

We spent a pleasant afternoon yesterday at a party honoring a fine young man in the family. Sam graduated from high school this month, and friends and relatives gave him an enthusiastic sendoff into the wider world via a celebration at Kettunen Center.

Sam has been part of our lives since he was born. We have seen every stage of life that he has experienced so far. Now that he is technically an adult—he will be able to vote in this fall’s midterm election—I suppose that he could decide that he will not be as informative in his dealings with us relatives. But, knowing this family and living within its boundaries for many decades, I am quite sure that escaping from both praise and censure will be nigh well impossible. And, if he is like most of us, and I think he is, he won’t want to diminish our roles in his future.

Still, his abilities in one field are so far removed from those of anyone else in the family—as far as I know—that we still have to scratch our heads at Sam on occasion, and I’m sure that he must do the same. He must wonder, when we play the game in which participants have to create pictures of whatever words are on the cards that they have in front of them, what in the world is wrong with us.

Sam has unusual artistic ability. This talent is completely absent in the rest of us. While we marvel at the pictures he draws, we can’t figure out how it all comes to be. I remember reading once that someone asked a sculptor of animals how he went about creating a frog out of a piece of stone.

“Well,” he said, “it is pretty simple. I just chip away everything that isn’t a frog.”

I guess that was clear to him. It was very obscure to me. But, I’ll bet that Sam knows just what the sculptor meant.

When Sam was a little boy, an artist spent a few days in the farmhouse, sketching and painting landscapes. While the rest of us thought it was interesting, we really weren’t motivated to stand and watch her for any length of time. Sam was.

And, when he started drawing pictures, it was evident that he was more than just a kid who liked to draw. All of us have gone through that phase. Sam seemed to instinctively know about “perspective,” for instance, from the time he was very young. An object that was supposed to be pictured farther away from the foreground of the drawing was always smaller. And details were there that would have never occurred to most children. A second grade self-portrait not only had shoes with laces, the laces had eyelets.

As Sam has grown up, his interests have leaned toward cartooning, superheroes, and all of the characters that are beyond my understanding. But, they are still impressive, even to one whose folk heroes are more likely to be of the nineteenth century type.

When Sam goes away to college this fall to study art, it will be interesting to the rest of us to see what direction this ability takes him.

Maybe he will find painting as entrancing as pencil and paper drawing. Maybe he will find that he likes to sculpt three dimensional figures. Or, maybe, animation and cartooning will be his future. It will be something for the rest of the family to watch develop. We will shake our heads, wondering how anyone can know how to do what he does, Right now, I am looking at a pencil drawing on our desk—a fantasy figure entitled The Sting. I don't think Sam has had any anatomy classes in high school, but that figure's muscles and proportions look just right. Just as I am fascinated by people's ability to sing and hit all the notes, or to play the piano or violin or some other instrument, I always wonder how Sam can take the same kind of paper and an ordinary pencil that I can pick up at any time and make something that causes me to blink in amazement. I hope this talent takes Sam wherever he wants to go and brings him a life of joy and satisfaction.

