# ANDREW WYETH *making contact*

"John Surovek Gallery, can I help you?" I heard a polished female voice.

"Yes, I'm calling to inquire about Stephen Scott Young. I understand you're his exclusive representative?"

"That's right," came the upbeat reply. "Are you looking for any particular work?"

"No. To tell you the truth, I was actually curious about the price range for his pieces. Are they all drybrush watercolors?"

"Yes, most of the work for sale is watercolor and the full sheet finished pieces are in the twenty thousand range, but there are some nice studies for ten to twelve thousand," I heard the smooth voice of a dealer, astutely including information about some of the lower priced works so as not to completely lose this unknown potential collector.

"I understand you also carry some works by Andrew Wyeth?" I inquired, not at all sure where this spur of the moment conversation was going or why I was even on the phone.

"You're interested in a Wyeth?" the tone of the voice seemed to change.

"Maybe. Depends on what you've got," I responded calmly not believing the words were coming out of my mouth.

"Sir, I think it would be better if I let you talk with Mr. Surovek. Can you hold?" the voice and the woman gone before I could respond.

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The big chair in the bedroom was a great spot to chill out and read the latest art journal or magazine. Leather, with big rounded arms and a spacious ottoman, the Roche Bubois was designed for one sitter but it would hold six and had as long as close contact was acceptable. In our family it was. "Daddy's chair" had turned into the family chair.

It was in that chair in September of 1995 that I was browsing the latest ART AND ANTIQUES with Danka curled up in my lap. I'm not sure whether she liked the attention or the literature. Maybe both. Nevertheless, she's the only miniature Dachsund I know who has reviewed the "100 Top Collectors in America" and eagerly awaits ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST each month.

On that day, we came across another advertisement for the John H. Surovek Gallery in Palm Beach, Florida. Stephen Scott Young is a young American artist whose works we had seen before from that same chair, in that same position and in that same publication.

In the margin below the two boys shooting marbles in the Bahamas, we noticed a list of other significant artists represented- Bellows, Homer, Cassatt, Hassam and Wyeth. Had I read that correctly? Wyeth? Andrew Wyeth? As with each case over the previous fifteen years when I had run across the name, my pulse got a little faster. Danka seemed to stay calm, either unaffected by the name or still looking at the Bahamian boys and the marbles.

I had just assumed over the years that the works of Andrew Wyeth were not readily available to the public. I don't know why. I suppose because after all these years of studying this American icon I had never seen one piece for sale. My books and catalogues suggested that many were in large collections owned by individuals or on loan to museums. Others were individual museum purchases. My perceptions had only added to the mystique of the impenetrable boundary around this artist, this unknowing mentor who had a very personal impact on my work and my life. In my wildest dreams I couldn't have scripted what would happen over the ensueing seven years. If I had nobody would have believed it anyway.

The following morning, Monday, was one of my surgery days. After finishing a Cesarean Section I sat in the Doctor's Lounge waiting for the room turnover and the hysterectomy to come. I picked up that September issue and in an impromptu moment dialed the number. There I was with not only the gallery on the phone, but the owner himself.

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"This is John Surovek. I understand you're interested in a Wyeth piece," I heard the energetic raspy voice of a man I did not know.

"Well, yes, I'm definitely interested in Wyeth's work. But I actually called to inquire about Stephen Scott Young." At the time I had no way of knowing that Scott Young would become my friend. I found myself feeling a bit flushed just talking with a dealer about available Wyeth originals. After all, I was inquiring about works by an artist I had for two decades assumed were, and probably remained, out of reach for the average guy and I was feeling extremely average.

"Scott's an American artist who has been painting in the Bahamas. He's certainly been influenced by Wyeth but he does have a unique quality. He's a beautiful painter. I've been very interested in the African-American in art and Scott's work fits nicely into that category. He's been quite successful and we're fortunate to represent and promote his work. Scott's a great guy

and a great talent. Be glad to send you a catalogue. Where are you?" *Sessums, what are you doing?*

"Mississippi. So what Wyeth pieces are available?" I tried to direct the conversation feeling he was unaware, thus far, that I was out of my neighborhood. "Out of curiosity, are you familiar with a limited edition print of the 1957 egg tempera, "Cooling Shed". I picked one up eight years ago from a New York auction but I wouldn't know its value today."

"Well, I'm not sure, but that could be part of the Traiton Press Portfolio that Betsy Wyeth put together in the early 70's. I don't deal with reproductions but I do have two watercolors here now. What are you looking for?" *OK. Now he wants to know if you're serious.*

"I'm more interested in the Pennsylvania works. . .the Kuerner series, Willard Snowden, Tom Clark, Adam Johnson, Alexander Chandler - the studies as well as the finished watercolors and drybrush paintings. I love the egg temperas but I'm sure they're out of my range." It was the greatest understatement in the history of the art deal.

"What *is* your price range?" John Surovek was an art dealer. Everything comes back to money, a frustrating reality I would learn to live with.

"What's yours?" I answered, referring to the two pieces he mentioned, but also deflecting one question with another since I had no idea about the prices for original Wyeth watercolors.

*DOWN BY THE DAM* is 24" X 24", a wonderful study of the Brandywine River bank behind the Wyeth's home in Chadd's Ford. It's seventy-five thousand. The other is a portrait, *WALT ANDERSON, 1939*. It's a smaller piece 14" X 18", but a marvelous watercolor. It's forty-five."

"Wasn't he Wyeth's life-long friend during the Maine summers?" I thought out loud as I am prone to do. I really was not trying to impress him, as though I could.

"That's right. Not everybody knows that." I could hear him licking his negotiating lips, sensing not only my knowledge of Wyeth and his work, but, without doubt, interpreting, correctly my passion and life dream to have my own Wyeth in my own home. Surely an artist's creations belong, in some sense, to all of us. But some artists capture us and our vision more poignantly. I suppose that is why we long to see one of their works hanging in the bedroom as we brush our teeth or in the back hall as we labor through to our daily responsibilities.

"I'm sure it's a great piece, but as I said earlier, I'm leaning towards the Pennsylvania works. Actually, I'm most eager to locate a pencil study." I communicated not only the truth but hoped the pencils would be in a more feasible price range. I heard the chuckle trickle through the line from Palm Beach, Florida, to Brookhaven, Mississippi.

"Yea! So would a lot of people," he responded with a surprised tone as though he figured I should already know that. "There are pencil studies out there. No doubt about that. But not many are available. The Wyeths have chosen not to let them out. I think he thinks they're too

personal. Too revealing of the creative process. I'm sure you know how secretive Andy and Betsy Wyeth are. Almost reclusive. I don't really think it's any kind of plan but it does add to the mystique. They rarely see anyone, attend few, if any, public functions, and grant even fewer interviews. I guess you could say it's a tight inner circle," he presented the image of a secluded, guarded fortress, sounding strangely like he had firsthand knowledge.

"Surely there are some pencils out there somewhere?"

"Occasionally a pencil comes up through private hands but they're usually sold very privately as well. Tell ya' what. I'll send you the transparencies of what I've got but you really ought to talk to Frank Fowler." *Think. Who is Frank Fowler?*

"Why does that name ring a bell?" It actually did seem familiar. But from where?

"Frank probably sells more Wyeth's today than anybody. Let me give you his number," he sounded satisfied I was either a serious collector or simply unusually well versed on the work of Andrew Wyeth. *OK. You're on a roll. But where to. Frank Fowler. Lookout Mountain, Tennessee. You've got to make another call.*

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Andrew Wyeth was born on July 12, 1917, in Chadd's Ford, Pennsylvania. A sensitive child, both emotionally and physically, Andrew was the fifth child of Newell Convers Wyeth and his wife Carolyn. Convers, as he was affectionately called by Carolyn, arrived in Chadd's Ford at the beginning of the twentieth century. The twenty-year old dreamer fresh from Needham, Massachusetts had come to study with the reknowned father of American illustration, Howard Pyle. Pyle hand picked his students, his rigorous but stimulating tutoring based in Wilmington, Delaware, with summer classes conducted a few miles down the road in the farming village of Chadd's Ford. It was to this place that N.C. Wyeth walked from Wilmington on that fateful day to find Mr. Pyle and to begin a career and family that would have a lasting impact on American art.

N.C. Wyeth was a person of marked contrasts. He was a powerful figure with a powerful personality, yet so sensitive and reflective he was often reduced to tearful emotion by simply listening to his beloved Bach or smelling the contents of a "box from home". His early oil paintings, illustrations for many of the literary classics, were painted with such energy and passion that he would often awake with sore muscles from the previous days work in which he lived the scene so *marvelously* rendered, the built up oil alive on the canvas. His studio was filled with props and memorabilia much of which he collected on a trip to the wild west in 1902, the excursion sponsered by the Scribner Publishing Company.

In 1906, N.C. married Carolyn Bochius from Wilmington. After losing their first child, Henriette was born in 1908. Nathaniel Convers followed, then Carolyn, Anne, and finally Andrew. What some might call a dysfunctional family, others would see as a uniquely creative haven, a fertile ground for an amazing crop.

N.C.'s passion for his painting may have only been surpassed by his passion for his family, an admirable quality by nature, but a seemingly destructive force in many ways for his work and his family. Although this may seem like a harsh assessment, this great American illustrator and painter seemed to use up much of his creative energy stimulating and nurturing the talents of his gifted offspring. In the early 1920's, his work seemed to change, the paintings having almost a searching quality as though he desired or thought he needed some change in style. This scenario would be a poignant memory and stimulus for his youngest child, who, partially due to his birth order, would be essentially left alone wandering the hills of Chadd's Ford establishing the foundations for a secret life, a secret world in which he has lived for eight decades. Sensing his father's despondent demeanor in the years just before his death, Andrew felt a certain burden for N.C. Wyeth's emotional and artistic decline. The youngest child and his siblings felt they had somehow sapped his creative juices leaving him unfulfilled as an artist and frustrated as a father.

On October 19, 1945, N.C. Wyeth was killed at a Chadd's Ford railroad crossing on Ring Road along with two year old little Newell, Nat's firstborn, and N.C.'s first grandson. Andrew Wyeth's life and work would never be the same. Although already an accomplished artist at the age of 28, he would later make the statement regarding his father's death and its effect on him as an artist, "I now had a reason to paint. I think it made me."

Unwarranted or not, Andrew now felt a certain responsibility to satisfy N.C. Wyeth's dream and belief. A Wyeth man would become a significant American artist. But the youngest son also believed his life would have to be a secret and selfish one to accomplish and complete such a task. His father's energies and emotions had been torn between his work and his family to the detriment of both. By his own admission, Andrew Wyeth did not plan a repeat performance.

And so his work was first in his life, compulsively driven to prove his father right and injected with the great passion to go his own way despite his critics. His own way led to the freely executed and well received watercolors of the Maine coast in the late 1930's from which he migrated to the intensely private yet telling portraits of the land and people in the Kuerner and Olson works. The controversial Helga series consisted of drawings and paintings conceived and born in a secret world within a secret world. Although some rocky roads were navigated along the way, he would surprisingly blend the two areas his father could not, being married to an amazing woman for sixty years and raising two sons , Nicholas and Jamie, all the while remaining sensitive those hidden springs that filled his well of creativity.

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"Hello," I heard a deep, slightly southern voice.

"May I speak to Mr. Frank Fowler?" I asked, not knowing where I was actually calling.

"Speaking. Who's this?" I was slightly caught off guard.

"Hi. My name is Kim Sessums and I understand you have some Andrew Wyeth work for sale."

"Who gave you my number?" *Uh-oh.*

"John Surovek," I replied, hoping I would be asking the rest of the questions. *Sessums, what are you doing?*

"Oh. OK. What can I help you with?" the voice and man now sounded somehow satisfied.

"Well, I'm not sure. What pieces are available?"

"What are you looking for?" the response was short, almost condescending. At the time I had no way of knowing that this man knew where almost all of Wyeth's works are, past and present. There I was on the phone hundreds of miles away. What could he do, but hang up? I decided, as always, honesty was the best approach, so I briefly related my story and twenty year study of Wyeth's work.

"I love all the work, but I'm most interested in the Pennsylvania pieces. I probably can't afford the egg temperas."

"The temperas start at about a million."

*What are you going to say now, bigshot?* Trying not to sound or seem shocked, I was, nonetheless. I knew Wyeth's work was valuable and he would surely be considered one of the most significant artists of the 20th Century, but this revelation startled me nevertheless.

"Well, I was right, out of my price range. What about the watercolors, or better yet, a pencil study?" I asked already knowing I was paddling up the wrong stream.

"Can't help you with the pencils. There just aren't many available. I do have three watercolors here. One is a resale from an estate. The other two are owned by an elderly woman who is relocating to Florida. She has owned them since 1968 when she purchased them directly from the Wyeths."

"What are they?"

"One is *MILKSHED*, a watercolor with some drybrush, of a building on the Wylie Farm. Andy has painted there for years. The other is *MILLSTONE*, a watercolor of an old gristmill in Chadd's Ford, now restored and owned by the Wyeths."

"*MILKSHED*? That wouldn't be the same building in the painting *COOLING SHED*?"

"Yea, I believe it is. So, you're familiar with *COOLING SHED*?" his tone slightly less harsh somehow yielding me some credibility.

"Well, yes. I have a Limited Edition print of that painting from the Traiton Press Portfolio. It is signed by Mr. Wyeth but I'm wouldn't know what it's worth today."

"I only deal in original work so I really wouldn't know," he replied almost as if insulted. "You might call Barbara at the Brandywine Gallery. She might know." *Excuse me. Who is Barbara and where is the Brandywine Gallery?*

After he gave me the price of each of the available watercolors, Frank Fowler offered to send transparencies of those works for me to view, if indeed I was "serious." Through the remainder of September and early October, I had several phone conversations with this Tennessee dealer and I felt like he at least appreciated my appreciation of Andrew Wyeth's work.

At some point, Frank made a comment about my ability to understand the deeper meaning in Wyeth's work, "being an artist yourself", and I realized I was conversing with an astute listener, despite the fact that he was a smooth conversationalist who benefited from selling paintings. Although I figured a sale to me would not make or break this man's career, a commission is a commission. After all, there were certainly bigger fish to fry and I would realize later how much the man loved to fish.

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Someone once told me that childhood trauma often yields creative energy. The three children of Howard Jean and Nancy Carolyn Sessums have contributed to that theory. The trauma was obvious, parents dying fifteen months apart leaving two little boys, six and eight years old, and a four year old little girl. I suppose each of us has found a way to release the energy. Kevin, the oldest, studied acting at Julliard and is now a free lance writer in New York. Karole, the baby, is a musician and art dealer. I have found my outlet through expression with figurative works. I guess you could say I came from a family of creative people or maybe creative people came from my family. I'm not sure.

Joe Rex Dennis, a small town eccentric conversationalist, became a friend in the small Mississippi town in which we were reared with our maternal grandparents. Joe Rex was a keen observer of people despite the complications of a poorly controlled bipolar disorder. While visiting him one afternoon, I came across a complimentary book obtained from Houghton Mifflin, the publishing company he worked for. That was the day I first laid eyes on ANDREW WYETH *KUERNER'S FARM.*

My interest in pencil drawing goes back as far back as I can remember. I found myself reproducing images with the pure joy of seeing my hand recreate what my eyes could see. With

limited outside exposure, my technique was unpolished, elementary, and essentially uninfluenced by any particular artists. But there in 1976, my artistic hunger and energy changed dramatically when I picked up that book.

Karl Kuerner and his wife Anna came to America after WWI and migrated from Philadelphia, PA, to Chadd's Ford, where Karl farmed and eventually owned a piece of land on Ring Road. As a kid, Andrew Wyeth roamed the Kuerner's property and "little Andy" became a part of the landscape. Unaffected by his presence, Karl went about his daily chores all but oblivious to the prolific, private world of the young artist. *KUERNER'S FARM* was a publication of Wyeth's visual record of life on the farm but more importantly it was an expression of the painter's inner world chocked full of emotional associations. I was stunned. I had never seen pencil marks do such things on paper not to mention how the splashes of watercolors sent my own imagination soaring.

