

# Kid's Korner

## Stone carvers are devoted to craft

WASHINGTON — "We work here at the Cathedral because it is an honor as well as a way to make a living. I've been here half of my life. My father was here before me. I'm the fifth generation in my family to be a stone carver. To do another job...it's my trade, what I was born to do."

Vincent Palumbo, 48, doesn't look much like a movie star, with his thinning curly hair, his rough workingman's hands, his shoes covered with half a lifetime of stone dust. He is a stone carver, an Italian immigrant who came to this country in 1961 to join his father as a carver on the massive Gothic-style Washington Cathedral, under construction since 1907.

### Occupational Folklore

But Palumbo and three of his former colleagues at the Cathedral are the stars of a new film. The 30-minute documentary was produced by folklorist Marjorie Hunt of the Smithsonian Institution's Office of Folklife Programs, who has been studying the carvers and their way of life for several years, and independent producer Paul Wagner.

What comes through in both the film and in interviews with the carvers is the burning intensity, the almost passionate devotion they have to their craft. For most, it is rooted in their lives in the old country, in a childhood in which their lives already revolved around stone.

Palumbo, for example, says that it never occurred to him to earn his living in any other way.

"To tell the truth, no, he says in heavily accented English that is nevertheless perfectly understandable once he begins talking about carving.

"I started with my father when I was 9 years old. Soon he gave me chisels, a piece of stone in the shop where he was working, and asked me to try to do this or that. Soon it was no more a joke, it was for real, and I've got to pay attention. Now I've been doing this all my life; I feel strange doing something else."

### Following the Sculptor

Most, though not all, of the work carved at the Washington Cathedral involves recreating in stone the creation of a sculptor. It is work that involves a certain subjugation of the carver's ego in the interest of faithfully duplicating a clay model.

"The good carver is like a symphony conductor who is loyal to the composer and is trying to create in sound what the composer has created," says sculptor Frederick E. Hart, who has designed a series of sculptures recreated in stone on the Cathedral's west facade.

Hart brings a special appreciation of the skills of the stone carver. Before he began an independent career as a sculptor, he spent three years as an apprentice carver at the Cathedral, to learn how to work with stone and what could be done with it. He worked under master carver Roger Morigi, who retired in 1978 after 60 years of carving stone. To Hart, and to many others, Morigi was the best of all.

"He's so fine because he's so utterly loyal to the sculptor," says Hart. "He doesn't have a point of view. He wants to carve the best way he can to recreate what the sculptor has created. The worst carvers are those who want to be sculptors."

Morigi, still vigorous and active

at 76, agrees.

"You don't count," he says of the carver's role. "You've got to interpret from the sculptor's model. If you have your own idea, you can't detach yourself. What the model has, you reproduce."

So loyal to the sculptor is Morigi that he once told Hunt:

"If it was upside down, but they put it like that, I'm gonna do it upside down. That's the way you like, that's the way you get!"

Palumbo follows in the same tradition:

"To a sculptor, everything he puts in means something to him. If we change it, it's not his work any more."

### Performance in Stone

But that doesn't mean the carver doesn't put something of himself into the Indiana limestone when he carves it.

"The sculptor is the creator, but the carver is the performer," says Palumbo, echoing Hart's analogy. "We do the statue. Yes, we copy the model, but when the finished product goes into the Cathedral, we have put our feelings into the stone. We have put life into it."

There is an unbelievable amount of carved stone at the Cathedral, dating back to its earliest days, and yet there is still a tremendous amount remaining to be carved. The number of carvers working at any time depends to some degree on money available, and to some degree on the availability of good carvers. At one time Morigi supervised a staff of 12 carvers at the Cathedral; Palumbo now has two assistants.

Both Morigi and Palumbo are acutely aware that they are among the last of a line of stone carvers dating to medieval times. Styles

