

Realizing a Dream

Although I'm a Missouri native my family lived a few years in Tulsa, Oklahoma before moving back to the Kansas City area (Raytown). While in the fourth grade my watercolor painting of a rocket blasting off at dawn was selected to be in the All School Exhibit at Tulsa's Philbrook Art Museum. That was certainly a memorable occasion and I continued to enjoy the subject and creativity of art. In junior high (Raytown) my art teacher, Mrs. Leann Fletcher, continued to encourage me and promoted my interest at the end of the year by giving me some copies of the *American Artist* magazine. I continued taking art classes in high school and even into the first couple of years of college. I purchased *American Artist* periodicals on my own, including a 1968 summer issue.

My life changed significantly, however, when I decided that my vocation would be in the field of Physical Therapy. And so, artistic endeavors were on the back burner simmering for several decades. When I began my career in Physical Therapy at St. John's Hospital, here in Springfield in 1972, I was an excited twenty-two-year-old and ready to start life's adventure. Then, at some point I looked back through that 1968 *American Artist* summer issue and saw an article about the Springfield Art Museum and the Watercolor USA Exhibit. Since then, I have been fortunate to view and be inspired by this annual exhibit over the years.

Now, in retirement, I have had more time to focus on art and creative activities. I have made wonderful friends through my association with the Studio 55 Arts Guild and have learned much from many fellow artists. I am still learning to take advantage of opportunities and this year, for the first time, submitted a watercolor to the Watercolor USA Exhibit. You can imagine my surprise and joy at being accepted as one of this year's entries. So, after some 63 years I have again been rewarded with an entry into a national art museum! The piece I submitted is entitled "Reflections of a Self Portrait" and I am looking forward to viewing it along with works by other Studio 55 artists, Nadine Ellman and Andi Snethern, and, of course, the entire exhibit.

One final comment. I will have the opportunity to reunite with my junior high art teacher, Mrs. Fletcher, who is in her 90's and I haven't seen since 9th grade, as we are both planning to attend my aunt's 100th birthday in Kansas City in mid-April. I will share this story and my gratitude to her for encouraging me to be creative and develop a love of art.

Gary Tebbenkamp