

A Third Life

SCULPTURES FOR GOD, COUNTRY
& NOTRE DAME

How does one make the transition from being a Lieutenant Colonel in the Air Force to becoming one of our country's leading sculptors? In this book Jerry McKenna explains that it was a combination of talent, timing, perseverance, and good fortune.

McKenna divides life into three distinct sections. **The First Life**, approximately 25 years, consists of preparation – childhood lessons, schooling, maturation, formation, trade school, apprenticeship, university, and, in some cases, military service. The **Second Life** is usually devoted to one's career or a series of jobs, raising a family, carving out a place in society. This segment of our lives also lasts approximately twenty-five years. The **Third Life** faces us when we have to decide what to do with the rest of our lives. The choice depends on our health, where we are financially, the ages of our children, the skills and talents we have to offer, our desire to continue working or to play golf, go fishing, or whatever.

McKenna was 52 when he retired from the Air Force and was in reasonably good health. Several years before, in fact, he had run the London Marathon. But still burning within him was a flame that never went out. He had studied to be painter at the University of Notre Dame in the late 1950's. Upon graduation, he was unable to find work as an artist. He enlisted in the Air Force and spent the next twenty-seven years in assignments around the world. However, in the back of his mind was this persistent attraction to sculpture.

Everywhere he went he would visit galleries and museums, study bronze and marble sculptures, and collect small pieces of sculpture – a wood carving in Taiwan, a porcelain bust in Hong Kong, a wooden Buddha in Okinawa, a bronze Shiva in Japan and Wedgwood bas reliefs in England. All the while he wondered if he had “the gift of sculpture.” When he was 42 years old – quite by accident – he finally found out. In the course of his duties at Kelly Air Force Base, he ordered a bas relief to be made and the artist who was creating it sought his advice. McKenna asked if he could try his hand at it and, lo and behold, he found that he had the gift. For the next ten years he tinkered with sculpture before retiring from the Air Force. By then he felt that he could “hang out a shingle” and call himself a sculptor.

Since then, McKenna has created over 200 sculptures across the United States and in Japan, Germany, England, Ireland, Nepal and Norway. They range from bas reliefs to larger than life bronzes. Notre Dame has been the recipient of nearly twenty-five “*McKenna's*.” A litany of Notre Dame luminaries such as Hesburgh, Joyce, Sheedy, Gipp, Rockne, Leahy, Krause, Parseghian, Holtz, Kline, and The Four Horsemen have all been immortalized in bronze. Now in his seventh decade, he is still going strong. This is the story of his **THIRD LIFE**.

By Dan Coughlin

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Jerry McKenna is a sculptor who lives near the small Texas Hill Country town of Boerne. He is married to author Gail Thomas McKenna. They have five grown children and 11 grandchildren.

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