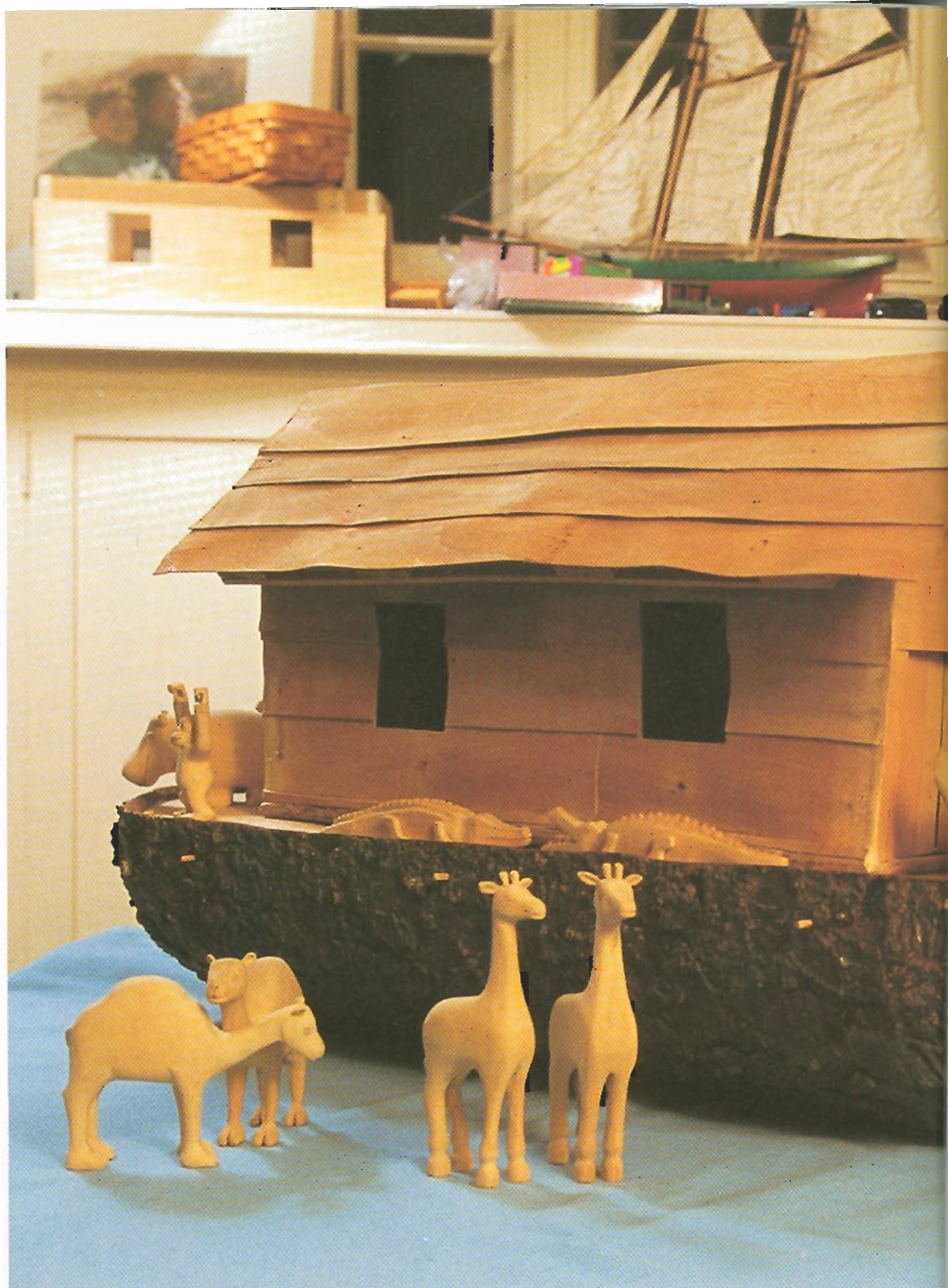


AFTER  
HOURS

# Dwight King: On the Cutting Edge



**D**wight King, head research librarian at the Kresge Law Library of the Notre Dame Law School, has a reputation for being on the cutting edge in his profession. During the day, he coordinates the first-year Legal Research class, helps faculty and students conduct their own research — which could range from finding the latest Supreme Court decision on a particular topic all the way to in-depth research on admiralty law — and engages in his own research and scholarship

to ensure that the Kresge Law Library continues its climb into the nation's top echelon of research-class law libraries.

