

KARSTEN'S MEMORIAL - SEPTEMBER 28, 2019

INTRODUCTION

Hello and Welcome,

We are all gathered here today to remember Karsten.

My name is John Pinter and I'm honoured to have been asked by Mary to be your MC today. Mary has been my quote unquote Aunt for my whole life (she's technically my mum's cousin), but in the last few years, with my mum being on the west coast, I affectionately have grown to think of Mary as my Toronto Mum. Speaking of mums, my mum sends her love, and her regrets that she can't be here with us today.

This remembrance was prepared by Mary in the time available and she regrets any errors or omissions. After the program we will be inviting anyone to share their thoughts and insights.

THE EARLY YEARS

Karsten was born Donald Stuart Smith in 1935 to Matilda and Frederick Smith.



Tragically, his mother died when he was only three, leaving his father to care for Karsten, his older brother Ian, and his younger sister Margaret.

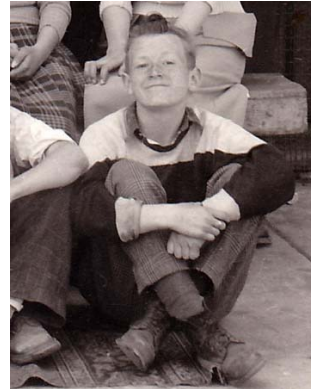


As the children grew older, they were able to help their father with chores around the house.

Margaret has written a few words about this time. They will be read by Zach, her grandson:

After Jessie left and before Mrs. Cantlay came to help out at our house, we were on our own for a little over a year. Ian made up a chore schedule that was taped to our kitchen wall. It said who was to clean what room, cook, wash dishes, dry dishes, etc. One night when Karsten was to wash the dishes, he disappeared to the upstairs' bathroom. He seemed to be gone for quite a while and when I checked he had gone out the window and was on the roof over the front door. He was trying to get someone to bring his bicycle up close so he could get down and make his get-away. He managed to get down with me yelling, "Ian, he is getting away!" The chase was on and Ian brought him back with his arm twisted behind his back. My dad must have been working late but I know he was really relieved when he finally got some help. Things certainly weren't easy for him that year, with a promotion at his work and no orderly help around the house, but we all managed to survive.

Perhaps Karsten didn't practice due diligence as far as his chores were concerned, so one might have hoped that he would be a conscientious student, however this was not the case. In looking over his old report cards, things started out OK, but then by the time he was in grade 8, for conduct, he had 3 Ds and 2 Es.



Karsten's creative attitude towards school attendance continued into his high school years until his father finally suggested that he might be happier working. His future sister-in-law, Mary, was working at Gorrie's Car Dealership. She got him a job there, where he also finished an apprenticeship, and Karsten became a qualified mechanic and a tune-up specialist.



Margaret has once again shared some more details, about his interest in cars, work, becoming more mature, and being a little more considerate to his baby sister. These will again be read by Zach:

When Karsten worked at Gorries, they had a stock car they used to race at different racetracks - Glen Watkins in New York and Mosport. I don't know where else. I think it was a crew of mechanics that worked at Gorries that raced and looked after the car. The car got pretty smashed up - it must have been in a crash. Karsten got or bought the car, I don't know which. He put a different body on the chassis (Oldsmobile). He had the car at Stan Brewer's Paint and Body Shop, and he worked on it for ages. After it was roadworthy, he sold it to his friend Rolphe Wilson. It went like a scared rabbit and that is about all I know.

When Karsten and I were young, pre-teens and early teens, we fought like cats and dogs. We would pass on the street and not say a word to each other. The first year Karsten worked at Gorries, he gave me a little white radio for Christmas. It is one of the gifts I will always remember. A radio all my own for my bedroom. I guess he liked me after all.