When I left home later that year to study architecture, Joe Rex allowed me to borrow the book, which I still have and which continues to be a source of study and inspiration. Little did I know I was beginning my own strange journey.

Andrew Wyeth's work affected me like no other art I had seen and not just because of the figurative reality or the bucolic scenery and subject matter. I was somehow drawn to the simple, emotional, tangible nature of his technique, yet mysteriously consumed with this story that was his. What was he expressing or communicating? Eventually I came to realize what a personal world this artist and others must experience in order to create such works of genius. How that concept related to me and my work would take years to reveal itself.

One particular work reproduced in the Kuerner's book, *ROPE AND CHAIN*, *1957,* a pencil study for the painting *BROWN SWISS*, captured my attention and wouldn't let go. I have always had a love for pencil drawing but this drawing went deeper, striking some harmonious chord in my innermost being. I have come to see things differently. As I drive out the driveway in the early morning, I am caught by the way light strikes the side of the hill. I am at once amazed and reminded of my childhood on old Highway 35 in rural Scott County, Mississippi, when I saw the same light on a different hill. What a challenge it is to express these emotions in words or on paper.

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In 1984, I saw *ANDREW WYETH: THE TROJAN HORSE REALIST* in Greenville, South Carolina. My education had migrated from architecture to medicine and while traveling the interview trail to find a spot to train in OB-GYN, I had my first exposure to Wyeth's work in person. I was not disappointed. The books and photos had only scratched the surface. Four

years later, my wife, Kristy, and I visited the Brandywine Museum and were fortunate enough to see the *THREE GENERATIONS OF WYETH* exhibition in Chadd's Ford. On both occasions I was speechless. I knew on that day in the Greenville County Museum that I would one day meet this reamarkable man despite how unlikely it seemed at the time.

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The transparencies arrived and the watercolors were amazing. What must the actual paintings be like? *MILKSHED* was just what I was looking for had I any right to be looking. *You can't afford an original Andrew Wyeth. Have you lost your mind?*

I informed Frank that I had received the transparencies and told him of our previously arranged visit to the Kansas City exhibition, *ANDREW WYETH: AUTOBIOGRAPHY*. He had been there in September for the opening having loaned four pieces from his personal collection to the Nelson Adkins Museum for the show. I informed him we would like to come up to Lookout Mountain the second week of November to meet him and see the available works. He said he would be in contact to arrange the details of our visit.

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In 1968, shortly after graduating from the University of Georgia, Frank Fowler began dating a young woman from Wilmington, Delaware, through whom he had his first exposure to a prominent American painter. By his own admisssion, he knew little about Andrew Wyeth's work but he was smitten after seeing the first painting. The Fowler family owned a furniture business in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and logically, Frank had been groomed to move home to help with the business.

Almost as spontaneously as I had dialed John H. Surovek that day, the twenty-four year old Fowler had picked up the phone and called for information in Cushing, Maine, where Andrew and Betsy Wyeth spent their summers. Amazingly, he was given the number and due to the blend of gin and tonic with his personal disposition, Frank called the number.

After hearing a high pitched "Hello", he identified himself as "Frank Fowler, from Lookout Mountain, Tennessee", and asked to speak with Mr. Andrew Wyeth.

Surprised by the response, "Speaking", Frank told Mr. Wyeth of his appreciation for his work and his desire to purchase a piece. Wyeth informed him that his dealer, Coe Kerr, was in New York and would be glad to help him. But Frank persisted that he wanted to purchase something from Wyeth himself, displaying even then the confidence and audacity that can open doors.

Responding that he only had two watercolors there and they were to be shipped out the next day, Wyeth told him the only way he could see them was to be in Cushing by noon the following day. Apparently thinking this would discourage this stranger from Tennessee, he underestimated Frank Fowler and said goodbye.

Undaunted by the conversation or the 9 PM hour, Frank began to arrange his travel and by the next morning he was back on the phone with Andrew Wyeth. This time, it was a local call in Cushing, Maine. Reintroducing himself, he asked for directions to the house and to his surprise, Wyeth offered to pick him up. That weekend Frank Fowler began a long relationship with Betsy and Andrew Wyeth.

While in Maine on that first visit, Frank looked at the two watercolors and unaware of their value, asked the prices. When he heard "thirty-five each", he said to the Wyeths, “I’ll take them both.” Relating the story as though it happened that very day, Frank told me at the time he had saved $10,000 and decided he would just buy both paintings. Wyeth told him one was already promised to another collector, but did sell him *BAITHOUSE*, the 1968 watercolor that Frank still owns.

After arriving back in Lookout Mountain, Frank realized he had become not only a collector of Andrew Wyeth's art, but a friend as well. He also realized, after the bill arrived weeks later, that he wanted to be involved with Wyeth's work. The business. He thought he had paid $3,500.00 for *BAITHOUSE*, only to realize he had missed by one decimal point. However, his love for the painting and the value he placed on this newfound friendship would not allow him to return the painting. He borrowed the balance from his father and the rest is art history, so to speak.

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Square Books in Oxford has always been a good source for unique books and the availability of the newest publications. A weekend visit in October for an Ole Miss football game allowed me to drop by and to my surprise, I found the wonderful catalogue of the Nelson Atkins Museum Exhibit, *ANDREW WYETH: AUTOBIOGRAPHY*. A striking Bruce Weber black and white photo of Wyeth was in the back, and that photo, my longtime passion for the art, and the recent events, precipitated my first inclination to do a graphite portrait of Andrew Wyeth.

I had never before done a drawing of any significance of a subject I hadn't actually met but my strange relationship with his work gave me a more intimate connection to this man who was, in truth, a stranger. The resulting portrait was one of the best I have ever done. I had captured a man I didn't even know. In a one man show later that month, *THE ROAD NOT TAKEN*, that study of Wyeth's face, was the hit of the exhibition despite the fact that many

viewers didn't even recognize who he was, a phenomenon I would learn thrills Andrew Wyeth greatly. The public recognizes his work but rarely his face.

Although I dreamed of owning a Wyeth painting one day, I began to consider how strange it would be if he should own a work of mine. I was aware of his love for pencil and found out from Frank that Betsy Wyeth also loves the medium. But how would they ever see this piece, my work? I had been made very aware that the Wyeths are private people. I couldn't just call him up. *Hey, Andy. I've got this pencil drawing I want you to have. That's right, an original Sessums.* But, Frank could. If he would.

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A few days later Frank called. It seemed that someone else was looking at *MILKSHED*, and he wanted to give me first shot. I was not expecting to make any decision until I had seen the actual painting. He suggested he could ship the painting and I could keep it a few days to decide.

During that conversation I mentioned the Wyeth portrait for the first time and Frank informed me that he makes every effort not to invade Mr. Wyeth's privacy. I had only hoped Frank would see the drawing and then make his decision but my timing was bad. *Idiot*

Four days later I came in early from the clinic and met a Federal express van in the driveway. The package was boarded up with screws holding the wooden crate together. I uncrated the prize and slowly turned it around. The emotional impact of seeing that watercolor, his watercolor, placed by his hand on the paper found me physically shaking. An original Andrew Wyeth was in my house.

I placed the painting over the Welsh wake table in the back hall. I was in trouble now and Frank probably knew from our conversations on the phone I would never be able to send it back. I had wondered why he would ship such a work of art to a man in Mississippi he had never actually met. At that moment I realized he had gleaned from our relationship over the phone that I had been on a long, thoughtful journey and this painting was an important leg of the trip. Neither of us knew the journey would not end there.

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After careful consideration and discussion, the transaction was made on October 19, 1995, a date I later realized was the 50th anniversary of N.C. Wyeth's death. I sent Frank a note to thank him for his input and enthusiasm in this process and told him that although we have all

experienced buyer's remorse at some point in our lives, this was not one of those situations. That has not changed.

Frank wrote back to say he had forwarded my note on to Andy because he knew he would enjoy it. He suggested that we come up after the trip to Kansas City. He knew how much I loved Andy's work and he had a few pieces himself he would love to share with me. What an understatement that turned out to be.

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Although I had heard the voice enough to recognize it, I had no idea what Frank Fowler looked like. I had envisioned an older man, tall and stout, with salt and pepper hair, full, with a thick mustache. As he walked from the kitchen I met a fifty year old man, thinning blond, beginning to gray, in stature slightly shorter and thicker than me, with rimless square reading glasses and no mustache.

The formal introductions seemed almost unnecessary as we stood in the breakfast room while Frank's wife, Gay, cleaned up the adjacent kitchen. Walking by a pine table I had immediately noticed a study of Willard Snowden, a black drifter who became one of Wyeth's studio models and an important subject for the artist in Chadd's Ford.

In addition to the pencil study, I turned and noticed two still life paintings by Henriette Wyeth Hurd. As I noted before, Henriette was the oldest of N.C. and Carolyn Wyeth's children, who recently died at her ranch in New Mexico. She was married to the late southwest painter, Peter Hurd, who brought style, charm, and the egg tempera technique to Chadd's Ford when Andy was in his early teens. A graduate of the Military Academy, Hurd once commented that West Point was a breeze compared to the intensity and rigors of studying under N.C. Wyeth.

As Frank and I were discussing Henriette and the two paintings, through the doorway to the dining room, Kristy spotted a striking portrait on the far wall. As I asked if it was a young Carolyn Wyeth, Frank nodded affirmatively.

"She was my buddy," he said with a reminiscent and emotional smile.

"Wasn't it Carolyn who once said of her renowned contemporary, Georgia O'Keefe, "Too bad her work doesn't look as good as she does"?" We walked into the dining room.

"I hadn't heard that," Frank laughed, "but it sounds just like her. She was unique, no doubt about that, and very close to Andy."

Carolyn Wyeth was, by most accounts, somewhat of a loner, as a person and as an artist. She once said, "I guess I love animals so much because I've never gotten much from people." She and her youngest brother were close and Carolyn was one of the few people who even knew

about the Helga series. In her later years, Carolyn taught art in N.C. Wyeth's studio, the same studio in which she had been trained many years earlier.

Donald Tullock, a journalist from Chadd's Ford, lives just across the hill from the Wyeth homestead and studio. He began studying art with Carolyn when he was 13 and has fond memories of his friend. In 1992, Tullock wrote an magazine editorial about the legacy and lasting influence of N.C. Wyeth's work.

"She drew a sharp line between those she liked and those she didn't like," Tullock recalled in a phone conversation from his home. "Carolyn was quite an introvert, staying by herself most of the time. Once, the DuPont Corporation asked her to speak at a conference about the Wyeth tradition and she declined, suggesting she was too shy. After much encouragement, she agreed, but only if I would sit in front of her on the front row, so she could talk to me, 'the others could listen if they want to'."

As we visited that morning, I wondered how strange it was that I could be so intoxicated by this collection of Wyeth family works of art. There were paintings by N.C. Wyeth and all the children who painted. I was in sensory overload.

On the sofa table in the bedroom sat Andrew Wyeth's hands, individually cast in bronze, a gift to Frank from the Wyeths. I had no idea I would see those hands again.

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"So, whattaya think?" I was more than a bit nervous.

"Andy's going to love it," Frank had a hint of surprise in his voice.

As Gay turned the corner to view the drawing, Frank rose to look from a different angle. Anticipating my thought processes once again, he beat me to the punch, absolving me from having to ask the question.

"I'll see that Andy gets the drawing but I'd like for you to send him a note," Frank reminded me. I handed him the note that had come from the heart.

*Dear Andrew and Besty Wyeth,*

*In 1976, I saw "Rope and Chains" for the first time. That pencil study was the stimulus starting a 20 year journey that continues today. I see the world around me differently... the textures, the light, the dark, wet,dry, the feel of it all is somehow more alive. Not because God*

*changed His creation... I'm sure He's always loved it... but He seems to have allowed you to expose it more clearly to me and countless others.*

*Pencil drawing has captivated me for these two decades. Graphite on paper is exciting and I have found that searching for my own style was futile... it found me.*

*The hours and weeks of work (and pleasure) doing this portrait seemed to bring my work full circle. Although I usually work from relationships, life, and my own photographs, in this case, the last two ingredients were missing. I could only rely on my relationship with the body of your work (which I trust reflects you) since I have never met you in person. But, this is really what the portrait is about to me... reflecting on all those woven textured surfaces, the crevices and contours, contrasted with light reflected in a special moment; and those penetrating , sensitive, insightful eyes that see the world unlike anyone else. Fortunately, you have shared a glimpse of that world with us.*

*As for a likeness, I do not know. I had to rely on photographs in the publications; in particular, a wonderful shot by Bruce Weber.*

*And so, to Betsy and Andrew Wyeth, at the risk of invading your privacy, please accept this drawing as my thanks to you, for traveling the road not taken. It must be quite a trip.*

*J. Kim Sessums, M.D.*

*p.s. "Milkshed", a watercolor you painted in 1967, was hung in my home on October 19, 1995. It serves as living proof to my kids that dreams can come true.*

* * * *

As we walked down the drive towards the car, I turned and commented, "Frank." He cut me off.

"If I told you I was going to get it to him, I am. If I didn't like the portrait, I wouldn't have told you I didn't like it. But, likewise, I wouldn't have told you I liked it if I didn't. Don't worry," Frank smiled, "he'll get it."

*  *  *  *

On November 21, 1995, my oldest child became a teenager. Jake was thirteen. It had been three weeks since our journey to Lookout Mountain and I had not heard from Frank. I trusted the Wyeth's had received the drawing and I didn't really expect to receive any acknowledgment of that fact. But, naturally, I hoped to get some confirmation from Frank or his office, and better yet, hear any comments Andrew and Betsy Wyeth might have made. Other than a note to Frank to thank him for his hospitality, I had not contacted him or inquired about the portrait. He had told me his plans and I believed him.

On my lunch break, I had picked up the mail from the side porch and as I walked to the kitchen, I flipped through the envelopes. One in particular caught my eye, the hand written address familiar. Especially notable was the unique K in the name Kim. I had seen that K in notes mentioning Karl Kuerner, personal notes from Andrew Wyeth to Bill Phelps, his friend and neighbor in the Brandywine Valley. Could this envelope have been addressed by Andrew Wyeth himself?

I stopped in my tracks and turned the letter over. On the back was the return address in plain print, THE MILL, CHADD'S FORD, PENNSYLVANIA. My heart and thoughts racing, I went into the kitchen. Was this actually from the man? I stood there, a grown man, trembling with excitement. Who would understand this? I slit the envelope and slipped out the two page hand written note.

*THE MILL*

*Dear Dr. Sessums:*

*What a fine thing for you to send me your pencil portrait of me.*
*What work you must have put into this drawing.*
*Have you ever tried doing a self portrait in the mirror?*
*I would love to see you do this.*
*I am deeply moved by your gift.*
*Bless you always.*

*Sincerely,*
*Andrew Wyeth*

*P.S.*

Delighted you have "Milkshed" A.W.

*  *  *  *

"Hey, bud.  You get a letter?"

"Like you didn't know?" I wondered why Frank would mentioned a letter.

"I didn't know.  I just thought that might be why you called."

"Why would you think that?"

"Well, Andy did call me about the drawing."

"What did he say?"

"Well, he loved it, just like I said he would.  I'll tell you this, Andy writes very few letters, mostly to friends and family.  So, tell me what he said!"  Frank barked as though he might actually be interested.

I related the details of the letter, describing the two pages of unmatched stationary.  Frank laughed and commented, "That's so typical.  Better check the back, there may be a drawing, knowing Andy."  I checked. No such luck.