But “after hours,” all that changes. When not tending to the needs of his young family — he and wife Mary have four children, Elise, Matthew, Gabriel and Madeline — or coaching a young soccer hopeful on the fine art of heading, or perfecting his own skills as a black belt in judo, or taking a long bike ride, Dwight King sits down at a table in his family room, picks up a carving tool, and transforms a rough piece of basswood into a work of art.

“I started wood carving when I was about 12 years old,” says Dwight. “My grandfather and I decided to carve a

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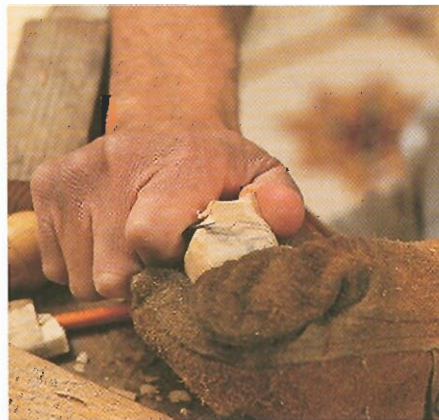
Derringer out of an old piece of pine." Although he didn't pick up another carving tool until he was in college, Dwight has always had a love of the art. "I was particularly interested in sculpture." While in college, Dwight took up wood carving as a way to reduce stress. It's no wonder he needed to find a release. Dwight earned three degrees from the University of Michigan in eight years—a B.A. in 1977, a J.D. in 1980, and an M.I.S. in 1981. (And in case you were wondering, in the fall, he

roots for "whoever signs my paycheck.")

Completely self-taught in his wood-carving art, Dwight now has nearly 30 pieces in his collection. Some projects he completes in a weekend; others have taken him years. "I would consider my Noah's Ark to be my best work so far. It has taken me over three years, and it's not done yet! I still have a few more animals to add." Dwight takes immense pride in every project. He painstakingly carves each piece by hand, without the use of any power tools.

He completed what he considers to be his first "real" piece shortly after the birth of his first daughter. It's a carving of Mary pushing Elise in a baby carriage. It has remained one of his favorites. Since that time, he has created a unique piece for each of his children, each capturing a different characteristic of childhood. "All of my pieces are special, but the ones for my children are very precious to me," says Dwight. When asked if he has ever sold his work, Dwight grins. "Only once, and it was one of the hardest things I ever did. After working so long on a particular piece, I grow very attached to it. It is really too hard to part with them."

Dwight characterizes his work as "folk art"—a term "generally reserved for those of us who lack real talent," jokes Dwight. Although noted folk artist and author Robert Bishop similarly describes folk art in his book, *AMERICAN FOLK SCULPTURE*, as "frequently amusing because the artist is incapable of realistic representation," anyone who has seen Dwight's work might take



issue with such a characterization. Dwight's pieces are vibrant and whimsical, and some are extremely detailed. His articulated alligator, for example, has individual teeth carefully made with small

pieces of toothpicks. Or his carving of wife Mary aboard a bicycle, which has jointed legs that actually propel the bike. Other favorites include the cowboy created for son Matthew and the horse-drawn carriage created for son Gabriel, which now sits on the mantle.

Dwight doesn't have an elaborate workshop, nor does he hide away in his garage to indulge in his late-night carving effort. "Actually, I find that I do my best work in the family room." Mary supports her husband wholeheartedly. "Well, let's say that she's extremely tolerant. It can get pretty messy at times."

Although his children have taken some interest in his work, Dwight isn't rushing to pass on his craft to them just yet. They love to watch him carve, but they're still too young to work with the sharp tools. "Actually, they're more interested in my judo. I visited a neighborhood school recently to talk to the kids about my career. I spent a few minutes on my position as a law librarian, and a few minutes on my art. But the thing that impressed the kids the most was when I 'threw' their teacher using a judo move!"

And what is Dwight's newest project? "Well, I've been inspired recently by another member of our family. It's a carving of me taking our cat Jinx to the vet!" Seems like there ought to be a few cutting edges in that piece as well.

