

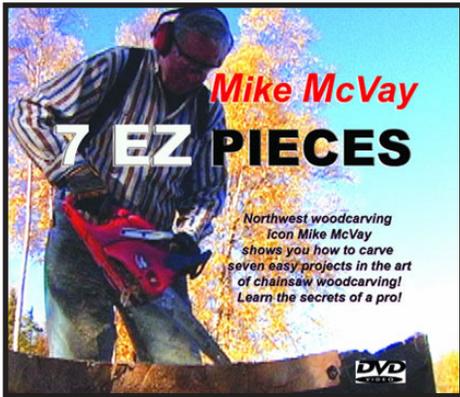
compiled by:



# Seven EZ Pieces

A collection of chainsaw carvings that you can do in less than thirty minutes

This series was originally published in the CCSG "cutting Edge" newsletter and is reprinted with the permission of the artist and the publishers.



available on line while supplies last at [www.whidbeystore.com](http://www.whidbeystore.com)

McVay has traveled the world, usually pursuing some form of art. He carved Oregon's history on six panels at the 1964 World's Fair in New York, done totem poles in Willow, a rain gauge for Quinnault Lodge on Washington state's Olympic Peninsula. Married twice, a father and grandfather of four, Mike lives on Whidbey Island, Wash., where his prolific, woodcarving family lives, or moving from job to job.

**Mike McVay Woodcarver**



"The McVays are well known as a carving family throughout carving communities in the nation," said Jessie Groeschen, whose 2005 book "Art of Chainsaw Carving" features McVay and his sister Judy.

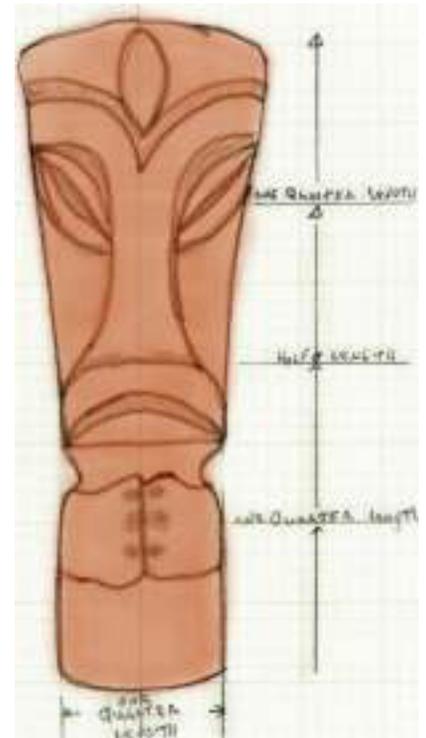
## Seven EZ Pieces - The TIKI

During the early years, I learned pretty quickly that big woodcarvings were about as important in people's lives as used tires. I had a hard time selling anything. "What am I gonna do with that?" they'd say and shake their heads. What people were mostly interested in was the process. "You did that with a chainsaw?" they'd ask. "I'd like to see how you did that." And so the performing art of chainsaw carving began. Word got around that this guy would come to your place and carve with a chainsaw. That was almost fifty years ago, and by today's standards, it was cheap.

I was enthralled with the adventures of Thor Heyerdahl and the Kon Tiki raft trip through Polynesia. Since Tiki figures have always been one of my favorite things, I developed a design

like the one you see here that I could carve fairly quickly. If they got the log and had the bark stripped off, it cost them \$50 for an 8-foot carving. I'd lay it on the ground to carve it, stand it up when it was done and I could do it on less than one tank of gas. I'd get paid and take off for the next job. I was young and dumb and could work bent over and still stand up afterward. As far as I know, this is the first ever "quick-carve," and it's still a durable design today. I carved one for a school group at the Ridgway Rendezvous in Pennsylvania last year, and they loved it.

I plan to do a step-by-step version of this for the Cutting Edge on-line Newsletter, along with several other designs. I'll see you there. Keep carving.--Mike McVay



Photos courtesy of Butch Elrod

Butch Elrod (woodhacker.com) a.k.a. TWOCLONES carved these Tikis after watching the Seven EZ Pieces video. His 14 year old daughter, Freja Elrod carved this sign for a local TV station..

# Seven EZ Pieces - The SCOTTY



When I started making public carving appearances, one big tiki would always guarantee a crowd, but it was never enough to keep people around or to get anyone to buy something. So, I'd take requests, some of which did nothing to put dinner on the table. "Hey, do you think you could carve up a watermelon? Is that a real chainsaw? Can I have these scraps? Whadaya do when you make a mistake? How many scars have you got? How'd you know where to cut? I didn't see any lines on that log. Is that hard to do? What is that? Is that a real log?" All those questions carvers still hear.

