

## Art and Awe

Don't you admire artistic talent when you see it; that ability of others, whether God-given or honed from years of passionate practice and study, to create something out of nothing and make you feel something deeply when you see it or hear it? What a joy and blessing they bring to our lives by entering our minds through our senses.

I am fortunate, like many of you, to have friends, family and acquaintances who can do that and it enriches our lives. They may not be the very best in the world, but they exceed that journeyman level. They have mastered an art.

My people (I know all their names and some are related to me) can paint, sculpt, create and perform dance, sing with a beautiful vocal instrument, play a guitar or a horn instrument, compose a piece of music, or conduct an orchestra. How great they are. Some can teach, and that is wonderful, but it is a greater thing that they can do.

The word that comes to mind is awesome. That word today has lost almost all its meaning because of the way we have come to use it. It meant to be filled with awe, so filled with awe that you were awestruck. It meant your jaw fell slack, your mouth was open and you were in a state near rapture.

For whatever reason, I longed to be able to play the guitar, but I never could. I am tone deaf and without rhythm. For years I played my guitar left handed without restringing it, so I played with it upside down and backwards. It was difficult to form the chords with my fingers and the strumming of the strings was in the reverse order. As much as I loved the sound of a voice singing, mine didn't work or have barely one octave range. That is fine, just how it is.

Now I appreciate how a master can write. I struggle to reach a journeyman level and am improving. For my own intellectual reasons, I have focused on fictional literature and history, and narrowed in on American history and further in on the Civil War period and our late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

This may mean nothing to you, but I admire these words. They are representative of a certain rich narrative style, skillfully executed by the late Shelby Foote, and I find them to be awesome:

“Now both rested from their injuries and exertions. Wrapped in their blankets, those who had them, the soldiers of both armies huddled close to fires they had kindled against orders. The waxing moon set early and the wind veered and blew coldly from the north; the screams of the wounded died away with the singing of the bone saws. Unlike the night before, on the eve of carnage, there were no serenades tonight, no mingled choruses of “Home Sweet Home,” for even the bandsmen had fought in this savage battle, and expected to have to fight again tomorrow, bringing in the new year as they had ushered out the old.

So they thought; but they were wrong, at least so far as the schedule was concerned. Though there were tentative skirmishes, fitful exchanges of artillery fire, and some readjustment of tactical dispositions on both sides, New Year's Day saw nothing like the carnival of death that had been staged on New Year's Eve. In point of fact, the two armies were rather like two great jungle cats,

who, having fought to mutual exhaustion, were content – aside, that is, from the more or less secret hope on the part of each that the other would slink away – to eye one another balefully, limiting their actions to licking their wounds and emitting only occasional growls and rumbles, while storing up strength to resume the mortal contest.”

These are just a few of the 1.2 million words he wrote in 3,000 pages and 3 volumes, taking 20 years to complete his Civil War Narrative when Bennet Cerf, the celebrated editor at Random House, asked him if he would write a book about the Civil War.

First he was a Southern novelist and then became an historical narrator. That great Mississippi son-of-a bitch could write. And I think he would want us to remember him with just those words.