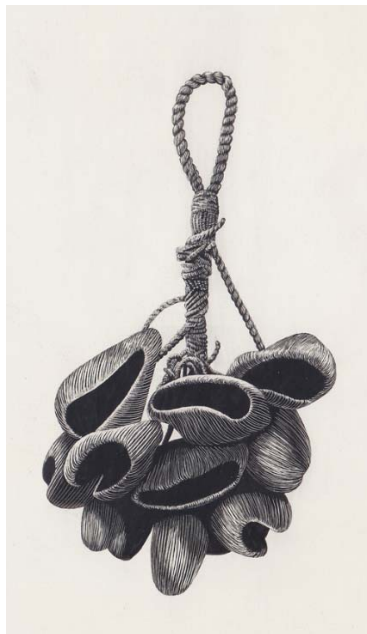
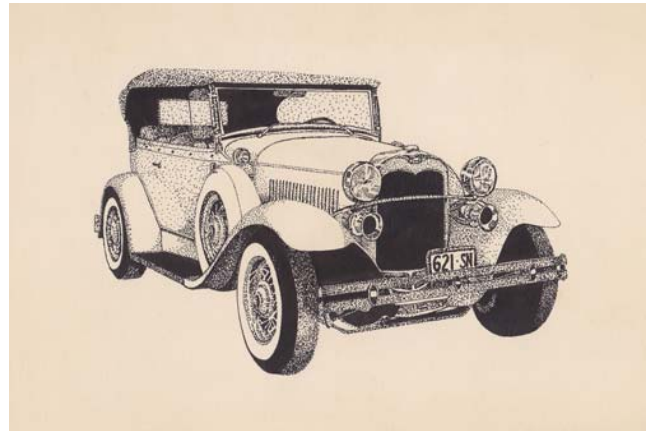
Another story that comes to mind is when I started working, one night at supper, I mentioned that I didn't think I should pay as much board as Donny because he ate more than I did. Karsten responded, "she uses more toilet paper than me". Needless to say, my dad didn't reduce my board.

With time, Karsten's interest in cars was not sustained, and he realized it would not be a career choice for him.

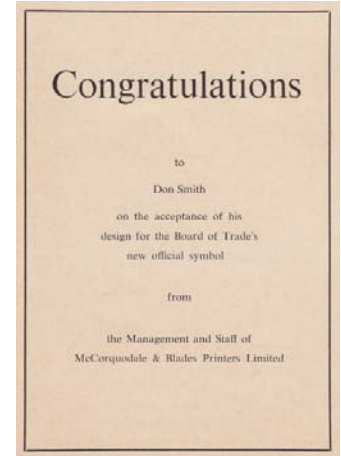
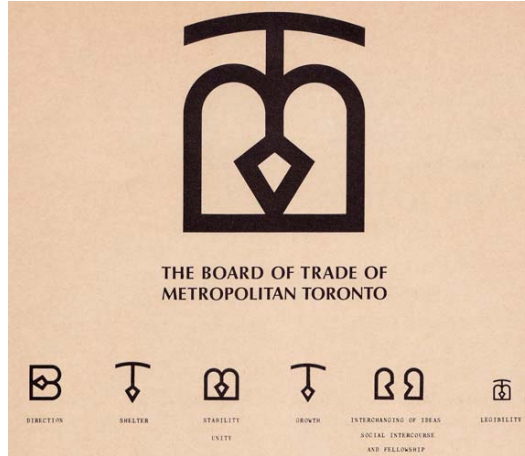
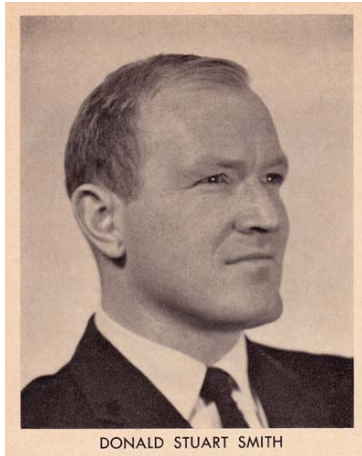
Already having an interest in drawing, he assembled a portfolio and was accepted to the Design and Illustration Program at the Ontario College of Art, which is now known as OCADU.

These are Karsten's comments on his time at OCA. Appropriately, the quote will be read by Sydney Punchard, Mary's Grandniece, who is currently in her second year at OCAD.

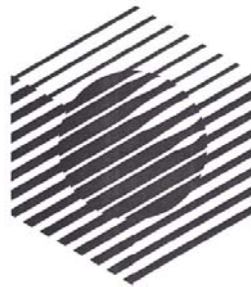
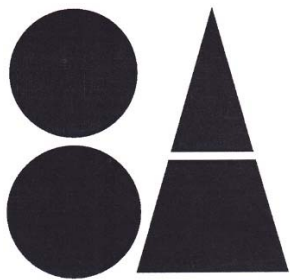
At college it was natural for me to try to depict a subject as close to reality as possible. I did quite well in field research, drawing alleyways, tree stumps and museum research. I loved drawing in the museum and spent almost every Saturday there for four years. Another factor was in my last year I saw an Andrew Wyeth exhibition at the Albright-Knox gallery in Buffalo. His paintings, though realistic, were very abstract in composition and feeling and had a huge impact on me.



