

More than Books

Invitation to an unveiling

Tomorrow afternoon, Wednesday, March 28, at 4:30 p.m., a bronze life mask of Abraham Lincoln will be unveiled in the library lobby, and you're invited to attend.

The original Lincoln life mask was created in 1860, just before Lincoln became president, Dr. Edward Finch tells me. It was made by the renowned nineteenth century sculptor, Leonard W. Volk.

What we'll be seeing tomorrow is a high-quality copy that was presented to the local Lincoln-Douglas Society by the Lincoln Forum, a national organization of Lincoln scholars and enthusiasts. The mask represents the Forum's prestigious Leonard W. Volk Award.

According to the Lincoln Forum, the award is presented only to "institutions and organizations that perpetuate the Lincoln story." Talk about being in good company! The previous recipients of the award include Ford's Theater, Washington, DC, Lincoln's Home National Historic Site in Springfield, and Lincoln's Cottage at the Soldiers Home in Washington DC.

Dr. Finch insists that the honor goes, not simply to the Lincoln-Douglas Society, but to the entire community of Freeport, for their support for the expansion, improvement, and preservation of Debate Square." George Buss, who is known locally and nationally for his portrayal of Lincoln, nominated the Lincoln-Douglas Society for the Volk Award.

Tim Connors accepted the award on behalf of the Lincoln-Douglas Society at a Lincoln Forum symposium in Gettysburg in November. The Wednesday unveiling will include a brief ceremony and refreshments.

Not that I'm not hoping for a good turnout tomorrow, but should you miss its presentation, you'll have plenty of opportunities to admire the Volk mask. It is going to be housed here in the library in a handsome cabinet provided courtesy of the Lincoln-Douglas Society.

A joke on Ed

Last week Ed Finch and I were chatting in the library lobby. Actually, I was chatting, and Ed was putting the finishing touches on the cabinet that will display the Leonard Volk life mask of Abraham Lincoln.

A woman approached us and asked me, "Are you Frances's mother?" It wasn't that the question surprised Ed: the surprise was that I responded in the affirmative.

"Yes, I am. Hey, aren't you Linda, and wasn't Frances in class with Cesa?" And here is Ed, standing on a ladder, affixing a label to a display cabinet, thinking, "Almost eight years I've known Carole, and never once has she mentioned her daughter. Boy, that's cold."

It was only when Linda and I got to comparing notes about Frances and Cesa's certification with Therapy Dogs International that the truth came out: I answer, at Carlson Canine Camp and Friends Forever Dog Park and elsewhere, as Frances's mom.

Pete and Frances are my five- and six-year old rescue standard poodles, and, yes, as the bumper sticker says, my standard poodles are smarter than your honor student.

Here's where I would appreciate friendly advice. I, along with many other people who live their lives with animal companions, am increasingly reluctant to identify ourselves as their "owners." I don't want to go all squishy on my column readership, but it just doesn't strike me as right to label Pete and Frances among my possessions. I own my house, I own my car, I own a set of 1971 "Encyclopedia Britannica." But owning Pete and Frances? It just sounds wrong.

Calling myself an animal guardian strikes me as a bit too PC. I am open to suggestions. Should I knock off the treacly pet-parent stuff and stick to dog owner? How about stiffen my spine and move to the politically correct term, animal guardian? Or remain Pete and Frances's mom?