But sometimes someone would take me seriously and ask about a duck, or a cat, or a dog. I always took them seriously and would carve whatever they wanted. If I did a reasonable job on the piece, it usually meant they would ask that most important question: "How much do you want for that?" and I would have been thinking of an answer to that all the time I had been working. It couldn't be too much or they'd shrug and walk away. "\$10? No, I'd say to myself. More than that! Is it worth \$20? Maybe. Will they pay \$20? I'd blurt out, "You can have it for \$10!!" And they would say "Is that all? I thought it would be more." I'd sigh, take the money, they'd smile and take the cat/dog/bear/owl or turtle home with them. Happy me when I could take home cash instead of carvings.

Things cost a lot less then. Gas sold for twenty-five cents a gallon, so ten carvings that sold for ten bucks added up to a hundred dollars by the end of the day. Not a bad take, and beer was a dime, so I couldn't drink it all up either, although I gave it a good try.

Not everything was a success, of

course, and some were complete bombs. The finish often didn't fit the subject. This was before the small hand sanders and die grinders. This was before the carving bar and quarter-pitch chain. This was the day of big teeth and beaver tail bars, of big kickback, bad gouges and lots of cusswords. That blue air around me wasn't just from the smoking saw.

So it came to pass that one day, a nice lady with an agreeable demeanor and a pointy-tailed, pointy-eared, black dustmop on a leash came by. She watched for a while and asked if I could carve her dog. It turned out to be the most natural shape for a carving among all the dogs. There were no feet and it had flat sides without definition and lots of straight lines. It quickly became a crowd favorite among the quick-carves, and after fifty years, it's still one of mine. The agreeable lady paid me twenty dollars for that first one and said, "Thank you. I thought it would be more."

It's shown here in a side view with some of the primary blocking cuts marked in straight lines. I'll have other views on our CCSG website as part of my on-going "Seven Easy Pieces" project. Before you start, cut out a 16"x24" block about 10" wide and sketch in the shape. If you can enlarge this drawing, you can make a pattern. Leave the head wide, round off the muzzle back to the eyes, separate the ears, round out the neck and back, center the tail, add texture for hair and you have a black dustmop dog: The Scotty. A good twenty minute quick-carve. So have a good time with it. Thanks and so long. I'll be back with another quick carve project in the next issue of The Cutting Edge.

