

Al Herwig

Carved 1927 Penny

Al shares, “I bought a jeweler’s blade that was 5,000ths thick, and I thought I could cut out the penny and the words in the penny. I ended up cutting a penny out for each of my two children and then one for my wife. They each got a penny from the year they were born. I took the penny to Rudnick Jewelers here in Sheboygan, and he said he had never seen a penny cut out that way.

The penny I’m showing in the show belonged to my wife. I made it for her eightieth birthday, and she wore it as a necklace. My wife was born in 1927. We were married for seventy years. We went together since eighth grade. We actually walked together to school since fifth grade, but we got serious in eighth grade when we started holding hands. We got married in 1947, and she passed away at ninety years old. And I’m ninety-seven years old. Who’d ever think I’d get this far? Everything is interesting.”

A note from Hannah Jakus, Social STUDIO manager: “In the years I’ve gotten to know Al, I have learned that some of his favorite things to create come from ideas that make him think. It seems problem solving and proving to people he can do it are fuel for his creativity. Al once showed me these two flip-out puzzles he made. He was working on a third and would come in every couple of weeks to show me the progress. It was going to be a car that flipped out and looked like it was driving on the road. To me, it looked like a car arriving at a drive-in movie theater (an idea that eventually stuck and was incorporated into the final piece.) Along the way, I proposed the question, ‘have you ever thought of making a table and chairs flip out?’ To which I received a silent glare that I like to joke encompassed every frustrating word he could think of. A few months later he brought in... a table and chairs that flipped out of the wood!

“If you have ever met Al, you have probably been asked the question, ‘have you ever seen my penny?’ A ‘no’ will swiftly prompt him to open his fanny pack (that I have yet to see him without) and he will pull out a small gray box. Inside he will start by showing you the penny and telling you its creation story. He will follow up with, ‘have you ever seen my illusionist heart?’ This small carved puzzle will dazzle you as Al flips and twists it to show you four photos – a photo of each of his two daughters, one of his wife, and the last of himself.”