*  *  *  *

In early March, 1997, on a Sunday, I sat in my chair, Daddy's Chair, reading through Art News magazine and resting from a long weekend of call.  The phone and my pager seemed to alert me to the next problem almost before I had solved the last one.  Kristy and my daughter, Joey, were asleep on the bed as another American Movie Classic came to an end.

"Hello", I picked up the phone again, expecting Labor and Delivery or some desperate parturient seeking permission or advice about "having relations, cause I'm in my eighth month, and all."

"Yes, may I speak with Dr. Sessums?" I heard a deep female voice, not local, but strangely familiar.

"Speaking."

"Dr. Sessums, this is Betsy Wyeth." The recollection even now sends  chills down my spine. As Andy would say, it made my hair stand on end.

"I'm sorry, who is this?" I replied spontaneously, thinking I had heard the name Betsy Wyeth but instantaneously assuming this was a prank by some friend.

"Betsy Wyeth.  Is this a bad time?"  I now knew I had heard that voice; the documentary on Andrew Wyeth, "Snowhill."  It was suddenly very clear. This lazy Sunday afternoon, the time and my thoughts trickling along slowly, was now a class five rapids of thoughts and memories and emotions.  She had received my letter and photos of the bust. That was the only conclusion I could reach and I reached it at warp speed.

"No! I'm sorry, I didn't hear you clearly the first time."
I hoped my voice was not expressing the same rush of exhilaration my body was feeling. "How are you?"

"Oh, fine, fine. Dr. Sessums, the work is remarkable." Had I heard her correctly. Betsy Wyeth, wife, critic, soul-mate, and major influence on the life and work of her renowned husband, had just said in her slow, deliberate way, that *my* work was remarkable. I was flushed, weak legged, and at a loss for words as I gazed with a blank stare into the bathroom mirror.

"Well, thank you. So, you like the bust?"

"We love it, and I'm quite fond of sculpture anyway. It is a mysterious, wonderful work, and you've captured Andy's ice blue eyes marvelously."

"Well, I thought so, but as I said in my note, I really need your input. I knew it was bold to suggest I had captured the essence of your husband, but I hope I have."

"Well, you have. But that brings me to why I'm calling." *Uh-oh. Here it comes.* "Andy and I have been talking about this for several weeks and although he doesn't lend himself to this sort of thing, he wants to meet with you if you can find some time to come up. There are a couple of subtle changes you can only make if you see and talk to him. You'll see," I heard her speak in a confident but gracious manner. There was a pause. *She's inviting you to see and meet with Andrew Wyeth? Get a grip.*

"I would love to come up. Are you in Chadd's Ford or Maine?" It was the only thing I could think to say. Betsy Wyeth had never called me on a Sunday afternoon while I sat in my leather chair reading with my sleeping wife and daughter across the room. I later realizing it was a blessing that she called so unexpectedly. I had no time to prepare.

"Oh, we're still in Chadd's Ford. I know you're busy, Dr. Sessums, but if you could, I'd like for you to come on up fairly soon. You know, Andy will be eighty soon and he's really slowing down."

*Too busy? If I could? Ha!*

"I'm sure I can get up there this month. Let me check with my partners tomorrow."

"I would like for you to keep this quiet. Don't even tell Frank. Let's just say this is between me and you and Andy. I haven't even told Jamie or Nicky."

*Me and you and Andy? You've got to be kidding me.* I had just read a blurb in Art News about Bill Gates' purchase of "Distant Thunder", a well known 1957 egg tempera of Betsy. The estimated purchase price, seven to ten million dollars. And now, only a few Sunday afternoon minutes later ( and 20 years study of his work and their life) I was on the phone with her; and she called me!

I assumed she would offer to contact me the following week to set up the visit and I sensed from our conversation that she seemed comfortable with me. Then, in a subtle way, she confirmed it.

"Here's my number. Just call me when you've arranged your schedule. Yours is busier than ours. But let me know so I can OK it with Andy."

By now Kristy and Joey had awakened, oblivious to the caller initially, since they were unaware I had contacted Betsy Wyeth by letter. Quickly, however, they identified my conversant by the conversation. Kristy paced the floor with arms crossed, her mind racing to piece together the puzzle of this encounter. She had most of it figured out. I was talking with Betsy. We were discussing the bust. But one piece still eluded her. If Betsy Wyeth called me, she must have seen the sculpture. But, if as I had said, I hadn't contacted Frank about it, then I must have done what my wife had told me not to do. I had sent Betsy Wyeth the letter and photos.

* * * *

My brother came home for Christmas three months before that conversation with Betsy Wyeth. Kevin was aware of my love for Wyeth's work, the drawing I had sent, and the letter I had received. He also knew about the upcoming biography by Richard Meryman though he had no idea if I already had it. As it turned out, the book was the perfect gift because I, although aware of the book, had not had time to pick one up. I was elated. I could not put it down and that December in 1996, I read the entire account in three days.

I was surprised that I was not bored with many of the familiar stories but Meryman had skillfully communicated intimate details that helped weave together the fabric of the painter and the paintings.

The biography, *ANDREW WYETH; A Secret Life*, was published in 1996, and as the author says in the close of his prologue, "Wyeth considers himself as an eye hovering above his existence. As he says, "I am an illustrator of my own life." That is why a man so secretive has allowed a book in his lifetime. His own portrait / biography is one of the final elements of that life - and the impish child that is so much Andrew Wyeth loves an uproar. He sees no reason not to be around for the whole show."

Richard Meryman met Andrew and Betsy Wyeth in 1964. He immediately hit it off with the artist as he interviewed Wyeth for a major LIFE magazine article. An editor for LIFE, Meryman found that he had common ground with this painting legend. Both were sons of realist painters, Richard Meryman, Sr. being a landscape and portrait painter in the 20's and 30's, as well as the principal of the art school at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. Ironically, N.C. Wyeth had once served with Meryman, Sr. on an art exhibition jury. The

Meryman family moved to New Hampshire in 1935, partially pushed out by the growing domination of Abstract art. The move gave a young Richard Meryman his rural New England roots to match Wyeth's summer association with Maine.

The writer seemed to understand Andrew Wyeth from the start, both the man and the work. In a time of growing abstract expression and its imposing aura on the art world, Wyeth charted his own lonely course in the tradition of Homer, Eakins, and Hopper. And, as he felt compelled to do with his domineering father, he did so in a secret world. He was not so much worried or concerned with what the critics thought. He simply didn't want to become confused or influenced as his father had, changing his focus or style as new waves rolled in. Now, as one writer put it, "he's outrun every art "ism" (and critic!) of the past half century." In a time when Realism was considered a beaten path, Wyeth's brand of Realism could very well be the greatest illusion of all - realistic images conveying abstract ideas. Ironically, that concept proved too abstract even for the abstractionists.

As Meryman grew to know the entire Wyeth clan, his relationship with Andrew and Betsy Wyeth deepened. They would inform him that he was to be the future biographer of Andrew Wyeth. Their intention, of course, was a biography after the artist's death. However, I was later told that Meryman was concerned he may well be gone before the subject of the book and he felt he should press on with the biography. Wyeth resisted initially, but later agreed on the conditions that he would not sit for interviews, would not read the manuscripts, and the book would be tough, treating "truth as a form of honor." Besty Wyeth, I later learned, was not in favor of the timing.

Andrew Wyeth's request that his biography be tough was honored. It is. Frank even suggested to me that I not read it, concerned that I might be disillusioned by a man portrayed who was not the Andrew Wyeth I knew. But it was the work I had developed a relationship with over all the years and not the man? I would later realize, with no disappointment, that the two have always been intertwined.

When David Michaelis, a young, gifted, Ivy League educated writer first approached the Wyeths about a proposed biography of N.C. Wyeth, he was not encouraged that the family would cooperate. However, after Richard Meryman went against Besty's wishes and pressed on with the biograghy of Andrew, she let Michaelis know that he was indeed welcome and could have open access to the family archives of letters, communications, and photographs. Though I cannot know her motives, my personal impression is that she takes pleasure in pointing young talent to open doors. David Michaelis certainly walked through his open door as the book *N.C. WYETH A BIOGRAPHY* became a best seller.

*  *  *  *

Though I had been working with clay and the three dimensional figure for a couple of years, nothing had really clicked. I realized my drawing skills had been fine tuned over many years, so I didn't really expect much from the early sculptures. I gradually began to realize, however, that those twenty years of intensive study in drawing lay dormant as a foundation that was essential for a meaningful transition to figurative work, although the drawing had not been studied and absorbed and digested for that conscious purpose.

As I read *A SECRET LIFE* I was reminded of Wyeth's challenge to me to do a self-portrait in the mirror. I thought of the bust I had begun two years earlier, my own head and face, done more out of convenience ( a readily available and willing human model) than for any significant reason. I was stimulated to return to that figure, but as I began to rework the clay, my thoughts kept going to that marvelous face on the cover of the Wyeth biography.

Gradually at first, then with reckless abandon, his face replaced mine and I had a real reason to work. As I said in my letter to Betsy Wyeth, "I began to disappear from the work." After frequent reference to the documentary "Snow Hill", I began to see this captivating, strange, gifted man in a clearer light.

But I had learned from clay studies of my own children, there is really no substitute for life. Personal interaction is essential for an intimate portrait. And so, after I had taken the bust of Andrew Wyeth as far as I could, I drafted and sent a letter to Besty Wyeth. I knew it was a long shot, but her input was crucial.

*Dear Mrs. Wyeth,*

*Initially, I thought of contacting Frank Fowler regarding my portrait bust of Andrew Wyeth. But, I know how much Frank treasures, respects, and protects your privacy, and I understand his position and your dilemma. Therefore, I decided to communicate with you directly. I do believe Frank would be interested in this project, as he has seen some of my other work, and, he is obviously fond of you and Mr. Wyeth. But I would be more grateful and would treasure your input, which I am sure would enhance my efforts to complete this work, which I hope to preserve in bronze.*

*Working from photos has obvious limitations, and your wonderful documentary "Snow Hill", has been a tremendous resource, but I don't want this to be just a nice figure of Andrew Wyeth*

*the painter; rather, a portrait that captures the essence of Andy Wyeth the person. I may be deluding myself, but I believe the clay figure is well on the way to that end.*

*N.C. Wyeth once suggested that the depth of one's painting (or any creative expression) can only go as deep as one's emotions go. If that is true, and I believe it is, this portrait bust should have depth. Somehow, as I looked beneath the surface, I was able to go deeper. Ironically, a study of my own head is underneath your husband's face, and that clay study had been sitting in my hospital call-room (turned studio) for the last three years. After Mr. Wyeth suggested to me, in a letter last year, that I try a self-portrait in the mirror, I was reminded of that self-study I had already done in the mirror, only in clay, and, only because I was a readily available live model.*

*Having pondered this present work now for over a year, I revisited my self-study as I began to work on the portrait of Mr. Wyeth, and gradually began to apply more clay, loosely and freely. "I" began to disappear from the work, and that seemed to make all the difference. I guess your husband has been on to something all these years.*

*After purchasing the watercolor "Milkshed" through Frank last year ( a purchase I could hardly afford but will gladly be paying off for some time), I began to examine why I have loved the work so, and that led to a deeper study of Andy Wyeth the person, his life and story; which is, certainly, also your life and story. I am convinced that the treasure of Andrew Wyeth's art would be a different treasure without your existence. Flattery? Probably a little, but true nonetheless. So, why this note?*

*It is my understanding that your husband would love to exist without really existing (at least when he's working); to not really be present, so as not to interfere with is true expression, his work. In a sense, he has succeeded... his work does stand on its own. But the person, Andy Wyeth, does exist. Just as many of us would love to know or see the physical appearance of Michelangelo, Winslow Homer, or some other historically significant artist, the world, when you and I are long gone, will long to put a face, a physical being, a creator, if you will, with the singular most significant and intriguing body of art of the 20th century. My small world involves four children, and this work, if for no other reason, preserves for them and their children, the painter of "Milkshed", which I hope will be in my family for generations to come.*

*I must admit, I find myself thinking, "Get real, Sessums. Betsy Wyeth could have any sculptor alive today do a portrait of her husband, if she so chose to. Why would she be interested in this work by an unknown artist; better yet, an OB-GYN physician working passionately in any free*

*time he can find?" Well, I decided it sort of fit with who I believe you guys are. I think Andy Wyeth, though he wouldn't seek to have his own figure cast in bronze, would desire it be done with heart and skill, not simply as some technical piece of art. And you, in addition to your business acumen and amazing organizational skills, seem to have a sensitive, caring spirit, even if it has to be guarded. If I am wrong, then this note is quite embarrassing, as my wife suggests it is anyway.*

*I have no idea how busy your husband is these days, but I would love to hear from you, as your observations would be so helpful. I plan to go to the foundry in Santa Fe the latter part of May to cast a couple of other pieces, and would love to take this portrait as well... it would be nice to place it in the room with "Milkshed". I look forward to your comments, Mrs. Wyeth. My home number is 601-833-6627, and my office is 601-833-8157.*

*Thanks for reading the note and viewing the photos.*

*With kind regards,*

* * * *

I arrived in Chadd's Ford around 7 pm on March 22, 1997. I made it despite traveling by air with a 75 pound clay bust in a camera case. At one boarding I was instructed to get two sack lunches, one for me, and "one for the head".

The Brandywine Hotel sits just up the hill from the historic Brandywine Inn, both less than a mile from the Wyeth's home on the Brandywine River. The desk clerk informed me that my room was compliments of Mr. and Mrs. Wyeth. Despite my travel fatigue, this revelation stoked the fire that had been smoldering for the previous three weeks. I was not only in Chadd's Ford to see the Wyeths but it was at their invitation.

* * * *

"Hello," I heard her familiar voice.

"Mrs. Wyeth, this is Kim Sessums. Well, I made it."

"Oh, Kim. Welcome to Chadd's Ford. How was the trip? And how did the bust travel?" she sounded genuinely interested.

"Well... good and bad."

"Oh, my! What happened?"

"The good news is, the head and face made the trip fine. But, the shoulders fell apart during the jostling and shaking of the trip," I shared what I had only learned a few traumatic minutes earlier.

"Oh, no. So what can you do?"

"Well, I can fix it tonight, but I'll need two wood screws, a power drill, and a screwdriver."

"You aren't going to find those in Chadd's Ford on a Sunday night. I do have a tool box here at the house, but I don't know if it will have what you need. George is still out in the mill. I'll check with him and you're welcome to come out and see if any of this will help," she graciously offered, sensing my discouraging deliemma.

"I hate to impose, but I really need to take a look," I was anxious about being too forward, having arrived in town five minutes earlier and not scheduled to meet with her husband until the next morning.

As she gave me instructions on how to get to the house, I reflected on Frank's advice. Besty had undoubtedly decided to let Frank know of our plans and he had called to put in his two bits. "Don't push. Let them call all the shots."

I felt like this was a legitimate situation and she had offered. Despite Frank's advice, I had to make a decision then that would effect the rest of this journey. I would go with my own instincts and be myself. After all, what else could I be? Betsy Wyeth was sure to see through anything else and I was fully aware of Andrew Wyeth's skills of observation. It was settled. I was about to meet Betsy Wyeth, though not at all in the way I had envisioned.

* * * *

I have read much about the Brandywine Valley and "Wyeth Country" but now I found myself not just in "Wyeth Country," but in his front yard, driving down the winding drive to the easily visible quartet of buildings, three of which were standing when the British troops crossed the Brandywine over 200 years earlier. There is no designed landscape around the structures. They simply rise up out of the Brandywine River basin like huge stones out in the field. I was literally driving into the painting "Battleground", where George Hebner stood in the winter landscape in his blue knit cap, the 18th century stone buildings down in the valley behind him in the distance.

