



The Art of Sound



Creator finds ideas through serendipity

Story and Photos by Paul Chandler

Reinhold Pieper Marxhausen is a creator, and most of his ideas he just sort of happens upon, through serendipity.

Serendipity is the process of discovering something by accident or mistake.

The following story is how Reinhold animated serendipity for me—not in these specific words, but I hope he likes the way I retell it.

A man and his son on a camping trip were walking through tall grass looking for an ideal wooded area to pitch their tent for the night. As the two were wading in the scrub, they happened upon a covert patch of cockleburs. Cockleburs don't have rattles.

There were thousands of cockleburs in the ancient patch, and a large percentage of them were tugging on and plunging into the shoes, socks, trousers, shirts and skin of the two campers. The man was fully annoyed.

While fighting the cocklebur patch, he allotted each burr a specific adjective. The boy, only slightly inconvenienced, stood silently still and thought it amusing to see his father in this uninhibited state.

"Satan created cockleburs," exclaimed the man.

"Isn't it amazing how well they stick to things," said the boy.

Abruptly, the fight between man and cocklebur ended. The two campers, centered in the cocklebur patch, faced each other in wondering silence.

Some time later, after the ideal wooded campsite had been found, stories had been exchanged in the glow of the pinewood-fueled fire and the two had returned to the city. Velcro could be found at the market.

Marxhausen, a retired art professor, stresses that there is more to serendipity than discovery by chance.

Serendipity requires "looking at the world with fresh eyes—a childlike innocence—a truly open mind," he said.

"The opportunities to discover and create are everywhere if you're open and alert to the things around you," he said.

Marxhausen may be the most alert person I've met. He's 68.

Marxhausen has been inventing in a multiple of mediums since 1951, when he helped establish the art de-

partment at Concordia College in Seward, Nebraska.

Recently, stainless steel found in junkyards, on the roadside or wherever serendipity rests and waits is the medium he's alert to most.

"I could continue to paint," Marxhausen said, "but I no longer have a message in it, so I weld stainless steel to create sound.

"I'm depressed about drugs, so I'm inventing things that give highs without drugs—sound vibrations. I've never taken drugs, so I don't know what they do. But I can feel the sound vibrations from my sculptures stimulate my arms, forearms, brain—my body."

Marxhausen plans to spend the rest of his life inventing therapy.

And the cocklebur story isn't the only tale Marxhausen has to tell. For his children, others and himself, he wants to archive his stories on paper while he still can.

"I enjoy writing, have had some poetry published and plan on writing more," he said.

Marxhausen said he doesn't always know where he's going to end up when he begins to write or picks up a piece of metal and wire.

"But you don't need to have an end result in mind. Just do it. Just pick something up, could be anything, and try it out."



Counterclockwise from left: Marxhausen ignites the welder he uses to make his art.

Behind Marxhausen is the shed he made specifically to house murals he was commissioned to build for the State Capitol. The shed, adorned with past creations, is now used as his welding shop.

Marxhausen listens to the sound vibrations after knocking two oyster-shaped sound sculptures together.

Plucking the wires welded to a metal helmet sets off airy chime vibrations that physically stimulate Marxhausen's senses.

Marxhausen demonstrates his discovery that, with a few minor changes, teat cups, usually used on automatic milking machines, serve as ideal creamers.

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