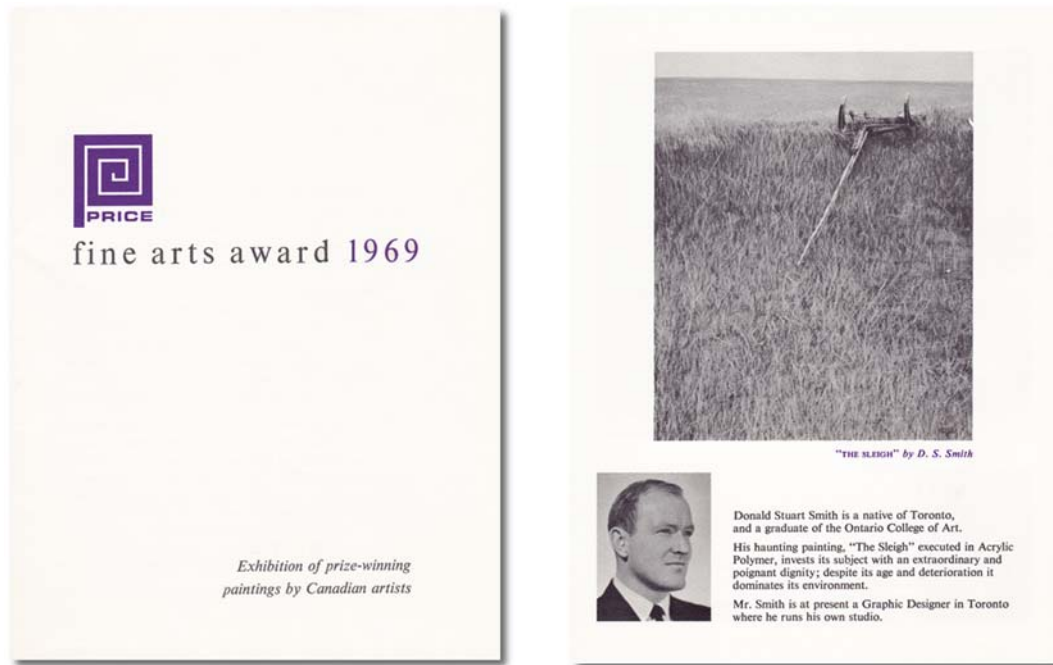
In 1962 after graduation, Karsten worked for a design firm and then for a large printing company as an art director and designer in Toronto. His interest had been to become an illustrator, but he felt that his sense of design was much stronger than his drawing skills. During this time, he entered and won a competition to design the Toronto Board of Trade symbol.



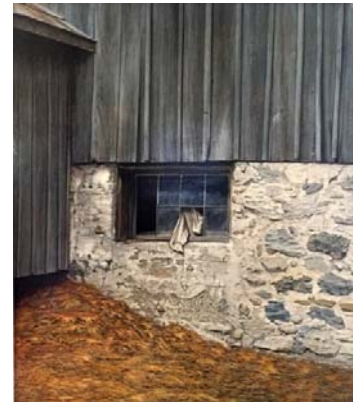
The publicity led to multiple offers for similar work. He then freelanced for two years, specializing in corporate design, the first logo being that of Smith & Andersen for his brother Ian:



Karsten's interest in painting also found expression. His painting entitled "The Sleigh" was part of the 1969 Price Fine Arts exhibition of prize-winning paintings by Canadian artists.



Here are some of Karsten's other paintings, and a sculpture that Karsten designed for Sayers & Associates in Mississauga.