George had worked for the Wyeths for forty years, beginning when they purchased the long abandoned Brinton's Mill which had been in continuous operation until 1948, the same year Andrew Wyeth painted "Christina'a World". A young Andy had played around the mill as a kid,

swimming in the Brandywine on family picnics and as the years passed it became a frequent destination to draw and paint, its natural decaying process and history stimulating to the young artist. Betsy bought the place in 1958, the year I was born, and Louis Pepe and George Heebner rebuilt the interiors of the granary and the miller's house. The restoration required gutting the structures down to the naked stones, stones that were erected there around 1706. Described to me by Frank as a sort of Pennsylvania Renaissance man, a philosopher and thinker, George was a Jack-of-all trades, doing most of the restoration of the buildings using original methods and staying on after completion of the miller's house in 1963 to help Betsy maintain her new village. The Wyeths moved into the miller's house in 1963 and the residence has since been known as The Mill.

As I reached the end of the driveway, around the corner of a carport shed walked a well-dressed, elegant, thin woman, with dark short hair. As I stepped from the car the voice was easily recognizable, her eyes alive, as she said hello through a vibrant smile in the dusky light. Her dark wool turtle neck sweater hung to her upper thighs, gracfully covering the black stretch pants. Even at seven o'clock on a Sunday night with no plans for a visitor, she had an elegance difficult to ignore.

"Hello, Mrs. Wyeth. I'm sorry for this intrusion." We shook hands.

"Ah, no problem," she waved off my apology. "I just hope we can find something you can use."

I sensed she was surprised by my appearance, younger than she expected. When patients often comment on my youthful look, I usually respond that I'm aging on the inside, and that evening, twenty years passed right before my eyes as I stood looking at the mill and Betsy Wyeth, her voice somehow in harmony with the rushing of the Brandywine waters a stone's throw away.

That's when I saw a somewhat disheveled older man walking towards us from the familiar mill, the very same building painted in so many of Andrew Wyeth's paintings. He placed the tool box on a fence post where we looked through the well worn metal container.

"George, this is Dr. Sessums," I heard her speak as George and I shook hands. He had a pleasant, generic face, and warm, friendly eyes that seemed to look curiously inside me. "Dr. Sessums, this is my longtime friend, George Heebner."

"Nice to meet you George. Hope you've got a drill I can borrow."

"What is it you're trying to do?" I heard his quiet toothy voice escaping from a mouth which moved more or less like a want to be ventriloquist. As we walked towards the mill Mrs. Wyeth was now walking towards the house and without further input, she was gone.

"Well, actually I'm trying to drill two small holes in a 2 X 2 inch block of wood in order to insert two wood screws," I explained a plan I wasn't completely sure about myself.

"Why don't you just tap a nail in to get it started?" George asked.

"Cause I can't really shake or jar the structure. I need to screw quietly, so to speak," my phrase drawing a strange look from this seventy-five year old handy-man.

As we walked into the stone structure a huge waterwheel with ten-foot paddles was there before my eyes, the millstone leaning against one wall, various ropes hanging from the rafters. The stairs beside the waterwheel led to the second floor of the gristmill and a gallery Betsy Wyeth had designed. At that moment I realized it was up there that she had first been exposed to the entire Helga collection in early November, 1985. The soothing sounds of Bach filtered through the darkened room and the Sunday sunlight was now all but gone. An artificial light came from an open door in the left rear of the large loft and we walked to a small work room, the walls and benches covered with the tools George had used to restore these historic buildings.

We surveyed the available tools and found a portable power drill, well used but functioning, not unlike its owner. George found the right bit and two wood screws just right for my impending night of armature repair. As I turned to the door to leave, I noticed a hand written Bible verse taped above the door. I made no comment and assumed that George Heebner must be an intriguing character. Though I would have loved to sit and talk with him, under the circumstances, something told me to keep this initial trip to The Mill brief.

I had reached the bivalved door when I heard George's voice, "Don't forget to return the drill or I'll have to bill you for it....the Wyeths are on hard times," he spoke without inflection in his voice though I could see a smile curl on his face. "Hope everything works out for you."

I wasn't sure if he meant my evening's work or my mysterious reason for being in Chadd's Ford in the first place. In either case, I hoped everything worked out too.

* * * *

"Good morning." Betsy Wyeth called at 8 a.m. "Well, did you get it fixed?" She had suggested to me in an earlier phone conversation that it would be a good idea to get started early, Andy being "like a caged animal in the morning, pacing around to get his day going." She said he would be fidgeting around saying "Where is he, Bets?"

"Yes, maam. Finished up about 2 am."

"Oh, God. You must be exhausted?"

"Not really. I've gotten used to limited sleep over the years. You women refuse to have babies during the daytime. Anyway, I am a little hyped up." I'm sure that revelation came as no surprise to her.

"Well, I told you not to worry. You'll be fine. Have you had breakfast?" I heard her chuckle a bit, sensing my excitement.

“Yes, thank you.” I had felt through the entire process that Betsy Wyeth was taking pleasure in arranging this meeting and that pleased me. I surmised that she had learned to be tough over the years, married to this temperamental, selfish artist with whom she found herself supportive and scornful at the same time; the agony and the ecstasy.

"Well, let me see what time he wants to get together," I heard her turn from the receiver and shout, "Andy, what time do you want to meet him?"

In the distance I heard the familiar high pitched voice, "Eight-thirty at the Long House."

"Did you hear that? He wants you to meet him over at the Long House at eight-thirty. Do you know where that is?" I heard her ask, as I thought, "Should I know the Long House?" I had an unexplainable amount of knowledge about the life and work of Andrew Wyeth and I perceived that she perceived that fact without really questioning why. However, the Long House I did not know.

She described the meeting house and its location and with the tone of a proud mother sending her first son off to college, I heard her say, "Good luck."

* * * *

I drove down Highway 100 with Andrew Wyeth's clay head and new shoulders sitting on the seat next to me. The Long House is one of Betsy Wyeth's converted residences, where she and her staff are accumulating a record of her husband's entire oeuvre. The gray shingle-sided building sits just across the street from The Mill and I pulled up into the steep driveway at eight-thirty sharp. As I exited the rental car I was met at the carport by a tall big-boned woman who looked to be in her mid thirties.

"Dr. Sessums?"

"Yes. How are you? This is the Long House, huh?"

"You found it. I'm Boop. Betsy told me you were to meet Andy here. He's in the house. Dr. Sessums, Andy is almost eighty years old and he's becoming quite frail. So, if you could, try to get what you need quickly. He feels like his time is getting more precious each day and he'd rather be out doing what he does, paint," she spoke bluntly and to the point though I did not sense anger or malice. She seemed to simply be carrying out orders and it was obvious that she was a faithful taskmaster.

In one striking blow I felt like that millstone I had seen the night before had just landed squarely on my head. The air was rushing out of my bubble. I gathered myself and conjured up a quick pep thought. *OK, you <u>are</u> meeting Andrew Wyeth, and at his invitation. Get a grip.*

As we walked towards the glassed screen door at the end of this Long House, my mind raced on. *OK. Her job is to set the stage in case he gets uncomfortable or decides immediately*

*that I'm a real loser. He's probably had other meetings and interviews he wished he had never agreed to.*

I steadied my nerves and reminded myself of my earlier decision; I would be myself. I hoped that was enough.

As we entered what appeared to be the original kitchen now converted to an office of sorts, we navigated a long hall at the end of which was an open room. On the wall directly in front of me was the egg tempera "Man and the Moon", and then, like a dog pacing back and forth along his fenced pen, I saw the figure of a thin white-haired man, waddeling, one leg splayed out with that characteristic walk, hands clasped behind his sweatered back. On the second pass he saw us enter the distal end of the hall and he turned to greet us.

"Hello. I'm Andy Wyeth," I heard the high pitched voice laced with a touch of guarded suspicion. I saw no lightening bolts. No fireworks. There were no flash-backs to the many nights of dreaming what this meeting would be like. I was one man meeting another man, he just happened to be Andrew Wyeth, shorter than I expected, and much thinner, though he would later tell me quite proudly he has weighed 140 pounds since he got married.

"Hi. I'm Kim Sessums. Nice to finally meet you."

I remember thinking his fingers were long and thin and though he looked a bit frail, his demeanor told me he was still capable and headstrong.

"Well, let's see this thing. Where would you like me? How should we do this?" he seemed to be trying to move things along, somewhat uncomfortable by the fact that he had agreed to it at all. I wanted to suggest he go about his usual day and I would just observe as I blended into his surroundings. But I knew not to suggest that or that I could, despite the fact that he himself had worked that way at Karl Kuerner's place. Then I reminded myself that he had been roaming the Kuerner domain for years, day and night. Here I was roaming Andrew Wyeth's pasture for the first time.

"I noticed a chopping block in the kitchen that's high enough to work on and the light looks OK in there," I referred not to the first room we had walked through, but another just off the big room, in the back of the house, a new kitchen area with windows across two sides

"That's fine," he began to shuttle that way.

"I'll just be a minute. I need to get the piece out of the car."

Boop escorted me back down the hall and into the driveway where I removed the bust from the front seat.

"That's nice work," I heard her say from over my shoulder as I walked towards the door. Although her tone was not excited, I felt like her compliment was sincere if guarded. After all, she was witnessing her employer and lifelong friend do something she had never seen or

expected him to do. Andrew Wyeth was sitting for a portrait bust and with an unknown artist at that.

As we walked, I briefly shared my prior evening's dilemma and how George Heebner and Mrs. Wyeth had graciously offered to help.

"I heard about that. George is my Dad. I've sort of grown up around here," the revelation now shedding even more light on why she seemed so protective of Andrew Wyeth. This was not just business, but personal. Somehow, despite what was becoming an uphill climb, this news was comforting and I had a fresh incentive to prove her wrong. I was not just another Andrew Wyeth "groupie" or some frustrated artist trying to benefit from a connection with this American master. This was also personal for me. Surely this man who valued honesty would see that if I was given any chance.

As we entered the makeshift studio I placed the clay bust on the butcher block. Mr. Wyeth was looking out the window surveying the rising wooded hill behind the Long House. When he turned to see the bust the room was silent.

He looked for what seemed likes minutes and then responded, "It's marvelous. I don't think you ought to change a thing. What do you think, Boop?" He seemed to be stating more of an honest impression than giving any constructive criticism, an apparent effort to see the work, acknowledge its existence, and be on his way with no emotional involvement.

"It's nice, Andy," her input once again guarded.

I sensed I might be losing him, soon to be escorted from this Long House, this long trip, for an even longer trip home. I had to say something in a day that was less than scripted.

"Mr. Wyeth, I think it may be a better portrait of you from the back," I spoke without really considering how it sounded or what he would think. I simply stated something I had really thought at one point during the sculpting. For whatever reason, it seemed an appropriate thing to bring up at the time and I certainly had nothing to lose.

As I finished the statement, I saw him turn from his gaze out the back window. He looked at me first, more personal somehow, then looked at the bust which I had turned so he could see the posterior view. He sat down on a stool and continued to look, then, smiling, looked back at me and said, "You know, I think you may have something there. I know I have big ears, but don't you think these should be more delicate. You know, ears are a delicate thing," he smiled.

I could feel for the first time that he was actually considering the work with his full attention, which is all I really wanted him to do. Maybe now I would have a chance to do what I came to do, observe and refine areas of the bust and add the personal touches only made possible by being with him.

"Well, now I can see where some adjustments need to be made, but I think that's why your wife wanted me to be here. Let me grab a tool and I'll show you," I turned to the counter top behind me and pulled out a couple of wire loops. As I began to shave some of the clay from the ears, ears which indeed were too bulky, he became more interested and intrigued by the big difference subtle changes in the clay could make.

"We're OK here, Boop," he whispered and she quietly disappeared down the hall.

As I studied his ears more closely, he was right. The dimensions were right but there was too much flesh. Too much thickness to the lobe. And especially, too much tissue in the cartilage attachment of the back of the ears to the skull.

"You know, ears can be a portrait in themselves, revealing as much intimacy as the eyes or the mouth as far as I'm concerned," I stated something I had long felt. The idea had just become so much more obvious to me in the last couple of years as I did clay studies of my children.

"You know, I feel the same way. Edward Hopper and I once had this conversation and he told me Eakins didn't feel that way. His ears were all the same, sort of put in only to finish the head."

Eakins? Thomas Eakins? There we sat, a country boy from Pennsylvania and one from Mississippi, discussing Edward Hopper and Thomas Eakins; the history of American art at its best. No big deal I suppose, except that one of us was Andrew Wyeth, himself an integral part of that same history.

* * * *

I had often wondered about the pronunciation.

"Is it *Ekins* or *Akins*?" I never dreamed I'd be asking Andrew Wyeth that question.

"Well, I never was sure, either. But Hopper called him *Akins* and if it's good enough for him, it's good enough for me," he smiled.

As he looked out the window with his back to me so I could observe and feel the back of the right ear, I continued to refine the clay flesh. I thought about the letter, his letter, and my recognition of that unique way he formed his K. I thought of Bill Phelps and as I had for years, wondered who this friend actually was and what his relationship was to Andrew Wyeth.

"Mr. Wyeth, tell me about Bill Phelps."

"You knew Bill Phelps?" he quickly turned to me with a smile of fondness on his rugged face as though he hoped that I had somehow known his good friend.

"Oh, no. I've just wondered for years about your friendship with him. Can you turn the other way so I can see the other ear?" I spoke with almost an apologetic tone which he obviously perceived.

"You move me wherever you need me. Let's get this thing right. And enough with the Mr. Wyeth, you call me Andy," he turned on the stool trying to pose and be natural at the same time, the effort somehow ironic since he was always on the artist's side of a sitting. He appeared to be realizing it's harder than he thought to sit naturally, to be unaffected by a probing eye.

"Bill Phelps was a good friend. He's dead now you know. Wonderful man and very supportive of my work. Bill encouraged me when nobody else gave a damn. He would show up when I was working and he'd buy works nobody else cared about."

"What did he do? How did he make a living?" I asked as my hands moved from ear to clay.

"Oh, Bill was independently wealthy. He made millions in the ivory business. Brought back an enormous shipment from Africa, or stumbled upon it somehow. I'm not sure. Anyway, that's how he got his money. Married late and had no children. He left his collection of art to the Museum in Wilmington.

I shared the account of my recognizing the "K" in the letter he had addressed to me over a year earlier, the same "K" I had seen in his letters to Bill Phelps. He turned and looked at me again, I suppose surprised that anyone would study those small images of the brief notes he had sent to his close friend, much less know them well enough to recognize one letter. I always assumed the notes had been published to reveal his personality, quick sketches sent to communicate some feeling or emotion he thought his friend would appreciate. What this sensitive man would not have realized is that the same communications also revealed some of himself to the rest of us, especially to a seventeen year old kid in Mississippi.

This conversation led to many more over the ensuing five hours as he sat and posed in any position that I requested. As we discussed his place in art history, his relationship and opinion about the course of American art, and his relationship with his father and the profound effect N.C.'s death had upon his work, I realized that we were just two people talking. This was not and was never meant to be an interview. I was indeed, as Mrs. Wyeth had suggested in our first phone conversation, simply one artist working on another.

When I suggested to him that I believed and hoped that many of his works now owned by Japanese collectors would eventually wind up back on American soil, he again turned to me and responded, "That would be nice. But I won't be here to see it."

"Maybe not, but if I'm here when it happens, I'll tell you about it when I get there," I answered quite spontaneously, not intending to get in too deep a conversation about life and death. But I suppose at eighty, it crosses one's mind.

"Awh, I'll be down there and you'll be up there," he pointed his thumb down, then up, without even looking back at me, the comment connoting some since of eternity, of life continuing beyond this confined version we know.

"What makes you say that?" *Careful.*

"I'm just an old scoundrel. I'm not a nice person, you know."