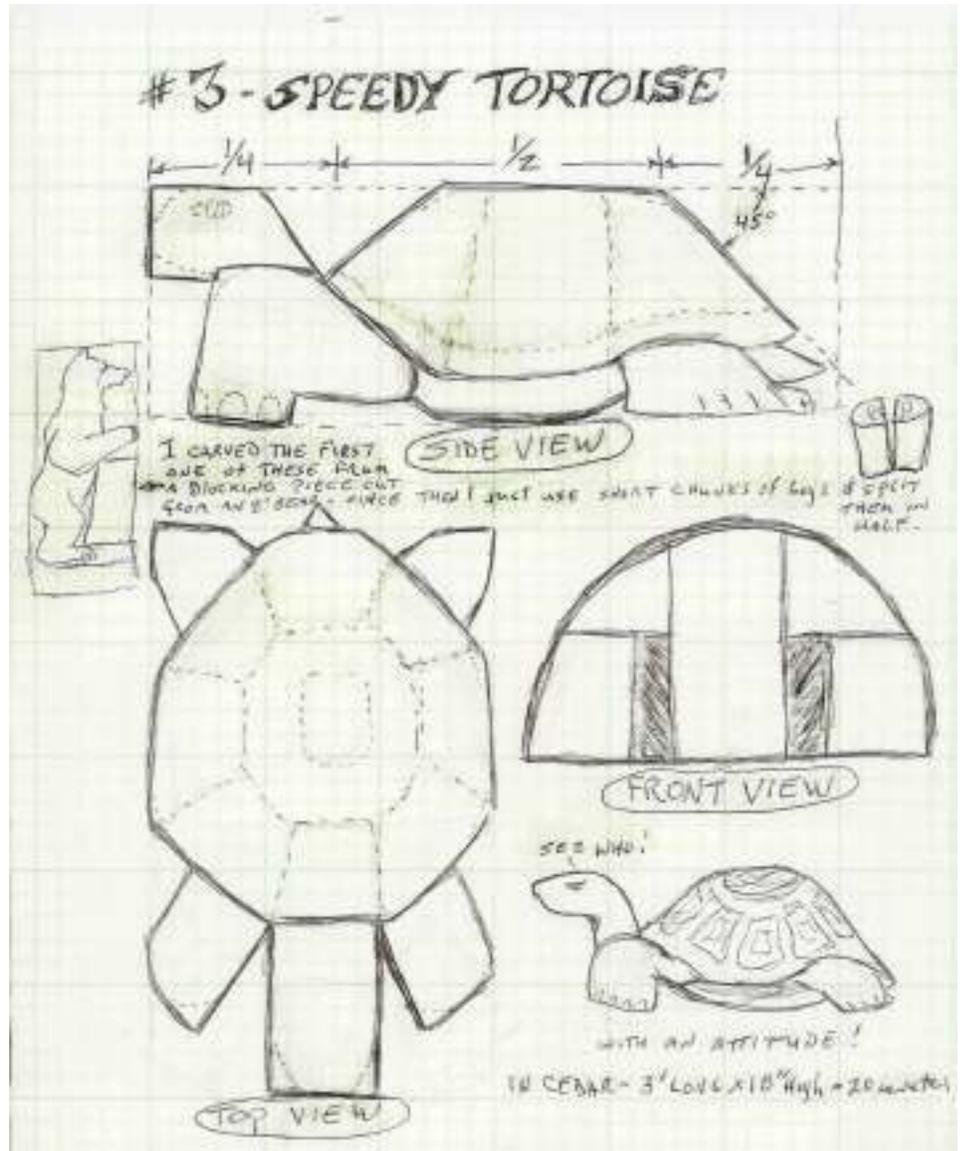
Mike McVay



Photos courtesy of Butch Elrod

# Seven EZ Pieces - The SPEEDY TORTLE

Greetings everyone, The third installment of Seven Easy Pieces is a Tortoise. This is a good carving for short blocks too big to throw away and too small for big carvings. Plus, turtles come in all sizes, so you'll be making a life-sized piece, whether it's four inches or four feet long. The tortoise is a variety of turtle that has adapted as a land dweller. It has lots of interesting features that make a good carving. The sculpted shell, called a carapace, is craggy with pronounced growth rings that mimic a tree. The long neck with all the loose, leathery hide and the serpent's head is made for carving with a chainsaw. But it's the front feet, the elephant feet, that I like best. They are just plain fun, especially when you add the toenails with the tip of your carving bar. The back legs are ok, but they're dull. They're there to push the whole cumbersome pile forward, and they do protect the tail and give something for the shell to curve around, so I guess I can't complain. Like the Tiki, or the Scotty Dog, this piece can be carved in a single position, without moving it or rolling it from side to side. There is some preparation necessary that will save you several minutes during your demonstration. As with all quick-carves, try to find a piece of log with no knots. For the tortoise, rip the log in half lengthwise. Set one of the halves on the carving table. If it's heavy enough, it will lie still while you carve it. If it's too light and wants to shift, put a screw in from the bottom. It's the same for any quick-carve project: get it in a secure position before you start so it doesn't bounce around or spin into the chain because that will slow you down. It's also worth remembering that none of these projects become true quick-carves until you've practiced them and know every cut. Don't expect to take the drawing out for the first time and get anywhere near the carving-time estimate I've listed. These are performance pieces, and just like music or theater, you need to rehearse every cut, every stroke and every line. That includes not just the cut you're doing but the



one you're going to do next. The saw should never be out of the wood and there should never be a time when you find yourself wondering what to do next. To make these really effective in front of the crowd you've got to think ahead. There is also a good deal more than blocking necessary for each of these designs. I'll provide detailed instructions on rounding and shaping when I get the material organized for the CCSG website. ([www.theccsg.com](http://www.theccsg.com))

Coming up in this series: a Stodgy Owl, the Alphabet for Name Signs, a Short Totem (plus Wings) and a fish to hang on the wall. See you all next time. Happy carving. Mike McVay