In 1967 an important event occurred which turned out to be “a pivotal moment” in Karsten’s life. Rolphe and Pauline Wilson were friends who belonged to a spiritual group called Subud. After trying to convince them for 3 years to “quit that crazy group”, he had an art-related experience which made him join his friends at Subud. The following quote, although occurring at a later date, would suggest just such an experience:

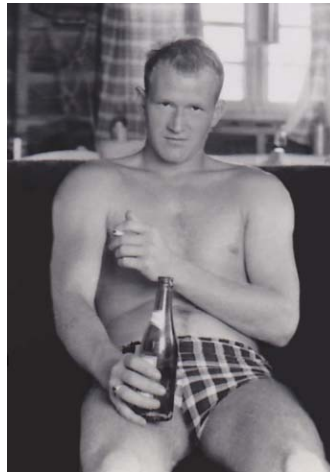
John Russell and I had been cracking huge rocks on order from head-architect Herbert Stewart for use in a monumental fireplace that Edwin Lehman was building. Afterwards, taking a break, I went for a stroll that involved crossing a stream by way of a concrete overpass. Once on the overpass I looked over and seeing that the opening was square, wondered how it would appear looking at it from below. I waded carefully into the middle of the stream and when I turned and looked up my breath was taken away and I staggered. As expected, I saw the massive and powerful cement structure with its dark square opening and a white square at the other end where the tunnel started, but I wasn't ready for the additional two black holes in the middle that were culverts, leading under a railway line fifty feet beyond. I stood there trying intently to figure out why this image had such an impact on me. Finally, I opened my camera and took a reference shot. Then I had a further shock. I uncomfortably felt another presence and quickly looking back to my side discovered the strangest bastardized standard poodle with its tongue hanging out and devilishly human eyes smiling at me at eye level from the bank just five feet away. I froze, as did the dog. To my credit I was the first to move. Without looking back I cautiously made my way over the slippery rocks to the side away from the poodle and slowly climbed the bank. Once on flat land I foolishly decided to unload the finished film and I dropped it. Just before I could reach it, that dirty dog came from nowhere, grabbed it between his teeth and ran off. I watched outraged as he disappeared behind a cottage and then apprehensively as he charged down the other side towards me. He circled three or four times before confidently dropping the film in front of me and then quickly picked it up just before I could reach it. His timing was precise, but he became overconfident and finally slid past his drop-off point allowing me to just reach it. He seemed to still be smiling so I turned and cautiously moved ten or so feet away and then, looking back, found the dog was nowhere in sight. I later talked to a local resident who agreed that it was the strangest dog he had ever seen. It was probably a great dog. Certainly full of life. Anyway, not to make a short story any longer, I knew I had to paint that ugly culvert. For me, the symbolism was very powerful. I also knew not many would like it, and I was right.

This excerpt serves not only as an insight into Karsten’s thought process and character as an artist, but also as a man.

Here is a short description of SUBUD from their website:

Subud is an international spiritual movement that began in Indonesia in the 1920s, founded by Muhammad Subuh Sumohadiwidjojo. The basis of Subud is a spiritual exercise called the *latihan kejiwaan*, which was said by Muhammad Subuh to represent guidance from "the Power of God" or "the Great Life Force". He claimed that Subud was not a new teaching or religion and recommended that Subud members practice an established religion; he left the choice of religion up to the individual. Subud encourages its members to engage in dharma enterprises and to donate a proportion of profits to welfare projects and to maintaining the Subud organization. Subud teaches that there is a dynamic interplay between "material" life and "spiritual" life. There are Subud groups in about 83 countries, with a worldwide membership of about 10,000.

Upon becoming a member of Subud, one has the option to change one's first name. Donald chose Karsten, and with that he left behind his "bad boy days".



At the time he joined Subud, the group was meeting on the second floor of a rental. Karsten decided that this wouldn't do, that they would have to get their own place.

He obviously had some self-knowledge, as he once wrote to his father, "Well Dad, you probably know better than most that I like telling other people what to do and now it seems that I need to take my own advice."

Karsten came up with an idea to build a cottage-size ski chalet around the year 1965. Herbert Stewart, an architect and Subud member designed it and they found a double lot in the ski country near Collingwood, Ontario. Many Subud members drove up there weekends, including Hardwin Blanchard from the United States. After 3 years, it was completed and sold, which provided the down payment on Subud Toronto's first hall, at 1189 Woodbine Avenue.



Karsten would go on to join chapters of Subud in Vancouver and Montreal.