"Well, I believe the outcome isn't based on what we did here. We're all scoundrels. We're born that way. I believe it's based on what somebody else did for us," I paused, having spoken without really analyzing my response. I was simply being myself as I had promised myself I would be. Never would I have dreamed of making this man uncomfortable.

Turning to me he replied, "Nobody's ever said that to me."

And with that, the room was quiet as Andrew Wyeth turned back to peer out the window, up that hill, not unlike the wooded hills he had roamed as a boy, the Pennsylvania Sherwood Forest of his youth.

* * * *

In 1966, a portion of the Brandywine Valley was in danger of being purchased and developed by the oil industry. George "Frolic" Weymouth, artist, carriage driver, socialite, and close friend of Andrew and Betsy Wyeth, became aware of the potential development of the historic farmland. Through his deep love of the territory and its history as well as the deeper pockets of his influential friends and family, he spearheaded the effort to establish the Brandywine Conservancy. Frolic, the nickname coming from a beloved family dog that died just before his birth, is, as I understand, a gregarious, fun-loving, talented man, who has always been more outgoing and approachable than many of the others in his DuPont family.

The land was purchased in 1967 and the Brandywine Conservancy was established. In 1971, the restoration of the grist mill for the construction of the Brandywine Museum was begun.

As I sat on the steps to the entrance of the Museum, the second floor of three, I reflected on the day's activity. I was waiting to meet Andy, who along with his father and son, are a major reason this unique museum has become a national treasure with 200,000 visitors a year. Although I had been here on two previous occasions, this was different. I was waiting to look at Andrew Wyeth's work with Andrew Wyeth.

As I sat there, physical and emotional fatigue set in. Not having my sculpture stand, which not only swivels, but cranks up and down, I had to adjust to the circumstance and I had worked most of the five hours from a squatting position, not unlike an umpire behind the catcher, intently watching the ball cross the plate, and calling balls and strikes on no less than Babe Ruth. It would not be until the next morning that I would realize how sore my thighs were from the

prolonged isometric tension in my quadriceps. But regardless of my physical condition, I was not going to miss out on this opportunity and invitation from Andy to see the present Brandywine collection and to see it with him.

* * * *

Earlier that afternoon, after we both felt the bust was finished, Andy began his trek to the Schoolhouse, one of Betsy's sister buildings, where she keeps and works on the computerized archives of Andrew Wyeth's catalogue raisonne.

"Don't touch it. It's perfect," Andy smiled and walked towards the back door of the kitchen. "I can't wait for Betts to see it."

"That makes me more nervous than you seeing it," I responded to my new friend, referring to his wife's reputation as a tough critic.

"You should be," he smiled. "She's tough, but she knows good work. She'll love it."

He turned and walked out the door and up the path to the converted Quaker schoolhouse. He was excited about this work, expressing it both verbally and by his countenance. Earlier that morning he made reference to Walker Hancock, the renowned sculptor and former head of the Department of Sculpture at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. Apparently, Mrs. Wyeth had arranged for Hancock to do a portrait of Andrew Wyeth years ago. However, Andy backed out of the project, telling me during our morning work that "his work just didn't have the bite yours does." That was the second greatest compliment I've received as an artist. The greatest, the invitation by Andrew and Betsy Wyeth to be here at all.

During the fifteen minutes Andy was gone, I had my first chance to sit back and reflect on the day. As I leaned on the counter trying to absorb it all, around the corner walked a man who opened the refrigerator.

"Hi. I'm Kim Sessums, " I introduced myself to another stranger.

"Hello. I'm Peter Ray," I shook hands with a clean cut fifty-ish man, who seemed rather reserved. Peter had worked for the Wyeths for twenty-five years, leaving a banking job to help manage the finances of this very successful artist. He took a Coke from the refrigerator, then turned to look at the bust. Taking a swig, he said, "Nice. So, how did you pull this off? I've never known Andy to do anything like this."

"Well, I don't know. I've studied Andy's work for years and when I sent photos of this work to Mrs. Wyeth, she must have liked it. They invited me up to do the final touches."

"Why you?" he asked between swigs.

"Don't know, I'm really a nobody. Maybe that's part of it. But I guess they actually liked my work, too."

He looked at the bust again and as I waited for some further response, none came. He looked back at me with a suppressed smile, then turned to go back downstairs to the basement business office.

I saw Betsy Wyeth walking down the back pathway, a cape-like covering over her shoulders, turtleneck underneath, and her husband meandering behind her, studying the earth underneath his feet. I watched through the window as this unique couple eased towards the Long House. They entered the back door of the room adjacent to the kitchen and I heard Andy's voice, "Wait Betts." He wanted to see her response.

As he led her into our morning studio, his hands covered her eyes, positioning her in front of the bust which now rested on a large peach basket sitting on the butcher block. Andy had emptied the basket of the firewood it held, agreeing with me that it was a good pedestal to elevate the work for a better view. As he smiled at me, he removed his long fingers from her eyes and her face lit up.

"My God, Andy. It's magnificent," she smiled at me, as he stood behind her, giving me the thumbs up. It was obvious that her approval pleased him as it has for the last fifty-six years. She suggested I make two subtle changes; a minimal elevation of the left eyelid, and separation of the lips, "ever so slightly."

I initially resisted the suggestions, then obliged, realizing afterwards she was right. Big surprise. Her keen insight into this man, as well as her sharp artistic eye, led to the personal alterations which made an already vital piece pulse with life.

As I watched them embrace, the intimacy of their reaction was touching. I felt the bitter-sweet relationship in which they both thrive, leading one friend to describe them like "skeleton and flesh." Another friend, who has seen them up close through most of his life, says "It's an intense loyalty and an amazing love. They tantalize each other and torment and tease each other to a degree of almost destruction. But it's not. It's productive. Their romance has a lot of fire."

As I had said to Mrs. Wyeth in my letter, I don't think Andrew Wyeth would have initiated this project. It's not in his nature. But their response there in the kitchen of the Long House made me think they were happy they had asked me to come. It was a nice moment.

* * * *

As Betsy Wyeth turned to retrace her steps to the back pathway, I heard Andy speak.

"Betts, I'm going to take Kim up to the Museum. Will you call Helga and ask her to go get Knome?" referring to his fourteen year old dog, large and white and all but bedridden; half Chinook, half wolf. Helga, apparently, had been giving the dog messages and after the first one, Knome had walked for the first time in days.

"You call her. You know I make her nervous," she responded and glanced towards me with furrowed eyebrows and a "can you believe he asked me to do that" look.

"Well, I guess I could use a little nap," he shuffled towards the long hall while thinking through his course of action.

"Tell you what," he looked at me as I looked at her, "I'm going to get the dog then take a nap. I'll meet you at the museum at about four. How's that?" he smiled, still pleased that Betsy was.

"Great. Whatever is good for you," I smiled back at him, then over to her, as she glanced back through the open door. I sensed her thinking about her earlier comment to me on the phone, "this is not a social visit." But in some way, I don't think she felt threatened or betrayed. After all, I was just going down to the Brandywine with my old friend of twenty years. It just so happened that I had only been *his* friend for a few short hours. She smiled.

As she walked one way, we walked the other into the long hall where Andy turned and reached out his hand, "We've done it! I think we've really got something here." As I reached out to shake his hand, Andrew Wyeth looked at me with a satisfied smile then reached out with both arms and bear hugged me.

* * * *

"I wish you could meet Frolic but he's out of the country right now." We walked into the Brandywine Museum. "He's a wonderful person and I know he'd love to meet you. You two would hit it off. He did a tremendous job of putting this place together. I remember the day we stood in this old mill. Frolic was anxious about actually pulling off the project. Betsy was there and told him if he built it, we'd put the paintings in it. He did and she's kept her promise."

"That's the cover-leaf of Treasure Island," I said out loud to myself, as Andy confirmed with a nod, standing in the opening to the N.C. Wyeth Gallery. I had seen the piece for sale through the American Illustrators Gallery in New York the previous year and now here it was in the Brandywine Museum.

We walked through the elegantly plain gallery and I was struck more than ever by the force of this amazing painter, the soupy, thick oil paint obviously applied by a hand full of life and emotion. Each painting in the Treasure Island series grabs you and won't let go.

"Andy, I don't understand how he could have been despondent in the end. He had certainly made his mark," I shared a personal opinion with the son who had not seen his father for fifty-two years, yet lived with him day to day.

"I feel the same way and thank God I told him so before he left Maine that summer. I told him, "Pa, you've done it." I don't think it helped him much, though."

I noticed a woman in the gallery who kept staring at us. Most people don't recognize Andrew Wyeth, as was once the case at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. So the story goes, Wyeth remarked about one of his own paintings,"That one's a bunch of crap." A lady in front of him responded, "You ought to be ashamed. That man worked hard on that painting."

In our present situation, however, possibly from our conversation, *this* woman had figured it out. She made her way to our position before "Old Pew" and asked, "Excuse me, could I have your autograph?"

Quite uncomfortable with the situation, his disposition changed immediately and Andy looked towards me as though for help.

I immediately remembered the story Frank had told me about being mistaken for Andy at a show in which he was in the receiving line. Going with the flow with the ever bowing Japanese patrons, Frank had signed Andy's autograph.

"I bet I can do your signature as well as Frank. Here, let me do it for you," I commented trying to break the tension but alarming this woman who wanted Andrew Wyeth's autogragh, not mine.

Andy looked at me now somewhat humored and grabbed the Museum directory, "Awh, give it to me," and he quickly scribbled the familiar name. Turning to me as she scurried away, he whispered, "I hate that kind of thing."

The adjoining gallery contained work by the rest of this family of American artist. Jamie Wyeth's huge pig was right in front of us. To the left were paintings by Hentriette Wyeth Hurd. There were also works by Carolyn Wyeth, Ann Wyeth McCoy, Peter Hurd, and John McCoy.

Andy told me that both his brothers-in-law had Alzheimer's disease at the same time, a fact he shared with a tone of sadness and hope that he would not live to experience that debilitation. I shared with him that he had the sharpest mind of any eighty year old I had ever spent time with; maybe of any person period. He laughed, his head thrown back.

Across the foyer was the Andrew Wyeth Gallery. On the wall in front of us as we entered was the huge egg tempera, "SNOW HILL", a compilation of all those important models from Kuerner's Farm and Little Africa. There were approximately thirty watercolors, dry-brush paintings and egg temperas in the space, including "THE DRIFTER", "GARRETT ROOM", and "MAGA'S DAUGHTER", the 1966 egg tempera portrait of Betsy that I had never seen in person. That afternoon I realized what a truly amazing portrait it is.

As we looked at "The Drifter", a drybrush painting of Willard Snowden, I commented to Andy that I had not noticed before how the blue under-painting on the cheek made the painting.

"Exactly!" he spoke with excitement as though he had painted it yesterday. "Most people don't see that. But then, you have an eye," he spoke without taking his eyes off Williard.

Tom Clark was an old black man, long and thin and a recurrent subject for several Wyeth paintings over the years. As with most of Wyeth's subjects, Tom excited Andy's inner thoughts and made it easy for him to "relate it to other evocations." I find his work does the same thing to me, though the relationships and correlations are different from what the artist himself experienced.

"Garret Room", that amazing 1962 drybrush of Tom Clark asleep on his daybed, stretched out on the quilted bedspread his grandmother had made, has always evoked stirring emotions for me. Though Andy apparently was stimulated by the memories of Christmas stockings containing thin wooden toy soldiers and the sounds of Old Kris on the roof, I have always seen Tom Clark as Pop, my grandfather, with whom I was reared. Pop, a brittle diabetic, was prone to "weak spells", severe hypoglycemia, that usually led him stammering to *his* daybed, like some great grandpa monster. It was an erie, exciting, funny and terrifying experience for us kids. Unforgettable. I can still see Pop, lying there supine, mouth open, waiting semi-conscious for some sweet relief to be poured down his throat.

I shared those thoughts with Andy as we stood before "Garret Room." One has to see the actual painting to get the full effect. On that late Monday afternoon, standing there with the man who created it, I was overcome.

Without really thinking, I said to Andy, "One day, I'll have something of Tom Clark." I spoke almost oblivious to the fact that the person to whom I was speaking was the same person who would have executed the "something" to which I was referring. He smiled and said nothing. We both stood silent sharing the same time and space with different thoughts.

That was the day the idea of an exhibition began to take shape in my mind but it took me four years to muster the courage to share it with Andy and Besty Wyeth.

* * * *

"I want you to strike while the iron is hot. Let's get this thing done," the elevator door opened and we walked out to the main floor lobby.

"Andy, I've got to go home and work some to make a living. I've got four kids at home, you know," I smiled at him, his enthusiasm contagious, as though I needed any encouragement to complete this project.

"Oh, Phooie! They say I'm famous. America's painter and all that crap. Well, if that's the case, cast a bunch of these and make yourself some money." I appreciated his confidence in my work, but knew better than to take his charge to heart, at least without getting someone else's approval.

"Don't you think we'd better check with the boss? I wouldn't want to do anything to offend her or without her input," I raised my eyebrows hoping Andy would agree. He did.

"Guess you're right," he turned to the entrance of the Museum, and then, spontaneously, spun around and asked, "Why don't you come by the house for a drink? Do you have time?" I was both pleased and humored by his invitation, so genuine and unpretentious, as though I actually might not want to.

I smiled at his smile, familiar now, wondering what she would think about this unexpected visitor; this "artist working on another artist". But I assumed such events had surely occurred at least a few times in their nearly six decades together and I accepted. "I'd love that."

"How about five?"

"Sounds great." We shook hands and he made his way down the steps, through a side gate, and to his Suburban.

As I turned to look at the gift shop, I was trying to absorb it all, the sensory overload undoubtedly yielding a blank look on my face. I didn't really hear the first "excuse me", or maybe it just didn't register.

"Excuse me", the woman with the autograph said again from over my shoulder. "I don't know who you are, but thank you," she referred to my efforts to ease the tension at the moment of her autograph request. I could think of only one response.

"I don't know who I am, either, maam, but you're welcome."

* * * *

I drove back down the now familiar driveway to The Mill, parked the car behind Andy's Suburban, and with power drill in hand, made my way over to the grist mill and George Heebner's domain. He met me at the large door where I stood on the platform at the top of the plank steps. There I was again with a sensation of living in a painting, this time standing above “Raccoon” in the 1968 tempera of the same name; I could almost smell the chained hound underneath the platform. George smiled as he reached for the tool.

"I see you won't have to pay for this, now."

I laughed and as I prepared to respond, I heard Andy from the house where he stood in the door, drink in hand.

"You'd better come on in before I get stewed!" he raised his glass to one old friend and one new.

"I'm coming. I just had to get something back to George," I hollered back across the open space, competing to be heard over the rushing of the Brandywine waters. Andrew Wyeth disappeared, as he often does, without another sound. I thought about the story of Andy napping

with his then young niece, Ann McCoy. Andy fell off the bed and when little Ann asked if he was OK, he laughed and said, "Oh, yes. I'll be right back." He disappeared and she didn't see him for weeks. I thought any minute, he would disappear again, and I'd wake up from *my* nap.

"This is beautiful, George," I referred to the winding flow of the Brandywine Creek behind us. "How did this old mill work, anyway?" I stood there amazed that by the prospect of this structure standing for nearly three centuries.

George shared his knowledge of the workings of Brinton's Mill in simple terms so that even someone non-mechanical could comprehend.

"You and Andy hit it off OK." It was not so much a question as an observation.

"Yea, I guess so. He's a great fella. At first, I think he was suspicious of me and the situation. But he must have decided that I was no threat. Guess he sees all kinds though."

"You could say that. Andy's a sensitive person, but you probably know that now," he spoke conserving words, not the kind of fella to waste any I suppose. "But I think you're gonna be fine."

"What does that mean?" I was watching the small falls up the creek.

