

Who Is This Dude?



"Good thing that this whole woodcarving thing worked out the way it did. I can play bass guitar some, but other than that, I don't know how to do anything else. I suck at math and am extremely disorganized. I'm not handy with fixing things. If the towel rack in the bathroom gets loose, my first instinct is to go buy another house."

— RAYMOND KINMAN

What He Talks About

How does a self-taught high school dropout and bohemian hippie who was once convinced he had no talent for art end up creating iconic woodcarvings for Disney Imagineering?

It started by saying yes to carving a sign for a friend's restaurant, something he had no idea how to do. What followed was a largely accidental career, shaped by unlikely breaks, periods of success, burnout, and the long road back.

Because in the end, it was never really about art. It was about who he was becoming in the process.

Now an internationally recognized artist, author, teacher, and barefoot philosopher, he talks about what most people already know... they're just not sure they're ready to admit it yet.

It turns out the thing people are really after isn't fame or fortune. It's the freedom to be who they actually are, not who they were told to be.

Who This Is For

People who think they're not creative but secretly wished they were.

People who took the practical fork in the road and never quite found their way back.

People who know there's something else they'd be doing... if they weren't so careful.

In other words, pretty much everyone.



The Résumé. Short Version.



"People sometimes ask me about completion dates and deadlines. I tell them I've heard of those. They sound stressful."

— RAYMOND KINMAN

Raymond Kinman

High school dropout. No formal training. No credentials. No sensible life path. Never held a real job.

Yet much to his own amazement, he ended up doing the work anyway.

For nearly 50 years, Raymond Kinman has carved original works entirely by hand, with no shortcuts, no automation, and no particularly good explanation for how any of it happened.

Over the years, Raymond's woodcarvings have greeted hundreds of millions of guests at Disney theme parks worldwide and are often the very first thing they see at their favorite attractions.

He is the author of *Failing Forward*, published by Fox Chapel Publishing. He teaches sold-out beginner woodcarving retreats from his studio in Grass Valley, California, where nearly 700 students have shown up convinced they had no talent, and left shaking their heads and reconsidering previously perfectly respectable careers.

He has no explanation for any of it and has made peace with that fact.



About *Failing Forward*



Failing Forward, published by Fox Chapel Publishing, is my first book. The first half is about why most people never try. The second half teaches you how to carve.

So how does a high school dropout who believed he had zero artistic talent end up mingling with some of the best artists and creative minds in the world at Disney Imagineering?

This isn't a pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps, rags-to-riches tale. It's a human one. Because what unfolded had very little to do with woodcarving and everything to do with dismantling some misguided beliefs about myself that I'd been carrying since childhood.

And not just beliefs about art. Beliefs about who I was. Ideas about what I was capable of and where I fit, that started forming long before I had any say in the matter. At home, at school, in the ordinary business of growing up. They settled in so early and so invisibly that by the time I was old enough to examine them, I didn't know they were there. I thought they were just facts about me.

I don't think that's unusual. I think most people are carrying around a version of the same thing. It's the human condition.

The book is about the playful, fearless creativity we all had as children and somehow left behind on the way to adulthood. Drawing from decades of making things by hand and teaching thousands of beginners who were convinced they had no talent, I make the case that the creative child inside you never actually left.

Here's something worth thinking about. After nearly 50 years of carving for Disney theme parks and private collectors around the world... nobody has ever asked me for my diploma. Not once. Not even Disney.

Speaking & Podcast Topics



*"I never set out to have an unconventional life.
I just kept avoiding those things that suffocated me."*

— RAYMOND KINMAN

1. The Story I Told Myself...

For most of my early life, I was convinced I had no talent for art. Zero. Zip. Nada. It wasn't just a passing phase or insecurity. As far as I was concerned it was a settled fact. Until one special teacher saw something in me I couldn't see in myself... and challenged that story.

2. From high school dropout to full-feral hippie to Disney Imagineering.

An unlikely chain of events I still can't fully explain. Nobody ever asked for my diploma. Not even Disney. Makes you wonder how many rules are real... and how many we just agree to follow.

3. It All Started With a Fib...

At 20 years old, I was a beach-bum musician with no money, no education, no tools, and no plan. A friend needed a carved sign for his restaurant and for reasons I still don't fully understand, I said I could do it. I couldn't. The next 50 years were spent learning how.

4. It Doesn't Happen Overnight.

There were years, even decades, I stood in food bank lines to feed my family. Now people wait years for my work. Nobody sees what happened in between.

5. The Crash and the Climb Back.

There came a point where the work stopped feeling like magic and started feeling like weight. Injury, burnout, and the slow grind of trying to keep everything afloat. For a while, it looked like the story might just fade out. It didn't. But not in the way you'd expect.

6. The Long Road Back...

At some point, I realized I couldn't quit. This was all I was ever really meant to do. Not because it was art, or making beautiful things, or even about making money... but because of who I was becoming in the process.

7. The Human Touch™...

The bots are here and flattening what remains of humanity. The machines are faster, cheaper, and never need a coffee break. In a world racing toward automation, one guy is still doing it by hand. Unapologetically, slowly, and on purpose.

8. Full Circle: The Heart of a Teacher.

It started with one special teacher who saw something in me I couldn't see in myself. Somewhere along the way, I realized being an artist wasn't just about creating beautiful things. The real reward is passing that on to someone else.



Suggested Interview Questions



"Somewhere around here, things started going off script."

— RAYMOND KINMAN

1. You've said you were convinced you had no talent for art. Where did that belief come from, and what changed it?
2. You dropped out of high school at fifteen. What was going on that led to that and how did something most people would see as the end of the road become your starting point?
3. You've described yourself as becoming a full-feral bohemian hippie after dropping out of school. You were living pretty far outside the mainstream at that point. What did those early years actually look like?
4. Tell us about the teacher who saw something in you that you couldn't see in yourself.
5. Tell us about the moment it all started — the carving job you said yes to without knowing how to do it.
6. You went from that to working with Disney Imagineering without a diploma or formal training. What actually opened that door?
7. Do you remember the first time you stepped into a Disney project and realized, "this is real... I'm actually here"? What did that feel like?
8. Coming from a completely unconventional path, did you feel like you belonged there or like you were getting away with something?
9. The iconic work you've done at Disney is often the very first thing guests see at their favorite attraction and has become cherished childhood memories for millions of people, often without them knowing your name. How do you think about that kind of legacy?
10. There were years of real hardship... even standing in food bank lines to feed your family. What kept you moving forward during that time?
11. You've described a point where the work stopped feeling like magic and started feeling like weight. What was going on then?
12. You eventually stepped away... and then came back. What changed?
13. In a world moving toward automation, you've stayed committed to working by hand. What keeps you there?
14. You have a multi-year waiting list, and people often suggest scaling up or outsourcing. What have you chosen instead and why?
15. You started with one teacher who changed your life. Now you're that person for others. How do you think about that responsibility?
16. Looking back, was this story ever really about art or was it about something else?



Photos

All photos are available in high resolution. Contact info@woodcarverguru.com to request originals.

HEADSHOT



WORK & LIFE PHOTOS



Sizzle Reel

Coming Soon

Sizzle reel link will appear here once available. Contact info@woodcarverguru.com for a preview screener.



As Seen In

- PBS American Woodshop
- PBS ArtEffects — Local Feature Episode 803
- ABC10 — Bartell's Backroads
- CBS Good Day Sacramento
- Business Insider
- Magazine B — International Disney Issue

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Contact



info@woodcarverguru.com



(530) 277-5200



woodcarverguru.com