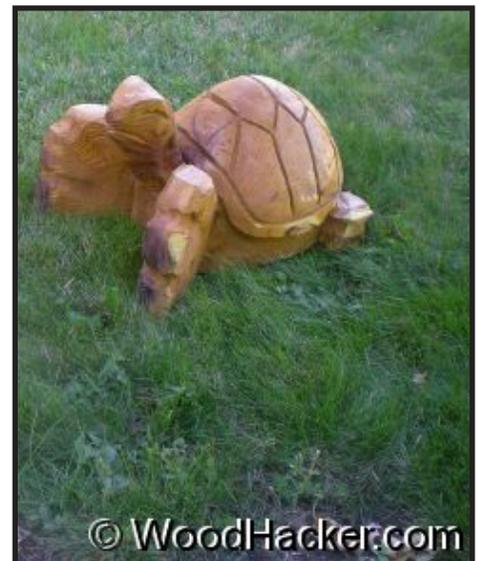


Photo courtesy of Butch Elrod

# Seven EZ Pieces - The STODGY OWL



The previous three pieces in this series--the tiki, the scotty dog and the tortoise--didn't require you to move them around while you carved. They were parked in one spot, and you moved around them. With the OWL, that will change. You'll need to roll this one in order to carve it on all sides. At demonstrations, I would always start with one end of the log propped up on another log, so I could roll it more easily. You can secure it in position with a block of wood wedged under each side. Most of the carving time is expended on the front, less on each side, and very little on the back. It shouldn't be necessary to shut your saw off while you roll the owl back and forth. Given the way saws perform when people are watching, like not starting, it's a good idea to warm up your saw before you begin. I hope to make a video soon showing step-by-step cuts, but if you're anxious to carve an owl right now, start at the top and work your way down. Do the front first then roll it, first on one side and then the other. Carve the back last. There's only the tail and a little on the wings to do there; then stand it up. It's always a crowd pleaser. The owl came about as a result of requests by people watching carving demonstrations. "Have you ever carved an owl?" they'd ask. Always quick to take a hint about what might sell (those pesky bills, you know), I set out to carve one, and then two and then a dozen. Soon the owl grew to be the most popular carving I did. I got pretty sick of them, like I am now with bears, and I'm happy to say that the thousand or so owls I carved around the West have probably all returned to the earth by now, while I keep chugging out new ones. Historically the owl has been associated with women and wisdom, and the tradition continues today. Everybody seems to have an aunt who likes owls. They're a little like bears in that you can never carve too many of them. There were many times the cow-boys, totems, fish or dogs weren't selling, and an owl stood up and paid the rent. I'm grateful. That's all for now. Next up is the high-speed alpha- bet. See you then. Mike McVay -- Wasilla, Alaska

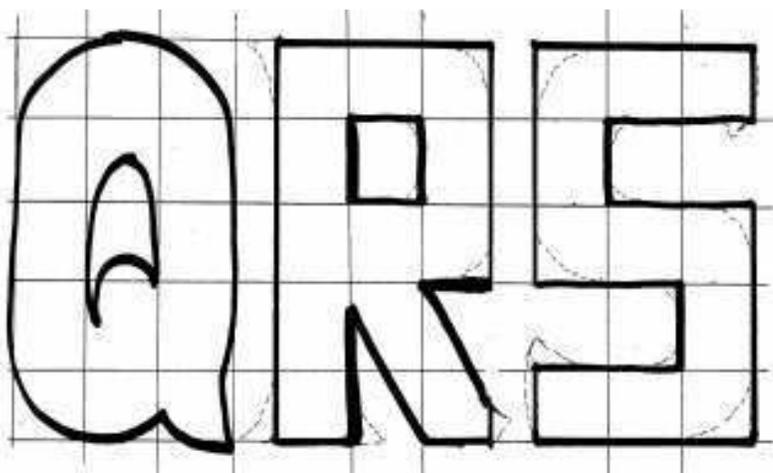
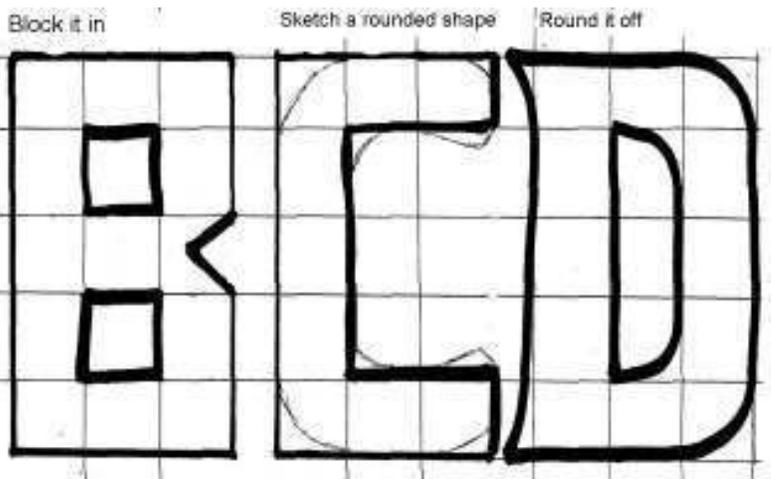
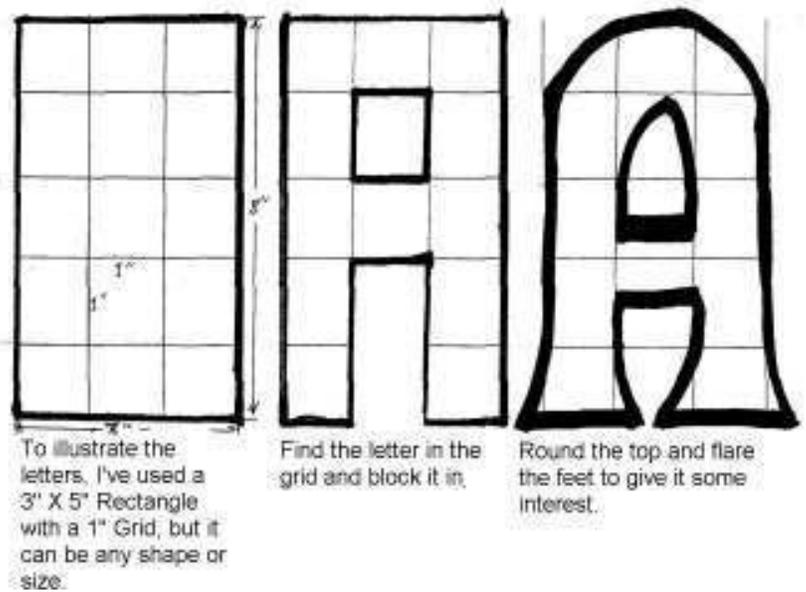


This is a version of the Stodgy Owl by Steve Backus, nephew of Mike McKay, carrying on the family tradition of Chainsaw Sculpture on the west coast.

