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I would like to commend Thunderbird Artist and American Healing Art Foundation in their valued Veteran Arts Class program. Five years ago I was enjoying the Thunderbird Art show in Carefree Arizona and visited the American Healing Arts booth where I learned that they were offering Art Classes for Veterans in the coming spring at their Annual Art Expo in Scottsdale Arizona. Kim Bulot explained that the classes were taught by local artists who exhibited at the Thunderbird Artist shows and the Art Expo. She said all the classes were free and all the art supplies would be provided. With the encouragement of my wife I signed up for three classes: Wood Working, Rock Carving, and Sculpting. When I arrived for the first class I was greeted by several of the Artists, Judi Combs, and Kim Bulot and was immediately welcomed into artist community. In each of the classes I closely worked with the artists who demonstrated their art and encouraged each of the veterans in their projects. While in the classes I enjoyed the camaraderie of my fellow veterans and felt the appreciation of the artists and Thunderbird Artist/American Healing Arts for our service to our country.

To my surprise I found that I had a hidden talent in Sculpting, where in the class we learned how to sculpt a hand. Hal Stewart, an accomplished sculpture artist, worked with each of the veterans showing us the steps and process for sculpting the hand. Upon the completion of the class I realized that I had the talent to pursue as a hobby in sculpting and perhaps one day able to even sell my work. I can't thank Thunderbird Arts/ American Healing Arts enough for the opportunity to explore the hidden talents within me.

Since the first year I have taken classes in Drawing, Painting, Harmonica playing, Photography, and of course more Sculpting. In all of the classes I felt encouragement, camaraderie, and the artistic ability within. One of the most important experiences I witnessed is how the Art Classes provided therapy for my fellow veterans. I have seen those who were crippled, suffering PTSD, stroke victims, and those who needed to experience their talent as I did. One Veteran had use of only one hand was able to sculpt a Bear which he had bronzed, another told us all that he has not been able to focus on anything until he worked on his sculpture (he was able to coordinate his hands for the first time), others were able to focus on what they were doing without the disruption of their lives. The Art classes have the ability to reach the inner core in each of us, and provide a personal therapy to our everyday life.

In each of my sculpting classes with Hal Stewart I have learned the process of sculpting, the ability to see what I was trying to do, learned how to accept positive critiques, and to see my work for its artistic value. Last year I had my first piece bronzed, a Horse that I have titled "Maestoso", Italian for "Majestic". I have received numerous complements from artists, friends, and art collectors on Maestoso. I feel that I have reached the level of being able to share my art with the art community, and one day sell my pieces. Hal Stewart said to his students in one class, that it is the Artists responsibility to share their art with the world because we all need to experience Art and its beauty.

In all, I want Thunderbird Artists and American Healing Arts to know that their program is of great value to the veterans and that it is greatly appreciated by us all. I personally want to thank, Judi Combs, Kim Bulot, Hal Stewart, the other Artists who taught my classes for the opportunity to learn what I had within, and the discovery of my artistic sculpting talent.

Thank you,

Steve Smigay