

Passing on the Dream

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KORCZAK Ziolkowski was a visionary whose dream was bigger than that of most entrepreneurs. It was as big as a mountain, as grand as the Statue of Liberty, as awesome as the Great Pyramids of Egypt. And the amazing thing is that Korczak, who died in 1982 at age 74, succeeded in passing the torch—in this case a super-sonic torch used for carving granite—to his offspring.

Seven of Korczak's 10 children are carrying on his life work, blasting and drilling and torching a colossal monument of Crazy Horse, the Sioux warrior, out of a mountain in the Black Hills of South Dakota.

The mega-scale of this project, which he started 50 years ago, attests to the size and scope of Korczak's vision. The Ziolkowskis are carving a three-dimensional figure on horse-back out of an entire mountain. After several decades, the fierce visage of Crazy Horse has finally emerged. Almost 90-feet high from chin to crown, the head will be large enough to fit all four of the Presidents carved on nearby Mt. Rushmore inside. The warrior's outstretched arm is nearly the length of a football field.

The Boston-born, self-taught sculptor had been asked to carve the mountain in 1939 by the Lakota chief Henry Standing Bear, who wanted a memorial to show that Indians had heroes just like the white man's chiefs enshrined at Rushmore. Korczak (pronounced Core-zhock) had worked at Rushmore under the sculptor Gutzon Borglum before World War II. During his Army service with an ack-ack unit in Europe in the war, he contemplated the project. After returning home, he moved West and devoted his life to it.

"He wanted to give back some pride to the Indian people," his widow, Ruth Ziolkowski, recalled in an interview with Family Business. "As an orphan himself, he was a great believer that you can do anything you want in this world if your pride is in place and you are willing to work hard enough and pay the price."

Korczak started work on the mountain in 1947 after filing a mining claim on the former Sioux homeland with the Federal Government. He worked alone at first, living in a tent and developing the site with his meager savings. One of the young volunteers who came West to assist him was Ruth Ross. She soon became his wife, and, through the years, as Korczak blasted and bulldozed the mountain, the Crazy Horse project became a family business. Five boys and five girls were born. Visitors came to watch the work in progress. A visitors' center grew up at the base of the mountain with a museum of Indian artifacts, a log home with Korczak's sculptures, a restaurant and gift shop. The Ziolkowski girls worked in the visitors' center, the boys were up on the mountain, passing dynamite sticks to Dad on his ladder.

Korczak did not see the project as a money-making venture. He saw himself as an artist—a "storyteller in stone." He was inspired by the story of Crazy Horse, who defeated Custer at the battle of Little Big Horn and was later killed after the Sioux were ousted from their lands. He wanted to do what he could to right the wrongs done by the white man. He was adamant about not accepting government funds. He remembered how Borglum had fought with the Government over every penny for Mt. Rushmore. Like the Indians, he distrusted the

Government's word and twice refused offers of \$10 million from the Secretary of the Interior for the project.

Today, the Crazy Horse Memorial is run as a non-profit foundation. The site was deeded to Korczak in an exchange of state for federal lands. Although the restaurant and gift shop are organized as a corporation, all profits are plowed back into the work on the mountain. The Ziolkowski "family business" is now a big business. Last year 1.2 million people visited the site. About 140 are employed during the peak summer season.

The family did a lot of soul-searching after Korczak's death to decide whether they would be able to carry on. Even many supporters doubted they had the determination and skills needed to pick up where Korczak left off. The decision to carve the head of the warrior at the top of the mountain first was a major departure from Korczak's plan, dictated in part by the need to silence doubters. The sculptor had wanted to carve the horse's head first, but in 1987, after some agonizing, Ruth and the foundation board decided to revise his plan. The warrior's head was to be only 90 feet in height, compared with 219 feet for the horse's head. The human head was not only more feasible financially but it could be finished sooner and would thrill visitors with the unfolding majesty of a face emerging at the top of the mountain.

WHY THEY CAME BACK

The seven adult Ziolkowski children who work at the site have each carved out a special niche. One son, Casimir, 43, works with the crew on the mountain. Monique, 37, a sculptor herself, works with her mother on "pointing"—measuring and marking the points on the mountain for carving and making sure they conform with the model created by Korczak. Another daughter, Jadwiga, 45, oversees the day-to-day management of the visitors' center, and a third, Anne, 42, is in charge of the museum, gift shop, and educational and cultural center. Two sons, Adam and Mark, do construction and logging at the site, and another daughter, Dawn, assists with administrative duties. All

the Ziolkowski offspring report to Mom, who is chairman of the 23-member foundation board. All have built homes at the site or in the town of Custer four miles away.

Most of the children left the mountain at one time or another to explore other opportunities in the wider world. What brought them back? What keeps them there, toiling on a project they may never see completed in their lifetimes? "It's because I loved Dad and really miss him a lot," said Jadwiga Ziolkowski on a video prepared for the project. A graduate of the University of Wyoming and a mother of three, Jadwiga said the monument is about keeping other cultures alive and keeping family alive. "I have three children and I want them to grow up always having something that they can see evolve, something they can see other people enjoy."

Monique, who often rides a measuring beam atop the sculpture, some 600 feet above the valley floor, described the satisfaction of seeing the warrior emerge from the rock. "I stand on the scaffolding and look down below and see the ripples on his forehead and where the eyebrows are coming out...I mean, I measured that. I measured it and the boys drilled it and torched it, and it's just like the little one [the model] down at the house. That's amazing."

"Korczak was a great father who loved to play with the youngsters," his 71-year-old widow said. "He made work fun—he really did. If you did it well, you got your share of the credit. He didn't keep it all for himself."

