



Artist Profile

Percy “Jim” Trudeau – A 21st Century Craftsman

Jim Trudeau, an 80-year-old Army veteran from Cheyenne, Wyoming, enlisted in the military in 1948, just before the Korean War. His unit fought in the area southwest of the Chosin Reservoir. After his initial discharge from service, Trudeau decided to continue his military career, enlisting in the Air Force in 1952 and continuing to serve an additional 17 years until retiring in 1969.

During his years in the service, Trudeau says he was considered by his fellow soldiers and airmen to be a “handy” kind of guy. Armed with, what he calls “the perfectionist work ethic” of a true craftsman, a keen mechanical skill and proficiency using many types of hand tools, Trudeau once fixed an Army tank in the field when no one else could. “The alternative was for us to destroy it before it could be captured – and we weren’t going to let that happen,” he says. Highly detailed, delicate tasks satisfy him the most. He puts it like this, “It’s got to fit and it’s got to be right!”

Trudeau discovered his talents when he was just a young boy. At the age of eight, he carved his first wooden propeller. “It was a simple carving, but it worked really well,” he recalls. “I remember how fascinating it was just to watch it spin.” Accused of being a perfectionist, the nature of carving satisfies his desire to create as he carves raw blocks of wood into an elegant musical instrument.

Today, Trudeau has come a long way from carving simple propellers. He now uses up to 50 specialized carving knives to create custom made, hand built violins. Specific knives are used to carve the neck of the instrument, while others are used to hone the sides of the instruments down to a mere one millimeter in width. Trudeau began carving his first violin in 1993, after realizing his hobby of building, flying and crashing remote controlled airplanes was a very costly one.

Although his first violin took him three years to complete, Trudeau can now finish each project in about a year. “There are times when I might go weeks or months without touching the carvings because I am scared to make another mistake,” he says. He entered his 11th violin into the Cheyenne VA Medical Center’s local creative arts competition, and that project ultimately advanced to the national level and earned him a gold medal at the 2008 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival in the woodworking category.

Trudeau is an active member of the Violin Society of America and attends the society’s annual competition, receiving past recognition in both the quality of sound as well as overall style. When notified that he had won the woodworking category of the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, he was astounded. “I could hardly believe that my piece was selected as a winner, knowing that there are so many other talented craftsmen out there,” he says. For his gold medal win, Trudeau was invited to attend the 2008 event in Riverside, California in October. It is his first time attending the annual event for the most talented veterans in the nation.