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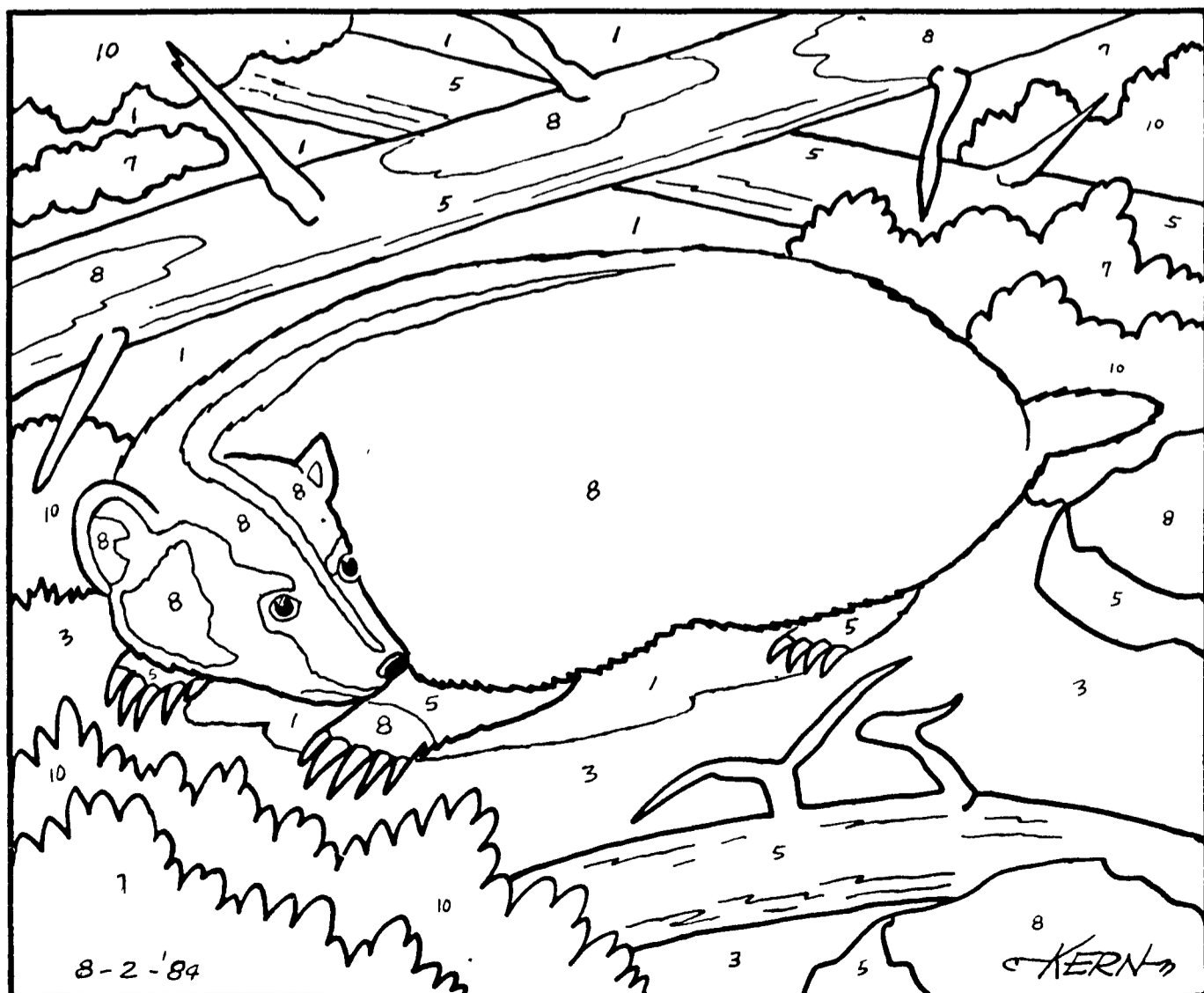


Using the same kinds of tools that stone carvers have been using for centuries, Vincent Palumbo works on the final details of a statue to be placed on display in the 14th century-style Washington Cathedral. Palumbo is one of only a handful of traditional stone carvers still plying the ancient craft in this country; most buildings today have little or no ornamental stonework in their design.

## COLOR THIS!

- |           |               |
|-----------|---------------|
| 1. BLACK  | 6. ORANGE     |
| 2. RED    | 7. GREEN      |
| 3. YELLOW | 8. LT BROWN   |
| 4. BLUE   | 9. LT. BLUE   |
| 5. BROWN  | 10. LT. GREEN |

**BADGERS LIVE IN WOODS AND GRASSLANDS OF WESTERN NORTH AMERICA. THEY CAN DIG SO RAPIDLY IT LOOKS LIKE THEY ARE MELTING OUT OF SIGHT. THE BADGER HAS SHORT STRONG LEGS, THEY WADDLE FROM SIDE TO SIDE WHEN THEY WALK, AND LOOK CLUMSY WHEN THEY RUN. THE HAIR OF A BADGER IS USED FOR ARTISTS BRUSHES.**



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