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Topics: Friendship or Heroes/Sheroes

### An Odd Friendship

I first met T when I was recruiting artists interested in teaching classes. T is a stone sculptor who enthusiastically replied and was excited to work with younger students. They would learn to carve plaster blocks using very basic tools.

T has MS and little, if any, use of his legs. At the time he could still independently drive his truck but needed help getting onto a 3 wheel cart an engineering friend had designed for him so he could be upright and navigate the classroom.

T was an athlete and competitive bike racer in his teen and college years. When he was diagnosed with MS in 1984 he had already begun his career in stone carving. Fortunately he had good upper body strength and the use of his hands. Starting with a block of alabaster he would study it, turning it round and round, drill a hole or two, and begin carving it away with rasps and files, letting the stone “speak to him” as to where he should go. The result was beautifully delicate, intricately airy pieces that seemed to float.

T is not an easy person to know, let alone “help”. He had a very abusive childhood including suicide attempts. As a result, he had no family connections once he left home and served in the Coast Guard. He channeled his fears and insecurities into athletics and eventually found art as his release and sanctuary.

Each day when his class was over he needed help getting back into his truck since he didn't have the leg strength to push himself up. I ended up doing this for him even after the end of his 6 week class. I would drive over to his studio on my lunch hour to help him get back into his truck. At home he has caregivers through the VA who help him in

and out of bed, get dressed, etc. Due to his fear and anxiety he has very detailed instructions. For example, he has a very specific diet. Once when he was hospitalized I went to his house at 5:30AM each day to prepare his breakfast and lunch to deliver to him since he refused to eat the hospital food. It consisted of: 4 blueberries, 6 small pieces of apple, 8-10 kernels of flax, 3 pieces of beets, premeasured squares of organic turkey, all cooked down in a designated amount of kale and bok choy. I did this for several weeks while he was hospitalized and in a nursing home. And I am NOT a morning person.

I know he is appreciative but has difficulty expressing it. I helped him with the daily truck assistance for probably 10 years. I always thought to myself afterwards to “get over yourself”. What he goes through on a daily basis to go to his studio, even for a couple of hours, is astounding. Even more so for the amazing fine art he creates. He says Art keeps him alive. I believe that.