Steve also has a DVD titled "How to Chainsaw Carve an Owl" available on Amazon.com.

# Seven EZ Pieces - The HIGH-SPEED-ALPHA-BET

When I was a little fella, I had a science teacher who taught a terrific course about sea life. He kept lots of fish and snails, crabs and fish, all doing their best to liven up the day in a huge aquarium. Learning the names of that menagerie was sometimes a task, but he always seemed to make it simpler. "Remember this," he'd say, "and you'll remember the names.", and he would give us a mnemonic that always seemed to work, like SCUPS. The first S stood for Sea and all the other letters followed..Sea Cucumber, Sea Urchin, Sea Pen and Sea Snake. He had a flair for that. I don't have that talent, so I have to explain everything, over and over. Endlessly, alas, unless I can draw it. Then whatever I'm droning on about will usually become clear. So if you find me rambling on about something and you don't understand, ask me to draw you a picture. You'll be glad you did. Like now. The alphabet is a fairly straight-forward bunch of lines that can be put together to make words. By the way, if you don't think you speak Greek, guess what? The word comes from the first two letters of the Greek, alpha + beta. If you're a woodcarver, however, that usually translates into people's names carved on boards for the fronts of their houses. I get a lot of work every year carving name signs. In fact my next article will be on the layout and carving of one. In these illustrations, I've laid out a basic grid for drawing letters that can be carved with a chainsaw. The purpose of the grid is to give you a feeling for the uniformity and proportion of the letters. Get a handle on this and you'll be able to develop all sorts of different fonts. They can be tall, short, square, round, bold, fine, italic, back-slanted, straight, intarsia or cameo. The shapes with the grid are geometric and dull, but if you add sweeps and flares they liven up pretty well. Plus, when you add sweeping serifs to letters, you get away from 90-degree corners which can be difficult to execute. It takes a little practice, but once you've mastered the sense of proportion gained from the grid method, you'll be inventing all sorts of alphabets. We don't have



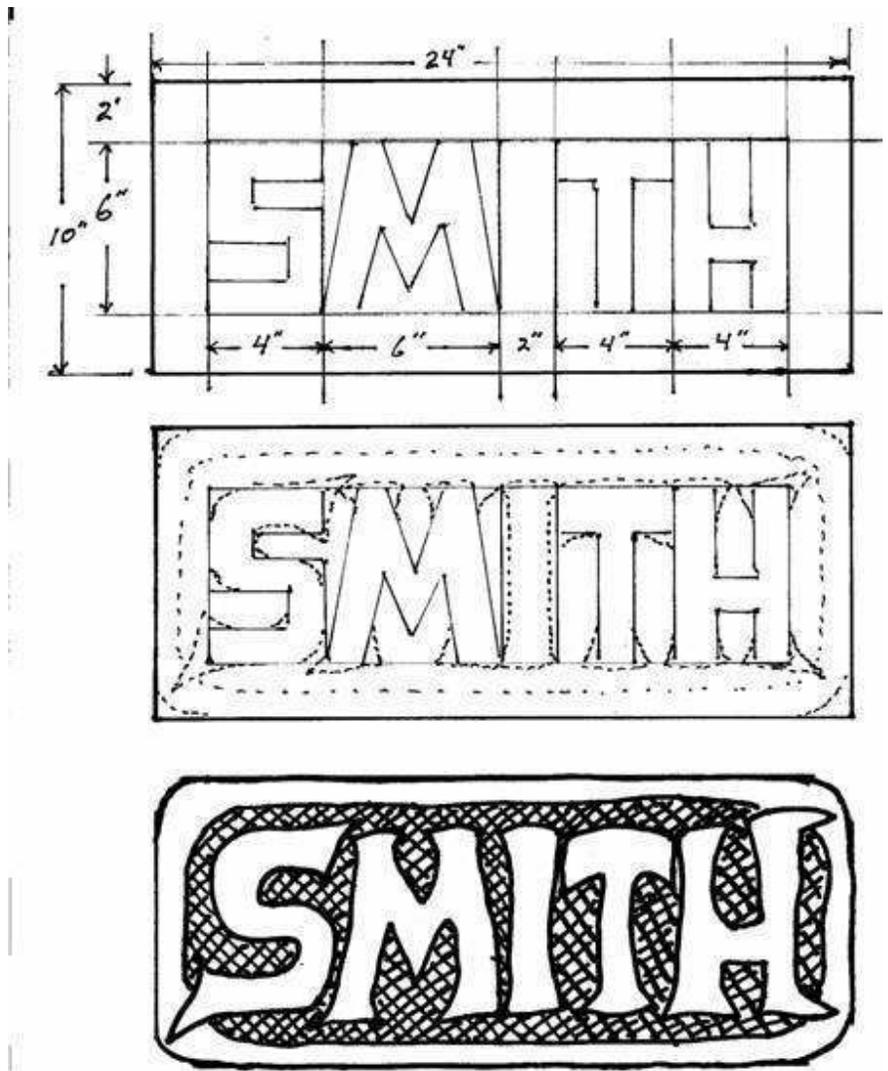
room in the printed form of the CUTTING EDGE NEWSLETTER for all the letters (and numbers), but I think you can get an idea from these samples. As for the rest, I hope to have them all posted on our CCSG website

