



Smith used a remote-control device to take this photo of himself, Sandburg, and the painting that appears on Family Weekly's cover.

# The Carl Sandburg I Know

Text and Photographs by  
**WILLIAM A. SMITH**

*A noted artist and personal friend depicts, in words and pictures, this beloved dean of American letters on the occasion of his 85th birthday*

*At 44, William A. Smith has won widespread recognition as a painter and graphic artist. He is represented in the collections of The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Library of Congress in Washington, has served as president of the American Water Color Society, and was a member of an official delegation to Russia under the cultural exchange program.*

**T**ODAY, JANUARY 6, 1963, is Carl Sandburg's 85th birthday.

To his home in North Carolina, near where the Blue Ridge Mountains meet the Great Smokies, will come letters and telegrams of affectionate salutation from friends and strangers, homage to a beloved artist who has set much of America to words.

The range of his work is prodigious; he has distinguished himself as a poet, historian, biographer, novelist, anthologist, and singer of the folk songs that belong to all the people.

Time and again during the past dozen years, Sandburg's fellowship has enriched my life and the lives of my family. A telephone call, and his resonant voice may announce that he will arrive at New York's Idlewild Airport the next afternoon. Can I meet him? he asks. If so, we can have a few days together to work on a portrait that I am painting of him.

My children love Sandburg and look forward to his visits—the stories, wisdom, walks in the woods, and the songs he makes up as he sings, sometimes songs about the children themselves.

My wife knows that she need plan no special menu, for he is the easiest of men to feed. His appetite for nearly any type of food is robust.

When I meet him, he will be wearing a slouch hat, its wide brim pulled rather far down, shad-

ing his eyes and emphasizing his aggressive chin. Bulging from under the hat at the back of his neck will be a shaggy abundance of his famed white hair. His carriage is erect, and his walk is that of a man who has been athletic and has kept himself in shape. He is just short of six feet. A large, colored kerchief will be wrapped loosely around his neck. He will be carrying a couple of small handbags and perhaps a flight bag. He travels light.

On the turnpike, driving from New York to my home in Pennsylvania, Carl once observed that the steady increase in the number of cars would make it necessary in a few years to build another highway, equally wide, right alongside this one.

"I have a recurring fantasy about this turnpike," he said. "I imagine that I am traveling its straightness and, except for me, it is deserted. There are no automobiles, there are no people, it is haunted and still. Then, as I continue, I notice some boxlike factory buildings. They appear as tombs, and there is an inscription: 'The United States of America, Land of the Free. . . Died of Vehicularity.'" Then his great loud laugh, and he repeated slowly and thoughtfully, ". . . smothered in the gravy of vehicularity."

That evening, shortly after Carl and I arrived at my home, snow began to fall. It continued through the night and the next day. In rural

Bucks County it meant that we were snowed in. Already the snow was two feet deep, and it was still coming down. Carl was delighted. Looking out a window he said: "This is a snowfall! Why, day before yesterday in Chicago, 17 or 18 snowflakes came down, and they thought they were having a snowstorm. Hah! A snowstorm with 18 snowflakes!"

Though it was hopeless to try to shovel the length of our lane, and the roads beyond were banked and impassable anyway, he wanted to shovel snow, just to be in it, feeling the weight of it on the shovel and the chill of it in the wind.

**I**T WAS four days before snowplows dug us out, but they were wonderful days.

Alone together in my studio, we talk while I am painting. What Carl says is always worth remembering—reminiscences of people, experiences, or simply random observations like: "The artist achieves solitude and then peoples it to his wishes."

If, while he is posing for me, I ask him to move his head to one side or the other, lift his chin, change position, he will say: "Your wish is my command . . . I'm your huckleberry."

Resting between poses he might place his hands on the arms of a chair and do a few push ups, or some of the exercises he learned as a soldier in the Spanish-American War. Then he will