"You've got a nice spirit about you," he was now winding the cord around the drill. *Spirit about you? Where's he going with this?* I reflected on our prior evening's meeting in the mill work room and the verse above the door.

"George, that verse above the work room door... that yours or somebody else's?" I noticed his toothy smile broaden.

"That's it, isn't it?" he spoke again without moving his mouth.

"That's what?" I watched his face fill with the March afternoon Brandywine light.

"You're a believer."

"Yep," I confirmed what I thought he meant and briefly shared my morning with Andy and our brief conversation about "up there, and down there".

"That all you said?"

"Pretty much."

"That's about right. You know, there's a lot more to Andy Wyeth than some people realize." I reckon he's right about that, too.

* * * *

I left George Heebner at the grist mill with the drill and the winding Brandywine and walked over to the house. Knome barked to announce my arrival, barely able to rise from his position to greet me. I thought again of Helga's hands.

"Knock, Knock, anybody home?" announcing my entrance through the cracked-open heavy wooden door.

Andy walked around the corner from the kitchen, straight ahead of me and to the left, as I now stood in a small den, a sitting room, with two high-back naturally upholstered period chairs to my left, a long bench balancing them to my right, and a large open fireplace behind that. I thought of, strangely enough, "The Ides of March", that wonderful 1974 egg tempera of Andy's dog, Rattler, sleeping in front of the smoldering embers in this very fireplace. Now here it was, March again. The only thing missing was that beautiful golden lab.

"Welcome to The Mill," I heard Mrs. Wyeth's distinct voice trail around the stone wall and then she appeared. "Would you like a drink?" she smiled at me communicating in an unspoken way that I was indeed welcome here.

"Thank you, but I have to tell you, I haven't pretended to be anything I'm not all day. I'm pooped. If I have a drink I'll probably pass out right here on this bench. I don't handle my liquor very well, especially on an empty stomach."

Andy cackled, "It wouldn't be the first time that's happened. The first time Frank was here, I believe he fell out of the loft over at the granary," his head now tilted back as he slapped his leg, laughing at his memory.

"Well, how about a glass of champagne then," Mrs. Wyeth stood by the colonial table in the dining area, between the kitchen and the room where I stood next to her husband. She placed a plate of caviar on the table.

"Champagne I could handle," I walked towards the table. "Do you like caviar?" she asked as she removed the bottle of champagne from the refrigerator.

"Believe it not, I've never had it."

"What better occasion to have your first taste," she showed me the bottle, a 1985 Dom Perignon. "Will this be OK?"

"Great," I responded, as Andy took another bite full on a cracker. I prepared to pop the cork and thought out loud, "This thing's going to blow a hole in the ceiling," which was about seven and a half feet high.

"Good God, the thing's two feet thick," Andy laughed, as the cork blew off and indeed bounced off the ceiling, to the countertop, and then into the sink. There was foam on me and laughter in the room.

Betsy raised her glass, "A toast, as we celebrate a great work of art."

*  *  *  *

I sat on the long bench in front of the fireplace while Betsy Wyeth served my first bite of caviar. In front of us, behind the two high-backs, hung the painting "Air Raid", a recent tempera set on Benner Island, suggesting a deadly encounter, crow and gull feathers floating in the breeze. That painting had recently been reproduced in the *LIFE* magazine article, *Wyeth at 80, The Inner World of America's Painter*. I recognized it as such and remarked that I thought it was a positive article.

"Yes, I thought so. I painted that on Benner Island. You must come up and see the island. It's really a remarkable place."

I thought about the southern tradition of saying to someone, "Why don't you come by for dinner sometimes?" or "Ya'll come see us." These comments are really more a form of polite conversation than a hard invitation. Yet, my brother had shared with me that in New York City, you don't say to someone "Let's get together for dinner," because the statement is taken at face value, and the other party may very well respond, "OK, when?"

I wasn't sure of the rules in Pennsylvania, but I was tempted to apply the NYC rules. Better judgment prevailed, however, and I simply replied, "That'd be great," as I humbly smiled at Betsy while she filled my glass again.

"Tell me how you guys became interested in owning these islands," referring to Benner Island, their present summer home, and Southern Island, which is now owned by their youngest son, Jamie, and the place he lives for part of the year.

"My mother was always interested in the ocean and conservation and I suppose it grew from there. We've had wonderful opportunities," Betsy shared a part of her life that has obviously held a warm place in her heart. The mention of her mother made me think back to the story of the courtship of the seventeen year old Betsy James by Andrew Wyeth, who turned twenty-two the day he met his lifelong partner. With only a few well placed questions, this engaging couple began to share their story.

"Oh, I knew she was quite a catch. Blew me away when she opened the door that day over in Cushing." Andy seemed almost teased.

"I had no idea who he was or who N.C. Wyeth was for that matter," she shared that her sister, Gwen, had told her he was N.C.'s son, and an aspiring artist himself.

Andy initially had told her he was a medical student at the University of Pennsylvania. However, a few days later, Betsy and Gwen rowed across the river to Port Clyde and looking at Andy's studio, Betsy was somewhat intimidated by Gwen's knowledge of the arts and art history. As Gwen discussed watercolors and other great American painters with the young Andrew Wyeth, he looked at Betsy as she looked at his early attempts at egg tempera.

"What do you like, Betsy," he asked her.

"I don't know anything about art, but I like this one," she referred to "Young Swede", the tempera of Wyeth's friend and long time Maine companion, Walt Anderson.

Andy was smitten. This vibrant beautiful, intelligent, captivating woman, as she remains today, had stolen his heart, and it was evident to me as I visited with this amazing tandem on that late March afternoon that he's still smitten.

*  *  *  *

"Betts, let's see if he can guess which hands are which," Andy was now up moving towards the table. Sitting behind the caviar were four hands, bronze, resting on the wrists, flat bases, fingers pointing to the ceiling. I had seen two of them at Frank's house and knew they were castings of Andrew Wyeth's hands.

"After we had Andy's hands cast in bronze, I went back and had Jamie's done as well. Remarkable how similar they are." Betsy smiled at me explaining what Andy was up to. "It's become a game of sorts to see if friends can pick which hands go together and then distinguish Jamie's from Andy's."

After a brief look and feel, I passed the test, much to Andy's satisfaction. I had spent the day with this man and for some reason I had indeed looked at and noticed his hands. I remember thinking, those fingers move the pencil and the squeezed out "dry brush" creating all those wonderful drawings and paintings. But I had come to realize more clearly during our day together that great art is not so much about hands as heart.

"You said you were going to show me where you painted *LOVE IN THE AFTERNOON*. I'd love to see that," I reminded Andy as I placed his hands back down on the table.

"That's right," he responded rising from his bench.

As we moved towards the door through which I had entered, he paused and pointed to a painting just to the right of the fireplace. "New painting. Just finished it," he almost whispered the secret. "Nobody's seen it yet. What do you think?" he paused waiting for my response.

"It's stunning. Who is she?" I took a closer look at the full sheet watercolor of a young black woman in profile, a sheer drape over her shoulders and naked breasts.

My thoughts drifted to my dream of a new Andrew Wyeth exhibition. As yet, nobody had gathered Andy's black friends and neighbors into one show. What an intimate, insightful, and stunning exhibition that part of his life's work would make. I was composing the premise in my mind right there standing by the artist himself.

"Young lady I met at one of those blue-blood parties over in Wilmington. She was serving drinks and I said to her, 'You're the best looking thing in this room'," he related the story

with excitement as Betsy continued to stir around in the kitchen. "I told her, 'I'm Andrew Wyeth.' Didn't mean a thing to her. Marvelous. She's been posing for me on her days off," he moved to a short hall leading left of the front door. "Come on, let me show you the house."

We entered another room with another bench in the center of the floor. Directly in front of us was a familiar egg tempera painting.

"Wow."

"Do you know that painting?"

"The Clearing?" I referred to the image of a young Swedish man, well built in the prime of his life, standing nude at the edge of the Maine woods.

“I painted that shortly after my hip surgery. The contrast between this young healthy man and myself, old and worn out; it was quite stimulating really. I had to get it down. And I think I did. It's all there."

He then pointed behind me to the wall next to the door through which we had entered the room.

"Young Bull," I was actually talking to myself now, not believing I was looking at one of my favorite Wyeth paintings, one I had studied for years, even painting my own rendition in an effort to better understand his technique. I remember that experience helping me realize that it isn't about methods. It's about communicating what's inside, regardless of the medium.

"I love that painting too," he recognized my emotion and shared the story. "I kept rolling out this paper trying to get the thing down, and this young bull just kept standing there. Amazing really. Then he stepped on my watercolor pan and splashed those spots on the side of the hide. See them there," he pointed to the hind quarter of the young bull. "Karl came by and said 'Andy, that young bull done ruined your painting.' I told him I thought it made the painting and I left it just like that," he cackled at the memory.

As if standing between these two paintings was not enough excitement, I then noticed a third. I now stood before "The Kuerners", that amazing portrait of Karl Kuerner, rifle over his shoulder pointing directly at his wife Anna, as she followed several steps behind. I wondered how Andrew and Betsy Wyeth decide which paintings to hang in their own home. I smiled realizing I would have chosen these two watercolors as well.

We walked up the stairs, two turns, past a study, to the top landing and the master bedroom. To the left were pistols and guns, authentic relics from the American Revolution. Next to the fireplace there sat a marching drum from the same era. And in a recessed window box next to the bed I saw Andy's toy soldier collection that had contributed so wonderfully to his vivid boyhood imagination, an imagination so well developed and maintained and essential to the meaning of so much of his work. To the left of the bed was a window with a blue sill and a handle to push it out and open. Below, one experienced the sound and beauty of the Brandywine

creek. I was indeed looking at the living painting, *LOVE IN THE AFTERNOON* which now had new meaning. I was experiencing what I knew to be true. Andrew Wyeth didn't need props or ideas or travel to give him stimulation. He painted who he was, where he was. And that was enough.

As we made our way back to the ground floor, I realized I had been at the Mill for nearly two hours and with Andy all day. I was tired and I knew he must be.

"How do you like the house?" Mrs. Wyeth appeared around the corner from the kitchen.

"What a great place. And not a bad art collection." We all smiled. "Andy, I know you must be exhausted. I really must be going. It's been a great day."

"We've had a good day haven't we?" We both began to walk towards the door with Mrs. Wyeth just behind us. As I turned to thank her for her hospitality and the champagne and caviar, she handed me the half empty bottle.

"Please take this to your wife and give her our best. I would love to meet her."

"What a nice thing. She'll be thrilled. I would love for you to meet her, too. She's a great person." I accepted the bottle and turned as Andy spoke.

“I’ll meet you at the Long House in the morning about 8:30. I want to take you over to my father’s studio. How about that?”

“That’d be great. I’ll see you then.” I turned back to Betsy Wyeth to thank her again. "If you hadn't come along this afternoon to suggest those crucial changes, I guess we'd still be over at the Long House working."

As Andrew Wyeth and I shook hands, Betsy responded, "Oh, that's silly. You're just so sweet," and she reached over and kissed me on the cheek. "So what's your next project?"

"I’m doing a portrait of Dr. Win Wiser who was my mentor in OB-GYN. Then I'd like to do a portrait of Eudora Welty, the famous southern writer from Mississippi but I may not have enough credibility as an artist."

Betsy Wyeth responded with pleasure, "You do now."

* * * *

The house in which Andrew Wyeth was born was built in 1911. The house, the barn, and N.C. Wyeth's studio were all constructed for $10,000, money he had received from Scribners for the seventeen paintings illustrating *Treasure Island*. In a letter to his mother dated July 26, 1911, N.C. Wyeth wrote:

*Dear Mamma,*

*Treasure Island completed! I write that as though I were glad- in one way I am- to know that I pulled through the entire set of 17 canvases (almost as tall as I am) without one break in my enthusiasm and spirit. The result is I've turned out a set of pictures, without doubt far better in every quality than anything I ever did.*

In 1965 Betsy Wyeth collected the letters of N.C. Wyeth, some 1200 in all, and after reading through them, she decided his story should be shared. She saw a side of this man she had never come to know in life and she regretted they had not been friends. She had been the woman who stole his son and would surely steal his creative energy. She felt N.C. resented her in that way and she longed to prove him wrong.

In Betsy's mind, N.C. had been a hovering father, smothering the family, unable to let go, and in the process, almost destroying himself. Despite that history, she compiled the letters and edited the book that was published in 1971, *The Wyeths – the Intimate Correspondence of N.C. Wyeth 1901-1945*. It is a remarkably insightful portrait of not only one of America'a great illustrators and painters but also the patriarch of one of America'a greatest artistic traditions.

* * * *

The next morning, I met Andy back at the Long House. He and the bust had both rested well.

"Shall we ride over to Pa's studio? You can ride with me. Let's see, do you want to take the sculpture now?"

"I suppose we could drop it off at the Brandywine Inn and get it out of everybody's way." I looked at Boop who simply raised her eyebrows and shrugged her shoulders.

We drove down the steep driveway of the Long House in Andy's Suburban with me in the seat next to him, his clay head balanced on my lap and some large sheets of paper on the folded down back seat. Between us a drawing pad was closed. After dropping the bust off at the hotel we headed across the street and up to the Brandywine Museum to get a key to N.C. Wyeth's studio.

While Andy went in to find a key, I sat in the truck wondering what new masterpiece was being conceived in that drawing pad or on the large papers in the back. Though I'm not sure he would have minded, I resisted the temptation to look. It seemed to be the right thing.

As we entered the drive of the homestead I looked up at the house I had read so much about. I thought of Carolyn riding her pony in the adjoining field and the kids sledding down the

snow covered drive; of Peter Hurd on horseback, jumping fences and sweeping Henriette off her feet. Andy and DooDoo shot firecrackers in the drive. Now there I was with little Andy driving.

"I was born in the front upstairs bedroom there on the right," he pointed to the front of the red brick house as we rounded the barn and headed on up the hill to the studio. I pictured N.C. up on that roof playing Old Kris, sending vibrations of such excitement and anticipation that a young Andrew Wyeth once wet the bed from the sheer delight of the terror. I was amazed that "Pa", bull of a man that he was, could have balanced up there on that frozen roof without slipping off and killing himself.

"The Brandywine Museum has opened the studio for tours for a few months during the year. Started that last year, but I don't think anybody's up here now," we walked up a brick path past the huge windowed wall on the front of the studio. Up the hill to the left, past the apple orchard and through the woods, Andrew Wyeth made a path to Kuerners's Hill. It all seemed so familiar, yet almost surreal.

We entered into a small foyer with a large cutout photo of N.C. standing in front of us. To the left was an opening into the portrait studio. His easel still stood there where it was the day he was killed in 1945 with an unfinished painting of George Washington where he left it. His brushes were spread out on a table, his faithful props spread all over the large gallery along with death masks of Beethoven and Lincoln. An authentic birch bark canoe hung from the ceiling, chaps and saddles sat on wooden horses in a row, and there by the old secretary opened as his writing desk, the indian drum upon which he sat to write all those letters over the years.

As I sat on the drum I remembered the story of two young artists who had stumbled into the studio during a thunderstorm. Hoping to absorb something from the American master, they got more than they bargained for. N.C.'s dissertation on their simple minds and thoughts had been much more frightening than the severe thunderstorm raging outside the great window. I fully expected to hear his voice blow through the door, but instead, I heard the high pitched familiar voice of his youngest son, "You like that stool, don't you?"

"I have loved reading your father's letters. I guess he wrote most of them from this stool."

"Sat right there for hours. He wrote down his thoughts just about everyday," Andy walked with hands clasped behind his back towards the large mural studio. I could almost palpate the love and frustration and pain he has lived with for these many decades.

"I didn't tell you, but I've done a small figure of your father sitting on this very stool," it seemed like the right time to tell him.