soon. Happy Holidays everyone, Mike McVay

# Seven EZ Pieces - The NAME SIGN

No matter how slow things are at the fair, no matter how much rain may fall and wind may blow, no matter how gloomy, broke and hungry you are, people will always, always pay to see their names carved in wood. It's the next best thing to seeing their names in lights. It's like they're famous. People love it. Plus, you can sell them cheap because they are quick to do and don't require expensive wood. Name signs can be made from all sorts of things, from scraps & slabs to boards and logs. It also makes for a good show. Here's how to get started. First, find a scrap of wood big enough to carve a name on it. In this case I've scrounged up a two-foot chunk of 2x10 left over from a planter box I made earlier, got it cleaned up and lying on a solid surface. It's blocked in place so it won't scoot around when I'm working on it. Next, I tell the first person going by that I will carve their name for nothing, for free. They shake their head and scoot away while glancing back to make sure I'm not following them. People are very suspicious of free offers these days. Then, I ask the next person what their name is. If they tell me, I immediately mark out the letters and carve them into the board, cross hatch the background and use the tip of the saw to clean up the chips and fuzz. It should take no more than ten minutes. (Five when you can carve them without having to draw them first.) Then I hold it up for everyone to see. If they ask how much, I tell them five bucks, or ten or twenty., it all depends on how broke I am and what the traffic will bear. Thereafter, if you adopt this plan, you should stay pretty busy carving signs for everyone else who wants to be famous. Carve until you have enough for food and gas, or until you run out of scraps. It's up to you. Of course this assumes you are familiar with my chainsaw alphabet (see the last issue of the Cutting Edge). Here's the step by step process. Let's assume the name is SMITH. That's five letters. You want to leave a two-inch border all around, so that leaves twenty inches. ( $24'' - 4'' = 20''$ . See drawing).

Twenty inches divided by five (the



number of letters in SMITH) equals four, so each of the letters will be four inches wide. But wait, there's a problem. SMITH has an M and an I. They can't be four inches wide because the M would be too skinny and the I would be too fat. You have to split the difference. The M (and W) in this alphabet is equal to one-and-a-half letters, or in this case six inches. The I is equal to half a letter, or two inches. Happily, it all comes out to the same thing.  $S=4'' + M=6'' + I=2'' + T=4'' + H=4'' = 20''$ . So, OK the letter sizes have been solved. Now you need to mark them on the sign board. Do this using a soft carpenter pencil or crayon so the lines will be clearly visible. Don't try to be fancy with the drawing. The important thing is the spacing and proportions. Next, carve the letters as

you have practiced them. A carving tip makes this easier, but has the disadvantage of splattering black oil on the sign. Be careful with the edges and joints and it will be fine. Add the cross-hatching to enhance the contrast, then use the flat of the bar just behind the tip to clean off the chips and smooth the surface. You may want to round off the corners to soften the lines. And that's it. The quickest, easiest, bottom-of-the-barrel sign job you can make. Of course if the weather is nice, you're not starving and you don't need the money, you can take more time, add trees and mountains, do some sanding, add color and finish and charge twenty times as much. That's all for now. Next is the twenty-minute totem and ten-minute wings. Mike McVay

