

# Inheritance

A sharp reminder and remembrance of a life cut short.

A chisel roll is an unlikely time capsule. Untouched in the three years since his death, the green canvas Ian salvaged from a discarded patio umbrella has protected his tools admirably. They are exactly as he left them: organized, razor sharp and without a spot of rust.

His mother and I sit at the dining room table he built for her with the tool roll open in front of us. We silently contemplate the tools she intends to give me. Ian was my closest friend and a gifted woodworker.

He was 24 when he was killed in a car accident and the tools tucked into the roll's many pockets speak of a life in progress. A life cut short. On the left are the tools that got him started—flea-market finds, ground down to the last inch, but lovingly restored. A nearly complete set of high-quality new tools, a mark of his newfound status as a successful professional, advances from the right. Only one pocket remains empty.

I remember when the first of the new chisels appeared. It was after college, we were living together in Seattle, and Ian had just started work with a renowned furniture studio. He thrived in the job and often stayed late to work on personal projects. In the quiet hours after the shop closed, I would join him to work on my first woodworking project, a small toolbox made from alder scraps.

Under his guidance, I cut my first dovetail joints. When it came time to pare the shoulders, he handed me a chisel. For a minute, he watched uncomfortably as I fumbled with the tool. When I cut my finger, he politely took it from my hands for fear I might inflict further harm.

Despite an inauspicious start, those evenings in the shop ignited a passion for woodworking that is among the



most tangible gifts from a friend who I miss dearly. His gift has continued to evolve, even in his absence, and I am grateful for it.

With his mother's blessing, I roll up the chisels and carefully bring them home. I know the time will come to sharpen these tools and that to do so will replace one more physical sign of Ian's life. The edge he painstakingly established on each chisel, honing both faces until they cast a flawless reflection, will be replaced by an edge of my making.

Will I hesitate before putting steel to stone? Yes. In the privacy of my own shop, I'll probably even mutter a thanks and an apology to my friend, even though I know I don't believe he's

anywhere to hear it. But, I will hold the blade just like he showed me and work it in slow circles across the stone, bringing a new edge, new possibilities, to the surface. **PWM**

*Gus is a graduate student in natural resources at the University of Vermont. When he's not studying, you'll find him tapping out dovetails at the kitchen table.*

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