"Why didn't you bring it with you? I'd love to see that," he spoke now standing next to George Washington, both of them looking my way.

"Well, I thought about it, but I didn't want to show up with portraits of the whole family. Seemed a little much for a first visit. Anyway, I couldn't have handled anything else on the plane."

He smiled. "Well you must send me photos. I'd love to see it. Feel free to come back up and look around some more if you like. Someone from the Museum will be here today cleaning up. You know, getting things ready for the museum and all."

Back in the Suburban, we drove through the apple orchard, past the barn, then the house, and back down to the private gate. As we sat at the corner, Andy looked over to his left at a small white house.

"That's the school house where Betsy and I lived when we first moved back here. It's my studio now."

I had hoped to see the studio but it didn't seem right to ask. So I didn't.

"Andy, my wife asked me this morning on the phone if I had expressed to you how much this trip has meant to me personally."

"Aw, hogwash. You're a damn good artist, that's all. That's what this is all about," he looked my way from behind the wheel. "We've had a good two days though, haven't we?"

"I'd say."

* * * *

The "lost wax" technique of bronze casting is an ancient method that has survived for centuries. A rubber lined plaster "mother mold" is created from the original work of art and that mold is used to create a hollow wax figure identical to the original clay sculpture. The wax figure is then covered inside and out with a liquid porcelain coating that is then fired preserving the shape of the thin wax figure as the wax itself is melted away or "lost". The space left behind will be filled with molten bronze poured at exactly the right temperature. After the bronze cools off, the outer porcelain shell is "knocked off" and the pour spouts are removed and "chased" away. One is left with a metal figure identical to the original clay sculpture. The metal is then heated and treated with a variety of chemicals which give the finished work its individual color tone, a process known as patination. Each bronze casting is a original work of art created from a new wax figure "pulled" from the mother mold, with each subsequent metal sculpture having its own patina.

*  *  *  *

In August that year I returned to Santa Fe and the Weston Studio Foundry for the patina work. After much discussion and trial and error, we completed the first patina, a combination of Sulfur, Cupric, and Ferric solutions absorbed by the hot metal. The tone seemed so familiar and so right for the Wyeth piece. Several days later I realized why. I came across the image of *SNOW FLURRIES*, that wonderful landscape tempera painting of Kuerner's hill. There in the foreground was the same tone, the thawing brown-red winter earth of the Brandywine Valley, an earth tone I had subconsciously recreated on the surface of the bronze.

On that same trip, I spent two days retouching and refining a plaster casting of *ANDREW WYETH*, a stark white bust in the same flavor of the classic Houdon castings of Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, and other early American patriots. Andy loves white and he had requested such a bust before I left Chadd's Ford back in March.

"You know, the last time I saw Edward Hopper, he told me he had come to the point where all he really wanted to paint was light on a white wall," Andy had shared with me in our makeshift kitchen studio that day. "As time goes on, I see more and more what he meant. I've always loved white; even white on white. I suppose that's why I'm thrilled by snow. Amazing, really."

*  *  *  *

The first finished bronze of *ANDREW WYETH* arrived at my studio in early September. It had been six months since my visit with Andy and our work on the bust. I couldn't wait for the Wyeths to see it.

Frank suggested that even he rarely visited in Maine which is where the Wyeths were in September. He suspected they would rather have the bronze in Chadd's Ford. He did suggest that Betsy's birthday was just around the corner and Andy might like to give her the plaster as a gift. Frank suggested I call Peter Ray who could run the idea by Andy.

Peter thought the idea was great and said he would relay it to Andy. However, several days later I heard from Peter and he said Andy was quite distracted, "in another world." It was probably best to wait until they returned to Chadd's Ford in October.

The week of Betsy's birthday, I received a call from Frank. It seemed that Andy was in a panic and wanted the plaster bust after all and would love to have it in Maine in time for her birthday four days later. Frank gave me Chris Crossman's name and number at the Farnsworth Museum in Cushing and suggested I could get the piece to him. Andy would send his assistant from Benner Island to pick it up.

So I had the plaster shipped express directly to Cushing, Maine. It would arrive undamaged for Betsy Wyeth's 76th birthday.

* * * *

"Hey, bud. What's going on?" I heard Frank's deep voice across the line.

"What's up?" I wondered why he had called, then glanced at a calendar and realized it was Betsy's birthday.

"The bust is a hit," he announced. "Just talked to Betsy to wish her happy birthday. She loved it. Everybody did. So, when am I going to see this thing?"

"What about Andy?" I wondered outloud.

"Well, he was crazy about it when you left Chadd's Ford. But you know he loves white. I told you. Obviouly, he loved it. Betsy asked me to communicate her sincere thanks to you and give you their best."

"Can't wait till they see the bronze. You too. It turned out good, Frank."

"Well, they really like the plaster."

"I know, but you've got to see this bronze. I really think she's going to love it. She hasn't given me the go ahead to do a numbered series."

"Why don't you just ask her? But I know she won't mind if I have one."

"Well, I really wanted to ask her in person, maybe when I took the bronze up to present it."

"You'll need to wait till they return to Pennsylvania. But I'm sure she won't mind. You don't get the big picture do you?"

"What do you mean?"

"This is the portrait bust of Andrew Wyeth. There won't be another one. Why it was you who did it, I'm not sure. But your grandchildren will see this piece in a museum one day."

I wasn't sure if I had just been insulted or flattered. Frank has a way of combining the two.

* * * *

"Hello," I heard a slightly muffled voice over the long distance line. It was late October.

"Mrs. Wyeth?" I didn't pick up the voice right off.

"This is Mr. Wyeth. Who is this?"

"Andy? How are you? This is Kim Sessums."

"Who is this?" he was almost shouting.

"Kim Sessums." *Oh boy*. "I sent you the plaster bust in Maine for Betsy's birthday," I hoped he would make the association.

"You're the artist? You did the bust?" the tone of the voice now lightened up and sounded like the friendly man I remembered.

"Yea! How have you been?"

"Fine. Fine. How are you? The bust is just wonderful. Betsy loved it."

"Great. I heard from Frank she had placed a Navy peacoat over the shoulders."

"Yes, it was marvelous. Jamie just loved it. Everyone was thrilled. I've got some pictures of me with it and I think Betsy plans to send them to you. We planned to be in touch, but it's been just crazy up here," he now seemed to remember who I was.

"Great. So you have been well, then?"

"Oh, yes. And your family is well? How is your wife?"

"Everyone is well, thanks. Tell Betsy I look forward to showing her the bronze casting of the bust. I believe you'll both love it."

"Oh, well. I love the white."

"I did too. It's got a great look. But you've got to see the bronze. Ask Betsy to give me a call, would you."

"I will. I'm sorry she's not here now."

"That's OK. I look forward to talking to you soon."

"OK. Good bye, now."

"Good bye."

* * * *

After several weeks, I had heard nothing from Betsy Wyeth, and I concluded that Andy, not unlike me, was not good with messages. I decided I would have to call her back hoping to arrange a trip to Chadd's Ford to present the bust. After all, when I left there back in March, Andy had suggested when I came back up he wanted me to meet Jamie and to bring my wife. We would have dinner at the Brandywine Inn. I now decided he may have been going by the southern rules of cordial conversation and invitation and not by the NYC rules.

When I finally spoke to Betsy, she expressed her appreciation and fondness for the birthday plaster bust. It had been presented sitting between her Jefferson and Washington busts, which were actually cast from the Houdon originals. When I asked how in the world she got them, she told me she "knew the right people." She said she now had plaster castings of her three favorite men.

I told her the bronze was ready and I would love to bring it up. She said she thought it should be someplace where it could be appreciated, not hidden away at The Mill. Sounded like a good idea to me. She suggested the Brandywine Museum and I certainly had no objections. She asked if I could ship the piece to Mary Landa, who, along with Betsy, is responsible for archiving Andrew Wyeth's work.

Although I had hoped to present the bust in person, it was now being shipped to the Brandywine Museum, yet another strange twist to this already bizarre tale. Along with the bust, I sent the following note.

*Dear Mrs. Wyeth,*

*Although I had hoped to bring your bronze casting of Andrew Wyeth to Chadd's Ford and present it to you both personally, I sense that has become difficult to arrange. Therefore, I am sending the bust on to the Brandywine Museum and this note to notify you of its arrival. It should arrive by Friday.*

*As we discussed on the phone a few weeks ago, I would be thrilled to know the bust of Andy would be seen by the many who journey to Chadd's Ford to experience the Brandywine Museum. I also agree with you that it should be presented on a pedestal of adequate height to fully appreciate the intimate portrait of this great American painter. I could never expect other viewers to experience the same emotion I feel when I look at the bust, but then, I associate it with the actual work involved, the years of studying Andy's work, and the wonderful brief time I spent with you both last March. However, I do hope others will see some of the intensity, sensitivity, and vision that makes Andrew Wyeth Andrew Wyeth.*

*Should you decide later when the Wyeth Center at the Farnsworth is opened that you would like to have another casting of the piece for that museum and library, just let me know. It would take about a month to get the finished bronze from the foundry.*
*I would love to see the bronze Andy face to face with the real one.*
*My best to you and Andy for the Christmas holidays.*

* * * *

"Brandywine Museum."

"Mary Landa's office, please," I was calling to make sure the bust had arrived undamaged.

"Wyeth Office, Mary Landa," I heard the pleasant female voice.

"Mary, I know you don't know me. This is Kim Sessums."

"Don't know you? Are you kidding? Guess what I'm doing right this minute?" she sounded genuinely excited.

"Well, I have no idea."

"I'm looking at Andrew Wyeth," she chuckled.

"Andy's there with you?" I asked surprised.

"No," she laughed. "But I feel like he is. I'm looking at your bust. It's amazing."

"So it made it OK. Where is the bust, anyway?" I was a little confused.

"The Oval Office."

"The Oval Office?" I'm sure I really sounded confused now.

"That's what we call our private office here at the Museum. The bust is here for now. You just missed Betsy, she just walked out. But she's planning to send you something. She really likes the bronze."

"Great. I thought she would, even though I know they love the white plaster."

"Well, she did say she was surprised that she liked the bronze better."

"I thought she might. Thanks for filling me in. Just wanted to make sure it arrived OK."

"It did, and it's just fantastic. I look forward to meeting you."

* * * *

In December, I received a package from Betsy Wyeth. It included a wonderful photo of her peering through a window on Benner Island at the plaster casting of her husband, fully outfitted in a peacoat and stretch cap, binoculars draped around his neck. With it, she sent the following letter.

*10 December, '97*

*Dear Kim Sessums-*

*Here I am peaking at your Andrew Wyeth through the Round House window. The old saying, "A painting is worth a thousand words", in this case I'd say- "A photograph is worth ten thousand words."*

*I'm just sorry I cannot climb up a third story ladder and peak through the Oval Office window to record my delight with the bronze. In fact it is so personal, I've decided to keep it there along with my most treasured possessions.*

*Thank you from my heart-*

*Betsy Wyeth*

* * * *

Over the next two years, I had limited contact with the Wyeths. I continued on my strange journey of art and medicine. Life-size busts of Eudora Welty, Dr. Winfred Wiser, and Billy Graham were completed and cast in bronze. The time with each of them gave me treasured memories. I also became friends with that other fine American painter who had drawn me initially to John Surovek, Stephen Scott Young. My long conversations with Scott about artistic expression and intimate nature of painting led me back to explore the dream exhibition I had first seriously considered that day with Andy at the Brandywine Museum. I began to refine and compose my thoughts regarding that aspect of Andrew Wyeth's work and life more closely- his paintings and studies of his black friends and neighbors in and around Little Africa, the community of black families within walking distance of Wyeth's Chadd's Ford childhood home.

For years I had been captivated by many of those figures and Wyeth's relationship with them. As I thought more deeply about the uniqueness of that body of his work, I felt strongly it would, as a collective group, be a stunning exhibition, not to mention one never before organized or realized. The thought gave me great energy and I began the research of locating as many images as I could and writing down my thoughts about a premise for such a show.

In March, 1999, I decided I should contact Betsy Wyeth to share my vision for the project and I sent her the following letter along with my essay.

*Dear Mrs. Wyeth,*

*I trust you are doing well. We are enjoying our small collection of Andy's work. The watercolors are living to me, but the pencil studies speak. As you surely know, my own work and life has been changed and enhanced by my experiences with his, (and yours). Thanks.*

*I'm sending along this essay which I wrote to try and express my feelings regarding one aspect of Andy's work and a premise for a potential exhibition of that work. To my knowledge, his work has never been shown in Mississippi and my recent discussions with Andy Maass, the director of the Mississippi Museum of Art in Jackson, MS have led me to explore the possibilities of seeing this happen. Mr. Maass knows Jim Duff (though he has not mentioned this idea to him) and some of the other Museum directors who have hosted Wyeth exhibitions. He is quite excited about this idea and there is an opening in 2001 at the Museum (writing that date and speaking it does seem strange, doesn't it?)*

*I can think of no other focused collection of Andy's work that would excite me like this... these are the works I keep coming back to over and over. As Andy and I stood before "Garret Room" at the Brandywine when I was there working on the bust (three years ago now, wow), this whole concept seemed so real, so possible, so exciting. I'm not sure I can explain it, though I've tried. I am sure there are thousands of others who would be just as thrilled with such a collection, viewed together for the first time all in one setting. I know I would travel anywhere in the country to experience the opening, but I sure hope it's in Jackson, MS.*

*I understand Andy had rejected a similar, but different, concept for a tour in Russia in the past, "I didn't paint them because they were black." I know that , you obviously know that , and anyone who knows his work knows that. This collection could certainly make that clear to those*

*who don't. More importantly, it would expose or re-expose them to some of the greatest paintings ever conceived on American soil.*

*One of the most exciting things about Andy's work is the stimulus that makes him paint the picture. Though the works on paper and panel are stunning, it is often the mystery of his creative process that keeps bringing me back. I believe the collection of his black figures viewed together prompts us to look even deeper into the heart of the artist, as well as our own.*

*I've not spoken of this idea with Frank, because I know it can only take root and grow with your input, your participation, and ultimately, with your blessing. If the premise, as it's clear to me, excites you as it does me, and you could present it to Andy with the heart that is intended, I know it could happen. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. And surely you know what I would gain is the thrill of seeing these works together for the first time.*

*So, please give my thoughts a close look. I realize the list of works can be expanded with works I've never seen. The thought of that .... as Andy would say, "Makes my hair stand on end!"*

*Give me a call and let me know what you think. As always, I send my very best to you both.*

*ANDREW WYETH*

*AMONG FRIENDS: A STUDY OF THE BLACK FIGURE*

*He has been called America's Painter; the profiler of the common man; the image preserver of rural America. However, in truth, as Henry Pitz once remarked of Andrew Wyeth's work, "His*

*pictures express him directly, and in a time of so much depersonalized and anonymous painting it is necessary to remind ourselves that here is an artist, painting not a theory, but his life."*

*Wyeth is, at once, our nation's most celebrated living painter and yet, one of its most reclusive and private citizens; an independent who resists labels and categories. Except for the wonderfully executed biography and other essays by Richard Meryman and the insightful interviews with Thomas Hoving, former director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, this beloved, yet often misunderstood American icon has been known only through the vast collection of images coming from his prolific hand, but more importantly, from a piercing eye, an ever probing mind, a fertile imagination, and finally, an empathetic heart.*

