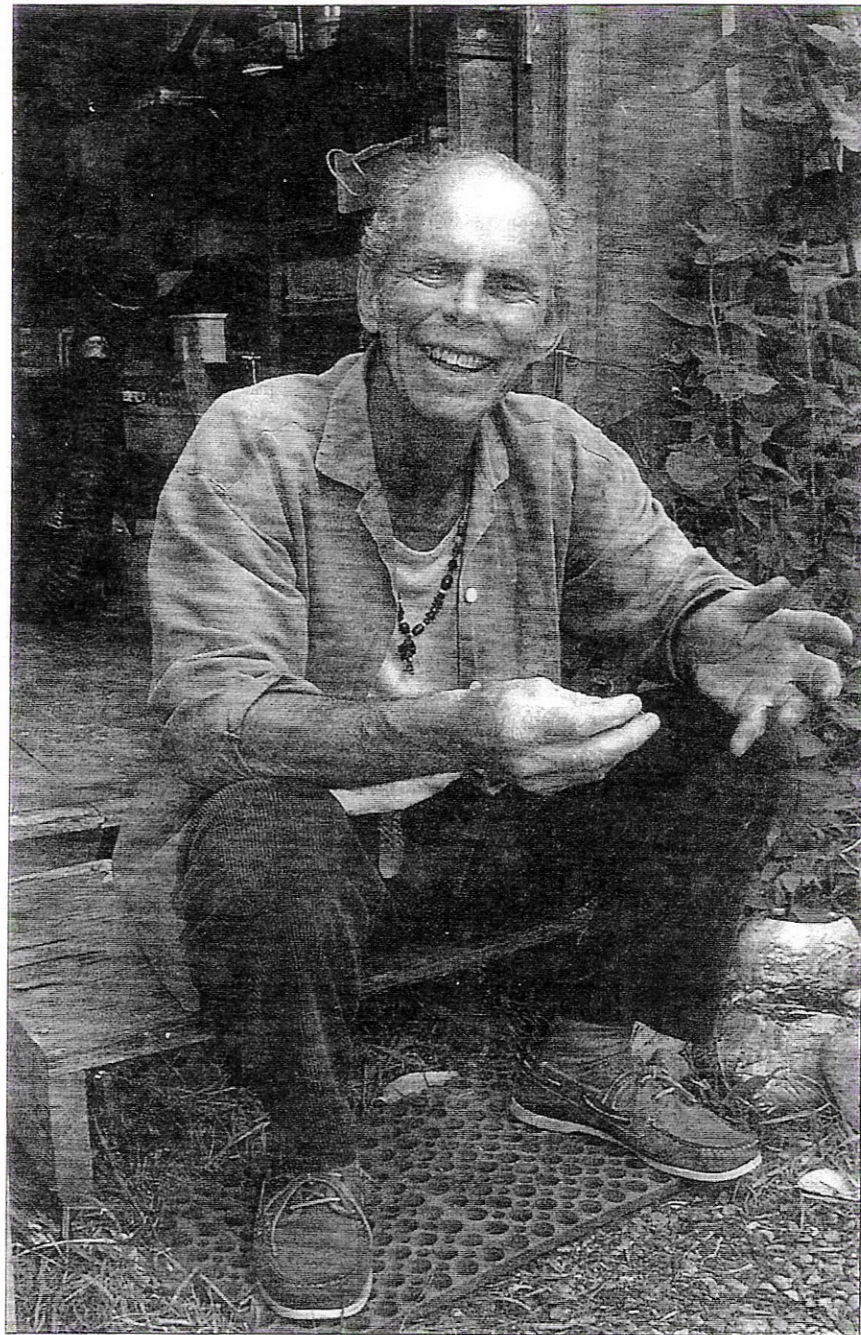
"One time when I was traveling I met some quintessential hippies who advised, 'You gotta have a gig, man.' He was a leather-worker and his wife made beaded earrings. When he pulled out a sheath to show me, I didn't focus on the leather, but on the knife. I said, 'Of course!'"

Remembering time spent as a child with his brick-layer uncle, Carder recalled some of the lessons learned about the natural world and such things as sharpening tools. He realized he could be a modern-day "tinker."

At first he sharpened knives for restaurants. He would also set up in the center of a town and put out his shingle advertising knife-sharpening. He asked for donations or trade, saying that there was no charge but the customer could pay what it was worth. "With that little shingle, for two years I never lacked for anything," said Carder.

Then when he started making knives, he realized that certain people were taking advantage of him and that he needed to charge for his work. "I figured out what a person would get in this country if there were artistic stipends, and charged accordingly. These days I keep track of what it costs to run the shop and pay myself a living wage."

Carder's first shop was a van outfitted with a bed and galley in front, a showroom in the back, and grinders and polishers in the mid-section. "I had to stop and plug in to use the power tools," he noted.



Knife-maker Maikel Carder explains the distinctions of his craft outside his workshop in Port Townsend.

Photo by Martha Worthley

"When I first started making knives I called myself Kabyle Knifeworks after a Moroccan tribe, the Kabyle, among whom the making of plows is considered pious work that can by no means be recompensed with money. The blacksmiths—whose

skills are vital—did not think of cashing in on their talents but rather considered themselves blessed to have been chosen as a conduit through which the creative spirit is made manifest."

Carder has taken this philosophy to heart as he has plied his

trade throughout the country. His business is called Stone Soup after a folk tale in which hungry travelers fool greedy villagers into sharing food they are hoarding. For Carder, the name Stone

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