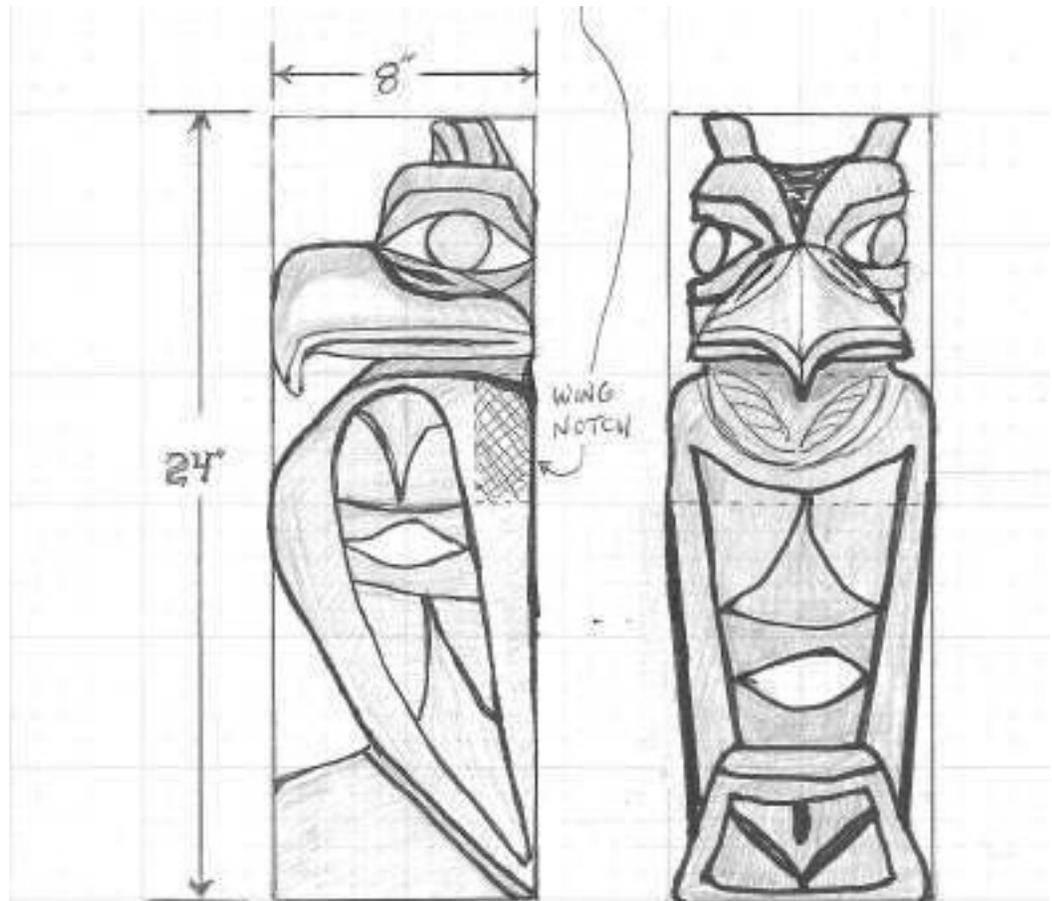
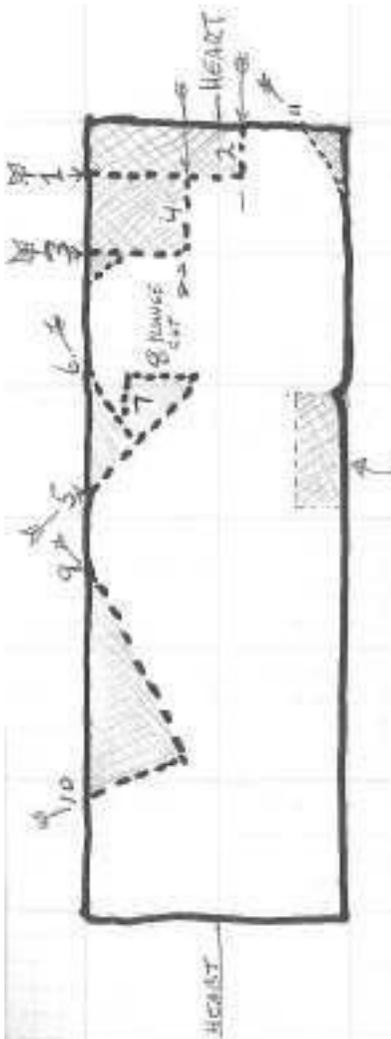
# Seven EZ Pieces - The TWENTY MINUTE TOTEM

This last installment of "Seven Easy Pieces" actually comes in two parts. The first step is carving the body of a raven figure (20 minutes), which I'll cover in this article. The second is carving and fitting the wings (20 minutes), which will be covered next issue. The two steps take the same amount of time, so if you are doing quick-carve demonstrations for a crowd, it's best to do them an hour or so apart. As I've said before, in order to get the time down, you'll need to practice until you can make the cuts without thinking or letting your saw idle. The subject of this little totem pole is the raven, which is held in reverence by native people. With its hooked beak and jaunty ears, it makes a dynamic carving. A small log, 8" in diameter and 24" long, is all you need. I've marked and numbered the first eleven cuts in order. Follow

the numbers faithfully. What's not shown are the cuts to define the width of the head or the shape of the beak. There's no room here for that, so I'll try to get them posted on the Cascade Chainsaw Sculptors Guild website. Be sure your email is registered so I can send you a notice. In the beginning you'll find it helps to use a felt-tip pen to mark the cuts beforehand. Once you get used to the design, there'll be no need to do that. Be sure to keep the carving bar level to insure uniform depth. Once you've done a few, you'll find you don't have to stop and think about it. The details, such as the eyes, chest and side patterns are all drawn with the tip of the bar. There is very little to bevel. Just carve the lines and you're done. Keep carving (so you don't have to get a job). All the best, Mike McVay