*Certainly some art historians have sought to diminish Wyeth's importance in the history of 20th Century American art. To those critics biographer Meryman responds, "I think they just don't know his work." In his 1968 publication THE BRANDYWINE TRADITION, Henry Pitz expounds further, "An impressive reservoir of facility is ready to his hand. Never common in any age, exceedingly rare in a time that pretends scorn of it, that is too gutless to undergo the rigors of disciplined competence, that derides something it secretly aches to possess, this facility tends to become a controversial factor. Wyeth himself is suspicious of his own digital gift, as were his father (N.C. Wyeth) and (Howard) Pyle before him. He has a lurking fear, perhaps a hangover from the Puritan age, that the servant might become master. Wyeth's technical ability seems to invite over-evaluation or excessive depreciation. Thousands gape at it and see little or nothing else, but to brush it aside would be a slavish concession to the tide of the moment. Most of the critics speak that retarded language, a depreciation of skill, partly because they are bereft of insight into technical matters. It is impossible to imagine a Renaissance, Baroque or Romantic artist apologizing for his virtuosity - he would glory in it and so would all his audience. It is (also) impossible to imagine Wyeth's art without this gift."*

*Though rarely traveling far from his surroundings in the farming village of Chadd's Ford, Pennsylvania, or his summer home in and around Cushing, Maine, Andrew Wyeth has studied his small world in great depth. But his work also strongly portrays life in a larger world, our world. Great art reveals that life to us; reminds us, enlightens us, exposes us to ourselves and to those around us.*

*Eudora Welty, the renowned Mississippi writer, Pulitzer recipient, and another great observer of life, once said of her own work, "I knew this, anyway: that my wish, indeed my continuing passion, would be not to point the finger in judgment but to part a curtain, that invisible shadow that falls between people, the veil of indifference to each other's presence, each other's wonder, each other's human plight." As her words and work have done just that throughout her productive and celebrated literary career, so also has the art of Andrew Wyeth.*

*Wyeth's work is personal, not only for him, as he paints his secret inner world, but for us as well. He moves us to something inside; something not seen. Sometimes it is reflective, sometimes self-revelatory, and often stimulating thoughts of our own existence and experiences with those whose paths we have crossed; indeed parting the curtain.*

*One particular aspect of Wyeth's work over the decades, the study and portrayal of the black figure, has yielded and stimulated an almost palpable emotion for the viewer. Like all his other works, he painted what he knew. Other great American artists in the realist tradition, including Winslow Homer and Thomas Eakins, have certainly painted the black subject, but rarely, and with less intensity. With few exceptions, their images made up larger scenes rather than intimate, personal studies of the subject. One obvious exception is Eakins' insightful portrait of his friend and fellow artist Henry O. Tanner, the Parisian-based African-American artist who had sporadically studied under Eakins at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. Interestingly, Tanner's father, a Bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, made these comments at*

*the end of the 19th century, "In no country in Christendom, except the United States of America, would the color of a man be deemed a subject worthy of consideration. In all other lands it is ... moral or intellectual status that is discussed." In concluding his comments, the elder Tanner noted, in America, "color is everything."*

*In spite of his relationship and respect for the younger Tanner, Eakins had earlier painted a series of pictures depicting rail hunting in the marshes on the outskirts of Philadelphia. A common ingredient of those compositions was the pusher, the pole steerer of the flat boat upon which the shooter would stand to bring down the rail, a game bird not much smaller than a chicken. One such painting, "Will Schuster and Blackman Going Shooting", shows two men of equal stature, presented in parallel view, neither dominate in the composition, their relative importance distinguished more through the title than the painting itself; one named, the other identified only as a "Blackman". Though the provenance of titles does not necessarily descend from the artist, this title does echo the predominant sentiment towards African-Americans in post Civil War America.*

*The black figures in the works of Homer date back even further. "The Cotton Pickers", "A Visit from the Old Mistress", "Sunday Morning in Virginia", and "The Carnival" were all painted around 1877, and mostly depict gatherings of black figures in the decade following the Civil War, a record of a time, a period, and a people. And although one critic wrote that "Mr. Homer is one of the few men who have been successful in painting the Negro character without exaggerating or caricaturing it," the figures were moments in time rather than extended studies, fleeting observances rather than a real part of Homer's life. Therein lies the uniqueness of Wyeth's work. His paintings have not been just another theme, another rural scene, a commentary on the social dilemmas of the day. He has painted the life and people he knew, the people he grew up with, the people he visited with in their homes. Individuals he grew to respect but who had descended from less respected heirs.*

*Many of these subjects were members of the small community within Chadd's Ford known as Little Africa, a community that had accepted "Little Andy" into their midst from the time he was allowed to wander alone as a boy over Kuerner's Hill; watching, listening, and sharing in their everyday existence. They became part of his world, and he, theirs. No presumptions, no prejudice, no ulterior motives... just people with varied backgrounds, varied cultures, and varied dreams. Yet people sharing common ground, even American soil, which has existed from its very beginnings as a blending in theory, if not in reality, of cultures and peoples.*

*In 1951, Andrew Wyeth underwent a near death experience from lung surgery. One day during his recovery period at home, the White School House down the hill from his childhood home and N.C. Wyeth's studio, there came a knock at the door. Adam Johnson, his old friend and neighbor who lived on the side of Kuerner's Hill, next to Mother Archie's Church, the hub of Little Africa, had come to pay his respects. A local handyman, Adam once said of Wyeth, "Andy got one power and he won't get nothin' else. Andy got a glory of paintin'. I got a glory of cuttin' grass and I won't get nothin' else." It was this simple view of life and day to day existence that had drawn them together, though Adam had been somewhat suspicious of having his picture painted. But Adam knew Andy's heart, the dreamer with the drawing pad under his arm who had become a part of the place, blending in as naturally as the Brown Swiss cattle on the side of Karl Kuerner's farm. An unspoken trust was conceived. That day as Wyeth was convalescing, Adam shared with his neighbor, "Andy, I did not send you any flowers when you were in the hospital, so I have come over to sit for you today as a gift." Though Wyeth's creative energy is rarely planned, out of that kind gesture, a truly unselfish gift, came the pencil, "study of Adam", and the watercolor "Portrait of Adam Johnson". Twelve years later Wyeth would complete the Egg Tempera masterpiece "ADAM", a tribute to a man, his simple way of life, and a valued friendship. That portrait, like the rest of the works in this exhibit, is loaded with emotion,*

*memory, and affection often clear only to the artist, but yielding works with strangely poignant meaning for any viewer.*

*On Halloween, 1960, Wyeth shaved his head, put alizarin crimson all over his scalp, and then took brown ink and rubbed it over very transparently, allowing the red to come through. He tipped his eyes with adhesive tape and enlarged his nostrils a little. Traditionally a wonderfully exciting time of exploration and mystery in the Wyeth household, that particular Halloween Wyeth was working on the tempera "That Gentleman". In costume, he was indeed becoming part of the painting. He was that gentleman, Tom Clark, the tall, thin, stately, methodical man who was a fixture around Chadd's Ford, living a simple life along the railroad track across the river from the village. His brother had worked for the N.C. Wyeth's for years and Tom became the subject of this and other paintings, a great stimulus to Andrew Wyeth's imagination and memory. In the landmark drybrush painting "Garret Room", he was the angular, sharp-edged toy soldier in little Andy's Christmas stocking, the colorful blanket bedcover, the robe of some medieval king lying in state.*

*Wyeth has often been drawn to fringe people of society; those others avoided or worse were indifferent to. Whether this reflected his own feelings of being on the periphery of the family circle as a child or was simply some empathetic cord with the strands of his being, the resulting portraits somehow touch in all of us that fear of being rejected, the need of being needed, that thread of humanity that ties us all together, and, on occasion, even taking us back to some childhood memory of our own.*

*The classic example was Willard Snowden, a former merchant seaman, who wandered by the studio one day looking for work. Not surprisingly Wyeth took him in, and over the next few years he became a fixture around the studio, cleaning up, doing odd jobs, living upstairs in the studio, and sitting for his employer. In 1964, Wyeth hurriedly painted this "Drifter" before he could*

*disappear. The painting is loaded with the artist's paradoxical impression of repressed violence and mellifluous philosopher. And what would this mysteriously elegant traveler say of Wyeth's selection of subject matter if asked?*

*"So many people, when they think the word 'Negro', they get the idea of some silly bunch of jokes, damn foolishness. Mr. Wyeth sees what I as a Negro can see - that thing that's distinct, very distinct. It's not a funny-looking something with great big lips, a lot of little curls on his head. He's painting a real live person. He's using his own head, you see. Most people are influenced by what others have to say."*

*On another occasion when asked how it felt to work with a great painter, Willard responded, "He doesn't much bother about the way a man looks. Take a look at that old coat over there. Hanging on the hook there. The one with the horse-blanket pins holding it together. Well, he wore that till it fell apart and kept on wearing it. He don't care about that, you know. One time Miss Carolyn (Wyeth's sister) and Mr. Wyeth were going to some art show in West Chester and they asked me to ride along. So I did. Then they said come on in to the show, but I didn't want to, you know. I wasn't dressed for it at all. I just had some old clothes on and I said no, I didn't want to go in, but, you know, they just made me go in there, looking like a farmer just off a tractor in there with those tuxedos and things. But Mr. Wyeth and Miss Carolyn, they never worry about such things."*

*Wyeth indeed didn't worry about what others might say of his hanging around the spot where five roads converge just outside the village of Chadd's Ford, painting "Alexander Chandler", the blind "Grandfather." He sat at the corner of his daughter's house soaking in the sun and the rebellious nature of his young granddaughter, Cathy Hunt, unable to see either, but feeling them both, nonetheless. The relationship of this artist with his surroundings is again made clear when*

*Wyeth paints Cathy Hunt seven years later as a beautiful young lady dressed for the school "May Fair".*

*Of these and other subjects presented in this exhibit, Andrew Wyeth once commented, "I think they are the most subtle people to understand. That's why I think they've been missed in painting."*

*Fortunately, they have not all been missed, and this uniquely fresh look at these images and the work that produced them rests not only with the genius of the artist, but includes the genuineness of the relationships and emotions that gave them life; the painter and the painted; each accepting the other, differences and all.*

*This collection, viewed now for the first time as a body of work, is sure to become part of our world, to be viewed, to be felt, and to usher us into each other's presence, even lifting our own veils of indifference.*

* * * *

I had mailed the correspondence on Friday and Monday evening the phone rang.

"Hey Bud, this is Frank."

"Hey. What's goin' on?" I hadn't spoken to him in some time.

"Betsy just called and told me to tell you to call her."

"What?"

"Call Betsy, right now."

"What about?" I had not told Frank of my idea for a show.

"Hell, I don't know," there was almost a chuckle in his tone. "Just call her. Then call me right back."

"OK."

"Now, call me back when you get off," he said again.

"OK. Bye."

Was this about my letter and idea? Was she angry? If so, she probably would have just told Frank to tell me to forget about it. Maybe she love the idea, though I know it's at least come up before. Enough speculation. I had to know. I picked up the phone and called the Mill.

"Hello." I knew the voice.

"Andy? This is Kim Sessums."

"Hello. I think it's a marvelous idea. How are you?"

"Great. And how about you. You feelin' OK?"

"Oh, yes. Betsy loves the idea and so do I. I haven't seen "APRIL WIND" in years." Could I be hearing this right. "Here, here's Betsy, she wants to speak to you. Good to hear from you."

Before I could respond, I heard her voice.

"It's uncanny."

"Hello, there."

"I received your letter this afternoon. You'll never believe it. Mary and I have just finished hanging a small show at the Brandywine. We pulled out our paintings and studies of Andy's friends- all the black figures. And now, to get your letter and marvelous essay. . . well, it's just remarkable. Andy just finished reading it and he loves it too. We wanted to go ahead and talk with you and tell you the show is yours."

"I don't know what to say."

"You can have all of our works and we'll do our best to get the rest."

"This is too good. It's sure to be a knockout show."

"Well, I have three requirements."

"Whatever you say."

"First, the show will be in the deep south only. Second, you will write the essay for the catalogue, and third, when people come to see the show, the first thing they'll see will be the bust of Andrew Wyeth."

"We ought to be able to do that. Mrs. Wyeth, I don't have to tell you I'm no professional art critic. This is just all about my passion for Andy's work. Especially this group of paintings."

"That's exactly why I think it should be your words. It's your idea."

"I just can't believe it. And Andy's OK with it?"

"Loves it."

"Can I call Frank and get his thoughts?"

"Of course. He will certainly want to help put the works together. There must be a hundred pieces out there."

"You must know how excited I am. I'll call Frank. Tell Andy I can't wait to see them all together."

"I will. We'll be in touch. Goodbye, now."

"Goodbye."

* * * *

After that phone call, Andrew Maass and his entire staff at the Mississippi Museum of Art, along with the critical assistance of Frank Fowler, Mary Landa, and Betsy Wyeth, put together the remarkable exhibition of pencil studies, watercolors, drybrush paintings, and temperas that was called *ANDREW WYETH : Close Friends.*

The show indeed focused on Andy's relationship and record of his black friends and neighbors spanning some six decades of the artist's prolific life. It opened on February 3, 2001 – two years after I presented the concept to Betsy Wyeth – at the Mississippi Museum of Art in Jackson, Mississippi. From there, the exhibition traveled to Greenville, South Carolina, and then on to Savanna, Georgia.

In the exhibition catalogue, Andrew Maass noted in his acknowledgments,

*A project of this complexity necessarily becomes a monumental undertaking. Sparked by an exhibition concept, Andrew Wyeth: Close Friends has taken on a life of its own and ignited the passion of Betsy James Wyeth. The project began in the summer of 1999 with her selection of*

*Andrew Wyeth's African-American works from their personal collection for exhibition at the Brandywine River Museum, Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania. It was serendipitously followed by an insightful concept presented to Betsy Wyeth by Dr. J. Kim Sessums, a physician and accomplished artist from Brookhaven, Mississippi. Influenced –almost obsessed – by Wyeth's work from an early age, Kim Sessums recognized the depth of this body of work and realized that Wyeth's images of black figures had never before been assembled as an exhibition. Simultaneously, he brought the idea to Betsy Wyeth and to me.*

*The seed was sown. Betsy Wyeth became consumed and, a thousand hours later, this book was complete. Now, almost two years later, the Mississippi Museum of Art proudly publishes, Andrew Wyeth: Close Friends and premieres the American tour of the exhibition of the same name. To Kim Sessums, passion has its rewards – witness Andrew Wyeth: Close Friends, the book and the exhibition.*

* * * *

I had witnessed the exhibition in my mind long before the works were gathered together and installed. On the evening of the lenders private showing, I walked into the first gallery and saw *ADAM* at the end of the foyer, the lights dimmed, with soft accents illuminating each work. I walked through without speaking, though people had already begun to mingle throughout the galleries. I was alone with my thoughts and Andy's close friends. Though I had never met any of them in person, I realized at that moment that I had developed a strange intimacy with the paintings and drawings themselves – *they* were my friends. In the third gallery space, I turned a corner and there before my was *GARRETT ROOM.* Six years had passed since I stood before that painting with Andy at the Brandywine. Now there I stood before the masterpiece again. Alone.

From the beginning, my hope and dream had been to stand in such a space sharing it with Tom and Adam and Willard and Alexander and the Lopers. And all the rest. Their willingness to allow Little Andy Wyeth to record their lives in his unique way had affected a boy on a country road from another generation and another part of the country. It all meant something to me too difficult to adequately explain. Now there I stood, before Tom Clark on that quilted daybed, my eyes wet with emotion as I lived the dream – all those paintings together for the first time. Indeed, passion has its rewards.

* * * *

Each of us has dreams and memories that might be considered possessions in a way. We certainly own them and they can be quite personal. And though we can share them, they ultimately remain ours, more likely than not, important only in our own minds. I had dreamed for two decades of making contact with Andrew Wyeth. After all, his work had made contact with me. For the rest of my life I will treasure the memory that I spent a short time with the man, even though we have corresponded occasionally since that meeting. As time has passed, I suppose I have come to realize it was my work that had really made contact with him. The truth be known, that's what an artist really wants anyway. If I came to know the man at all, I think Andy would agree. It was enough.