In 1952, he wrote a letter to his children that they did not read until after his death (see page 30). As recalled by his son Casimir, the letter said: "You don't have to take this [project] up, but if you do decide to take it up, don't ever let go of it." Casimir summed up the spirit of his own decision and the family's: "We decided to take it up. And I'll be damned if I'll ever let go of it. For me, it's the only job I want to do for the rest of my life."

Although Korczak left behind detailed instructions for the carving work, the family has had to modify them over the years. "My daughter Monique and I change as little as we can of Korczak's original design," says the mother. "But sometimes we compare the model and the

work on the mountain and we decide it really doesn't look right when enlarged 34 times. If Korczak were here, he might agree that something has to be changed."

New drilling technologies in the 1980s have helped accelerate progress on the monument. The completion of the face coincided with the 50th anniversary of the project this year and set off an explosion of publicity, including a cover story in "Time Magazine for Kids," a report on ABC-TV news, and an appearance by family members on the Today Show.

There are signs the family is feeling the pressures from the project's growth, however, and plans for the future succession show signs of tentativeness. "It's a lot more pressure than it was five, six, or seven years ago, since we've gotten all the publicity," says Jadwiga. "You feel the whole world is watching you, and you have to work harder to keep it up." In the promotional video made a few years ago, Ruth Ziolkowski had envisioned a triumvirate of Jadwiga, Anne, and Monique running the project in the future, with Anne, who has no children and puts in long hours at the site, as the leader. When interviewed, however, the matriarch emphasized that the next generation would work as a team, with each in charge of his or her activity. "Times change," she said about the apparent shift in plans.

Meanwhile, the family continues to build on Korczak's dream. The foundation has opened a Native American cultural and educational center. It has added almost a thousand acres to the site in recent years, on which it hopes to create a university, a medical training center, and a larger museum of Native American cultures.

Korczak, who is buried in a granite tomb facing the monument, once acknowledged that the memorial might take as many as 100 years to complete. The perception of time was relative, he once pointed out, especially when it came to enduring works of art. "It took 600 years to build Notre Dame," he said. "And 3,000 slaves labored for 20 years to build one pyramid." Assuming that his dream is passed on to another generation, there will be no shortage of Ziolkowskis to do the work. There are 23 grandchildren. At least some of them may be inspired

by lines of unknown origin that Korczak liked to quote:

When the legends die, the dreams end;
and when the dreams end, there is no more
greatness.

-- H.M.

JOY IN A NOBLE PURPOSE

In 1952, Korczak Ziolkowski dictated a letter to his wife, Ruth, before most of his children were even born. The letter was included in his will and his 10 children did not read it until after his death in 1982.

To my children:

Life at its very best is a fleeting thing. It can be likened to a wisp of a cloud that comes up out of the horizon—from where we know not—and as it draws near, it becomes full of embodiment, so much so that it can be evil enough to cloud the sun and make darkness—or, by the same token, it can be beautiful and give shade.

You can, with your own lives, either darken the sun and make things unhappy after you—or you can create a lovely haven of shade for your family, your friends, and for those who will follow you.

For 39 years of my life I sought for something wherein I wished to dedicate my life. As you read this, you know, of course, that I am no longer with you in body; nor do I wish to place a burden upon you without it being done with your consent. But once you take up the burden, do not lay it down, even though at times your friends will tell you that you are wrong. For you will not be wrong. No one is ever wrong who desires to do that which is not required of them to do—and that which is of a noble purpose. The purpose of Crazy Horse is noble.

There are many people who do not see its nobility at present, [or will] even in your own time—and maybe even in your children's time. The vision of Crazy Horse may be clouded to some people; but if you wish to dedicate your life as to carry out my dreams— and, I can now

say, your mother's dreams, too—they will then also be your dreams someday. You will find in the darkest hours a feeling of great strength, of great satisfaction, of great joy and happiness in carrying out even the mundane tasks that go toward living for something far greater than yourselves.

— Korczak Ziolkowski, Sc.
Feb. 19, 1952

WHAT WOULD CRAZY HORSE THINK?

Some critics of the Crazy Horse project question its enormous scale and whether the Indian warrior himself would have approved. An article in the New York Times this past summer quoted John Yellow Bird Steel, president of the Oglala Sioux Tribal Council, as saying, "How can we tear up a mountain for a statue?" Although he said the tribal council supports the "overall concept," Steel noted that no one really knows what Crazy Horse looked like because he never allowed himself to be photographed. Indeed, it was reported that the Indian rebel once told a photographer who wanted to take his picture, "What? You would imprison my shadow, too? You've taken everything else."

Another quote attributed to Crazy Horse, however, perhaps provides some justification for the Ziolkowskis' efforts. Crazy Horse was killed in 1877 when a soldier plunged a bayonet into his back during a meeting under a flag of truce at Fort Robinson, Nebraska. A few years later, a medicine man named Black Elk told an interviewer that the warrior had predicted: "I will return to you in stone."

-- H.M.

THE FOUNDER'S FIERCE WORK ETHIC

Korczak Ziolkowski believed work was one of life's greatest blessings. The bewhiskered sculptor once expressed his own unbending determination in an interview:

"The world asks you one question, only one: 'Did you do the job?' And there is only one answer: 'Yes.'"

"You don't say, 'I would have done it if there had been any money in it.'"

"You don't say, 'I would have done it if people had been more sympathetic and understood what I was trying to do.'"

"You don't say, 'I would have done it if I hadn't gotten hurt or crippled'—and, God knows, I've been crippled."

"You don't even say 'I would have done the job if I hadn't died.' I don't buy that."

There is only one answer: 'Yes.' " ■

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