

It was when he was alone, however, that his creative desires would come calling, linked as they were to his peculiar fixation upon effectively replicating reality. Whereas other elementary school pupils would draw whatever sprang from their imagination or memory, Arden would seize upon something within visual range, attempting to recreate its look as accurately as possible. The nearer he got to attaining perfection, the more satisfaction he derived. Why this was, he neither knew nor cared. All that mattered was that he enjoyed it.

As he grew older, he found himself intrigued by maps, whether it was the folded ones stashed in glove boxes or the hardback topographical collections found in the reference sections of libraries. He would lug one of these nearly three-foot-square beasts from its shelf, plop it onto a table, then flip through its stiff color pages until selecting a destination. Typically he would study maps of places he knew firsthand or areas to which he had traveled with his family. Viewing maps of familiar regions not only helped sustain the memory but offered up the notion that man's world could, to some extent, be tamed. The proof could be found in these weighty atlases whose pages teemed with accurately measured data on some of the land upon which Arden himself had trodden. Maps shrank the world, their surveyed grids of indisputable precision reassuring him that the big bad world could be faithfully captured in miniature. Whittled down to controllable doses. Arden sensed that, with the right amount of control, he might just one day master perfect replication.

His uncanny artistic ability to meticulously recreate whatever it was that he saw before him was encouraged both at home and at school. His parents made sure that their home was kept stocked with drawing paper, crayons, ink and pencils. Arden was, at this stage of his life, decades from the two things that would become hallmarks of his art: his use of oil paint and the painting of portraits. While he

would from time to time draw people, sketching them out in lead in a leather-bound book purchased for his ninth birthday, he preferred putting forth precise renderings of inanimate objects he deemed worthy. These varied from the innocuous - a mailbox perhaps - to the elaborate: the house across the street, for example. He came to believe that no moment taken on the road to perfection was wasted. If rendering lifelike was his form of worship, then every moment it took to attain this coveted perfection became a prayer. Patience was the key, and Arden realized early on an indisputable fact of self-awareness: he was very, very patient.

This quality stemmed from his all-around positive upbringing, for he could afford himself the luxury of time, knowing there was nothing lying in wait to impede his patient, methodical efforts. All was well in his life. He loved both parents, and they loved him. All three were in excellent health. While they were not wealthy, bill collectors never pounded at the door. Arden flourished in school, and while he preferred his own company to that of others, he got along with almost everyone, even if at a superficial level. All in all, life was good.