

# under the sun

## He Fashions Mollusks And Witches And Saints

BY MARJORIE MEGIVERN

It all began when the feisty two-year-old visiting his grandmother's shell shop was given a blob of clay, "to keep him quiet."

"I looked around the shop at all the dioramas full of sea creatures and began copying them in clay," said Duane Schilz.

Now the sculpted sea life that comes from the hands of the 20-year-old artist is used as a teaching tool in museums and colleges all over the United States and in eight other countries.

Duane is a native of Virginia Beach, where his grandparents, Zida and William Kibler, had a museum-like shell and gift shop until 1973, when they moved to Shallotte to build a house.

"I came with them and stayed with them till my mother moved here soon after," Duane said. He and a younger sister now live with their mother, Lydine Schilz near Holden Beach.

Although the meticulously detailed sculptures Duane creates came to public attention only about four years ago, he said he's loved working with clay since those days as a toddler, when a doting grandmother gave him the first raw material.

She still preserves the very first piece he made for her, a tiny mouse, sitting upright on its haunches, its open mouth adorned with one of Duane's baby teeth.

Throughout all his years in Brunswick County schools, at Union Primary, Shallotte Middle and West Brunswick, the young artist pursued his hobby without instruction or guidance. "It was just something private. I never showed it to anyone except the family," he said.

Then, four years ago, while the family was in Florida, with the intention of making a permanent move, Grandmother asked Duane to come back to Shallotte and make animals for an exhibit she was preparing for the University of North Carolina at Wilmington.

"I was going to stay two weeks, then that became two more weeks, and finally the family joined me and we just stayed," he said with a laugh.

That was the beginning of his public career as a sculptor. Accompanying Mrs. Kibler to shell shows, where his mollusks, squid, cuttlefish and snails were on display, Duane began getting requests for sea life models from scientists, professors and museum curators.

Now he has pieces in such farflung places as Chicago, Ft. Fisher, Hong Kong and Greece. His "Meet the Cephalopods" exhibit at UNC-W in Wilmington was used

as a marine biology teaching tool. Recently a scientist from Brazil bought some of his models to use in his teaching. Also, there is a contract pending with the Delaware Museum by which Duane will re-do the Indo-Pacific mollusks in their marine collection.

Mrs. Kibler points out Duane's awards with grandmotherly pride. He was the youngest ever to win the Conchologist of the Year award in 1984 at the N.C. Shell Show, and the DuPont trophy for the most outstanding exhibit at the 1985 shell show in Jacksonville, Fla.

This self-taught young artist is modest and unassuming, yet open and articulate about his work and his future.

He said he enjoys sculpting fantasy creatures "out of my head" as much as the sea animals, which must be accurate in every detail, based on textbook pictures. "We used 40 books the first time he did an octopus," his grandmother noted.

And his current order for religious figures from a North Carolina Christmas shop is a "breakthrough" that challenges and excites him. "They want statues of Joseph, Mary and Jesus that look like old wood-carvings," he said. His finished product fits that description perfectly.

But Duane has still other plans. "What I'd like to do eventually is special effects for movies," he said. He's made overtures in Wilmington to the DeLaurentis Entertainment Group, and will visit his father in California this month, where he'll explore special effects jobs in Hollywood.

"Ideally, I want to do that kind of work part of the year, then keep up with the scientific sculpting the rest of the time," he said.

When he's not sculpting, Duane works at a local furniture store. "That's fun; I like talking to people," he said. "I don't want to spend all my time sculpting and forget how to get along with people."

But his work with clay is clearly his first love. Aside from making sea animals for his grandmother's exhibits or fashioning figurines for a gift shop, Duane enjoys creating strictly from imagination.

"Sometimes I just sit and mess with the clay till I get an idea," he said.

The ideas that flow through his fingers and take shape and life through a lump of clay are beautiful, intricate works of art. They seem to speak of a bright future for this young man who has so far let his talent flow into channels that benefit science and students all over the world.



DUANE SCHILZ displays his exhibit of sculpted sea life, called "Meet the Cephalopods," recently on view in the marine science building at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington.

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