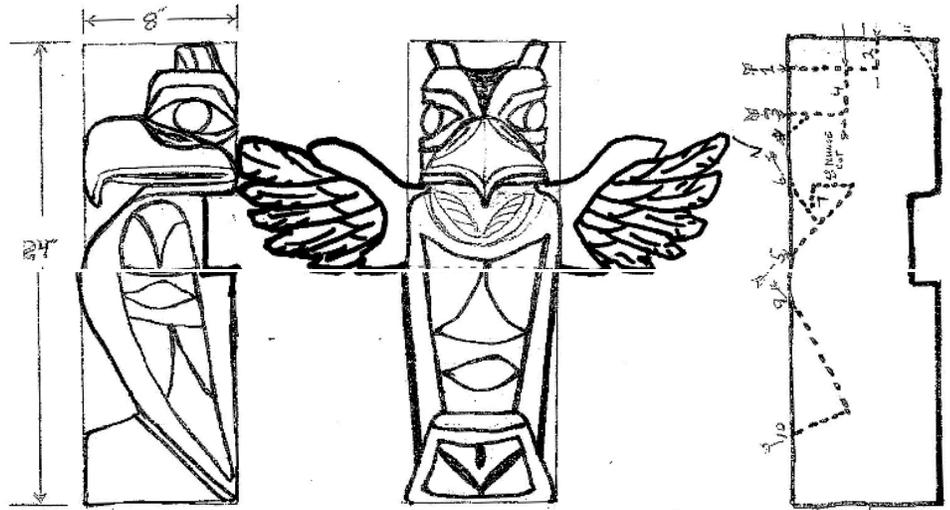


Photo courtesy of Butch Elrod

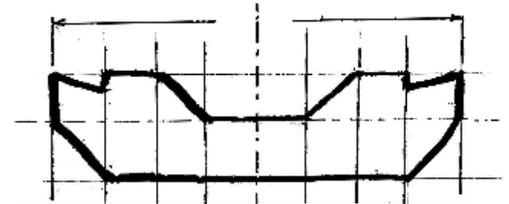


# Seven EZ Pieces - The TOTEM WINGS

Totem Wings is the last article in the series Seven Easy Pieces©. Assuming you carved your small totem from an eight-inch log that was 24" long, the wings should be carved from a 2x6 that is also 24" long. The drawing shows the proportions. It's important that the size of the wings fits the size of the totem, and although they may vary by a couple of inches, they should be neither too large nor too small. In this case 2x6x24 is the smallest for this size pole. The largest would be about 2x8x28". You will want to work out your own preferences while you practice. It's all a matter of what looks right. A board this size is too small and light to carve without clamping down. If it's just lying loose on the carving table, there's a real hazard the chain will catch an edge and flip it back at you. When that happens, the flying wood always hits something soft and tender. It's best to not let that happen. My preferred technique is to use a longer board that can be clamped to a carving table or screwed down to a heavy block. That leaves the wings sticking out in midair where you can carve from all sides. Be sure to mark out the basic proportions, especially the center line. An error of an inch or two on one side will produce bizarre results. You'll have a critter looking like it's trying to make a left turn. I like to use the top of the bar to make the outline cuts that give the wing its basic shape. Stand on the opposite side of the board; hold the saw straight up and down and cut with the center of the bar. This position lets you see what you're cutting. It also throws the sawdust down so the lines stay visible. Warning! Be careful you don't get too close to the tip or the bar will push up and run over the board- straight at you. Not good. Once you have the silhouette of the wings cut out, the next step is to use the tip of the bar to carve the feather pattern. Cut straight down like you were drawing with a pencil. That will establish all the lines, then lay the saw flat and bevel the feathers. You should also bevel the ends of the wings so they don't look like a 2x6. Taper them to under an inch along the ends. Did



I mention the wing-mounting notch in the back of the totem? You'll need that for stability so the wings fit into the back of the totem, otherwise if you attach them to the outside of the log, the carving will be back-heavy and fall over. Locate the notch at the top of the shoulders, just below the beak. Be sure to get it squared so the wings aren't angled backward and forward. I've tried a number of ways, from clever notches to nails and screws, to attach the wings quickly. The simplest was to hold the wings on the back of the totem and use both hands to raise it up for the crowd to see. We have to remember the constraints of time in all this. And on that note we come to the end of the series as written for The Cutting Edge. There will be more to come. The entire series is on (unedited) videotape, and there are lots of details to be added. It will be offered through The Cutting Edge as it is completed. Watch for it here. The Seven Easy Pieces series was conceived for the purpose of providing designs that could be used in short, fast demonstrations of the chainsaw as a carving tool. The criteria were simply that the items could be carved in twenty minutes or less, and that they would be identifiable to the onlookers. The idea is to carve quickly without pause, to finish the piece before the saw runs out of gas, and to elicit a "Wow" from the crowd. These pieces all take



One of Mike McVays many totem carvings.

practice, but once you get the knack, I think they'll serve you well. I want to wish any of you who take up these Seven Easy Pieces (c) good luck and good carving. All the best, Mike McVay