

Unremembered Loss

For all the news and information from the world of Rathrac, and for the story Unremembered Loss

Issue 74

October 2015

Wands



Magic wands are not something I spend a lot of time thinking about. I've read stories that have had wands in them and watched movies, too. I don't think I've written a story yet that has a wand wielding character.

All this leads up to Emma starting school this year and being in a Harry Potter and Society class. Before class started, the teacher sent each student an e-mail letting them know what to bring to class. One of the things on the list was a wand.

Being a good dad, and unable to take Emma to the store where Harry bought his, I went into the backyard, found a suitable branch on one of our peach trees, cut it off, and then spent the next hour whittling, sanding, polishing and waxing it. I went in the house, my clothes wet with sweat, and gave it to Emma. She took it, looked it over, thanked me and I think rolled her eyes a bit.

Felling encouraged by her response and a personal sense of accomplishment at having finished an art project, I went back outside and found some more suitable sticks. For my second attempt I moved up from a knife to a lathe. Trying to use a lathe changes the definition of suitable.

For those of you not familiar with the term lathe, it is a motor that holds something between it and another point. When the motor is on, the something spins. If a special knife is then pressed against the spinning something, it makes a cut all the around the something. Picture a candle stick or the round poles of a staircase rail or in my case a wand.

Finding that special stick is a little harder when using a lathe – the stick has to be more special. When whittling a stick it can have a slight bow to it, or even a knot or bend. When using a lathe, the stick needs to be straight, very straight. Since the stick is being spun around two points, that becomes the “center” of the wand. As the wand is cut, the wood removed is relative to this center. If the stick is bowed, then when the knife is pressed against the spinning stick, the knife only cuts wood away from the outside edge of the bow.

Finding very straight sticks turns out to be much tougher than finding sort of straight sticks. For the wand at the bottom of this page I used a combination of turning and whittling. I really like this wand because it has lots of character: the bumps from the knots, the slight curve, the narrowness in the center where the true

straightness of the wand can be seen, and the coloring of the handle.

I completed three more wands that afternoon and another two the next day. With five wands in hand, and one already I'm Emma's hand, I pondered what to do with my newly created bounty. I suggested she take them to class with her and sell or give them away. She thought it might be better to wait a few classes before taking them in. It's been a few classes and she hasn't taken them in yet.

You might think that would be the end of my wand crafting days, and it would have been a good bet, but the situation has a couple of curve balls in it, the first is that sense of completion and pride I felt as each one was finished. The second is the joy I see and feel when someone holds one of my wands, turning it over, feeling the smoothness of the shaft, commenting on the handle and the unique elements I try to put in each one.

The next weekend we stopped by the wood working store to buy sandpaper since my supply was, shall we say, meager. I selected 7 or 8 grits of sandpaper (grit is a measure of how many grains of sand there are per inch – the lower the number the rougher the paper.)





I start with 60 grit paper. 60 is rough enough that if you use it on something that is in any way smooth, it will make it rougher instead. The 60 will wear the wood away quickly. The next smoothest paper is 80 grit. Still very rough, but less likely to cause new deep gouges in the wood.

Once the basic form is set, it's time to break out the finer paper. 100 grit is the first of the "gentle" papers. Along with it I use 120 and 150. With these three papers the work moves from shaping to smoothing. Of the three sanding phases, this is the longest and most technical – putting the curve in the bumps along the wand and highlighting the grooves.

When the sanding is done, the 200, 400, 600, 800 and 1000 come out to do the polishing. For these wands I just went with the 200 and 600.

I read a book on writing by Steven King and he is of the belief that stories already exist and as writers our job is to uncover them much as an archeologist uncover hidden bones. I don't know how much credence I hold in this belief, but for wands I can see it is true. The knots, bends, and grain of the wood, all insist on a certain form.

The wand at the top of this page started as a stick with a slight bow. You can see that the bark is still present on the "top" of

the wand while there are deep notches on the other side.

The wand in the middle of this page, on the other hand, was very straight and had no knots or variation in color so its interest is dependent on how it's carved.

After making the first five wands from peach wood I started looking for other types of wood. I've made one from pear wood, one from the wood of a rose bush, one from some sort of reed, and two from hard woods that I bought at the store.

I looked on line to see what a wand might sell for. I found them for as low as \$10 and as high as \$50. Most of the hand carved ones are in the \$30 range.

I looked for the right size of box to hold a wand and failed with my internet searching ability. Seems the market for 18" long, 2" wide and 0.75" tall boxes is very small.

Five weekends in a row and now I have 13 wands sitting on the shelf. I'm still wondering what to do with my growing collection. I feeling like I should be

writing up their histories and stories before they are forgotten.



If you'd like a wand, let me know and I'll find a way of getting one to you. Consider it one of the perks of being a newsletter reader. Check in with me quickly for the best selection.

Doug

Progress

Another month and let's see where I am. 120 pages edited on a target of 75 so that's more than good – its done. No more pages to edit. 4 new stories on a target of 6 so not great, but I can focus on writing the last six stories between now and the end of the year – I'm super stoked. Looking at my spreadsheet, I should really write 10 or 13 more stories, but I only need 6016 words total so 462 words per story, or half a page. That would balance out the words and stories per chapter.



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