



Artist Profile

R.S. Johnson – Always a Struggle, But He’s Ahead

R.S. Johnson is using his artistic talents once again. “It has been a struggle,” says the 58-year-old Army veteran from Milwaukee, as he sits back comfortably in his chair. Johnson is pleased to have been awarded *Best of Show* recognition at the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, taking place October 20-26 in Riverside, California. The Festival is a culmination of talent competitions in art, creative writing, dance, drama and music for veterans treated in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) national health care system.



This will be Johnson’s first visit to California and he is making the long trek from Wisconsin by train. It is also his first entry in the Festival. His colored pencil drawing entitled “A Day in the Life of Will.i.am,” impressed the judges enough to win national attention. The entry is a portrait of the lead singer for the *Black Eyed Peas*, an American hip hop group from Los Angeles.

During his Army days, Johnson was in the infantry and then served as a battalion draftsman. He talks of his longtime love of the arts, beginning with drawing for his older sister’s science projects in grade school.

Now, Johnson talks freely of his struggle with addiction and the help he has received at the VA Medical Center in Milwaukee. “I came to the VA to get a handle on my substance abuse,” Johnson said. Instrumental in his journey to sobriety he credits his art therapist Marisa Straub. “When I get famous, she is going to be my manager,” he said with a smile on his face and a lilt in his voice.

Today, Johnson is doing freelance art work in his own apartment and studio. “I try to stay busy with my art and renewing relationships with my daughter and sons. It takes a commitment and a desire to make things work out.” He has recently completed an acrylic piece for the Marine Corp League in Milwaukee entitled, “Brothers in Arms.”

His future? As described by Johnson himself, “Stand straight and sober.”