Here is Karsten's account of his time in Vancouver:

"I moved to Vancouver in 1972 hoping to work with Dharma Presentations, perhaps the first Subud enterprise in Canada. It didn't work out right away, as they were just reorganizing, but eventually Bardolf Paul and I bought out Miles Simon and then Gordon Campbell, two of the original founders. The name was changed to Dharma Design and Consultation and we worked mainly for large corporations designing corporate identities, displays, slide shows and audio-visuals. We also designed a private museum for BC Sugar and a room display for the BC Mining Museum."



Just a few months ago, Bardolf sent an email to Karsten. He had been listening to Gordon Lightfoot singing "If You Could Read My Mind", and he wrote:

"Hi Karsten, this guy always takes me back to our time at the Water Street office.

Hope your spirit is strong,

Love, Bardolf"

We'll now have Mary's nephew Gabor sing "If You Could Read My Mind".

Between 1989 and 1993, Karsten submitted designs to the Royal Canadian Mint, and won several second and third prizes. He also got two first prizes which were made into coins. The coins were titled "Stagecoach" and "The Empress of India":



Karsten moved to Montreal in 1999 after retirement. He bought a triplex on 2nd Avenue in Verdun. He lived on the third floor and rented the other two suites. Over the years, he renovated his suite, and he did so painstakingly as with everything.



His second-floor tenants were friends Rusdi and Francois. Rusdi was a dedicated artist and Karsten was on hand to help him with gallery shows, but Karsten himself was not inspired to get back to painting.



Besides renovating, Karsten spent his time attending Subud meetings and events, socializing and always meaning to learn French.



Karsten made many trips to Toronto to visit family and friends. One of these friends was a recently widowed OCA classmate, Mary Cserepy. Their visits eventually became more than just friendly, and he moved back to Toronto in 2010 to be with Mary.

After only a year in Toronto, Karsten was diagnosed with kidney failure, and had to undergo hemodialysis 3 times a week. Despite that bad news, Karsten and Mary had a full and active life while keeping to his treatment schedule. They had a lovely wedding on the morning of Saturday, October 18, and that afternoon he kept his scheduled dialysis appointment at 4pm.



In honour of their wedding, Mary's sister Eva rewrote the lyrics to the song "Sunrise, Sunset" to tell the story of Mary and Karsten's courtship, and it was sung by her son Gabor and his wife Mylene at the wedding. Here they are for a repeat performance.

Mary and Karsten enjoyed many happy times with family and friends, and Karsten was able to attend the weekly Subud Toronto meetings until he entered Bridgepoint Healthcare in 2017. He was very fortunate to get placed at Bridgepoint because it is one of only two care facilities in Toronto that have onsite dialysis.

Mary has asked me to read the following to you:

When Karsten and I got together after all those years, one of the things that surprised me about him was his interest in gardening. We both grew up with a parent who loved gardening. Like his dad, my mother also was widowed and had to raise three children alone. Looking back, I'm sure gardening was partly a way for my mother to get away from us children, and for her to keep her sanity. Karsten's dad had influenced Karsten's interest in gardening. In Mary's case, the interest didn't transfer, but Karsten got involved in gardening wherever he lived.



Karsten's efforts in the Subud Hall in Montreal did not go unnoticed. His friend Lahanna Doucet wrote me that shortly after Karsten moved to Toronto, the neighbour from across the hall asked her, "where is that tall Viking-looking man who used to look after the garden?".



In Toronto he also started the garden in front of the Subud hall. I found myself helping with the garden, and asking myself, “how did I get here?”, and here I was paying someone to do my garden at home. When Karsten entered long-term care at Bridgepoint, he asked his brother-in-law Ron for some geraniums for his windowsill. The following year at Bridgepoint, he didn’t make that request. I was not sorry not to have to look after all those plants. Now I don’t have to look after plants, and I don’t have to look after Karsten.

After the cremation, I received a large basket of plants from my art group. It was like a mini garden and when I was ready to go back to Bridgepoint, I took it to give to the nurses. It seemed fitting that after two years there that he should leave a small garden behind.

Goodbye Karsten.

“Goodnight Sweet Prince, may a chorus of angels sing thee to thy rest”.

[SONG - HALLELUJAH]

We’ll be happy to take this time to invite anyone who would like to share their thoughts or stories about Karsten.

Thank you everyone.

Now we’d like to invite everyone to chat and make our way downstairs for coffee and refreshments.