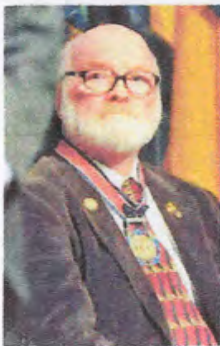


# Mike Reagan '65 Medal of Honor Recipient...



**Mike Reagan, Class of 1965, is a remarkable artist, storyteller, good friend and family man, and now a Medal of Honor recipient. He is a veteran of the Vietnam War and has a strong and undying love for our country and the men and women who serve and have given their most precious gift, their lives. He honors them and their families by remembering their faces through the portraits he draws daily in the basement of his home.**

Mike is a humble, spiritual man and a piece of his soul is incorporated in every one of those portraits. He takes the time to research each fallen hero before he starts to capture the image for the friends, family and loved ones left behind. And, he does this for free...because he cares so deeply.

While at Lincoln, Mike had a reputation for drawing on about anything (and maybe got in some trouble along the way?). He was greatly influenced by two art teachers, **Bill Holm**, who ended up taking charge of the Burke Museum at the UW and was a world renowned expert on Northwest Native American culture. Also, **Duke Washington**, former running back from WSU, who after leaving Lincoln became a senior official in student services at the UW.

When Mike graduated from high school, he had a decision to make as to whether to go on to college, get a job, or go into the military. When one of his close boyhood friends was killed in Viet Nam, it motivated him in his decision to enlist and he chose the Marine Corps. Cpl. Michael Reagan served from 1966-1969, where much of his time was spent in military combat in Viet Nam.

One of the things Mike did during his "down time" in 'Nam was draw portraits of other Marines. He'd charge for the art he'd draw and send the money back home. This became his nest egg for art school when he returned to the states.

Mike enrolled in the prestigious Burnley School of Professional Arts. After graduating, he got interested in computers while working for the Seattle School District. Then he went to work at the University of Washington. We was there for 30 years with the official title of Director of Trademarks and Licensing and unofficial title of Artist for the Huskies. He proudly wears a 1991 UW NCAA National Championship Ring with his name and "artist" on it, presented to him by Don James.

During his years at the UW, Mike continued to draw portraits of movie stars, famous athletes, presidents (and first ladies), Playboy bunnies, even a Pope. He developed the idea of drawing two portraits of each celebrity, giving one to them and asking them to autograph the other. Mike donated the second drawing to many different fund-raisers and his portraits have raised over \$10 million dollars for charity. Mike says he "had discovered His purpose."

An Evening Magazine 5 minute video (resulting from a 7 hour interview) on Mike's work aired in

2004(\*). He does not know why a comment he made during this interview had NBC pick it up and air it across the nation. As a result, a Gold Star (the family of someone who has served and died in the military) mom in Idaho contacted Mike about a portrait and that was the true beginning of his Fallen Heroes Project.

If you go to Mike's website, <http://www.fallenheroesproject.org/> you will learn about what he has dedicated the last 11 years of his life to. "Our mission is to honor the American Fallen Heroes for their ultimate sacrifice during the war against terrorism. The foundation will provide the resources to produce and distribute to each family a hand-drawn portrait of their Fallen Hero, created by artist Michael G. Reagan, free of charge. Each portrait is intended to show our Love and Respect for these Heroes and their families." He now works for love. Mike feels that it is his destiny to use his gift as an artist to make a change and help start the healing process for the grieving families.

Mike draws in his basement in a workspace surrounded by toys that feed the "kid" in him, when the "adult" in him gets a little down. There is a special energy in this one room. After he receives a request for a portrait, he studies that soldier so he gets to know him/her before he starts to draw. When he's sketching, he carries on a conversation with that person to make sure he's conveying the right message. And most important, he always starts with the eyes, "that's where the story lies." He strives to reconnect what was "broken when that soldier died."...that "piece of heart, snap, torn away," through his portrait as a gift to the families. Mike feels a part of himself is in every one of the over 4,200 fallen hero portraits he's drawn. Each drawing takes about five hours and he will draw one to five a day depending upon the request and the urgency. He has, also, done the portraits of some of the OSO landslide families, all 26 Sandy Hook victims, the Marysville Pilchuck shooting victims and most recently the two NYPD officers killed. All for free...all for love.

Which is why, late March he was awarded The Citizen Service Before Self Honor Award by the Congressional Medal of Honor Society and Foundation back in Washington, D.C. It's known to some as the Civilian Medal of Honor. Out of 400 nominees, and 20 finalists, only 3 of these awards for 2015 were given. Two of the three were for heroism and one of these two was, also, from Washington State. Only Mike received the award for service to others. He still can't get over why he was singled out for this recognition, especially when his award presentation coincided with the 30 Congressional Medal of Honor recipients for their military service. Those awards he understood.

It wasn't until he visited Arlington National

Cemetery that he realized the true purpose in his trip to D.C. It wasn't for the award, it was to visit the gravestones of all those soldiers he had drawn. He could remember their faces and had the chance to call some of their family members to say he was there. He had a very real opportunity to be among the men and women that he knew and could show respect for the lives lost. He felt them saying "thanks" in return.

There was a firefight in Viet Nam on March 28, 1968, and four Marines died that day. One was a kid named, Vincent Santaniello. Mike took care of Vinnie until he passed and kept his face and words in his mind and heart for 46 years. Although the memory has always been an inspiration for Mike, it wasn't until last year that he was able to match a name to the face. He has since drawn Vincent's portrait and the story was covered by John Sharify at King TV last December 2014 (\*).

In conversation with Mike, I discovered that there was a remarkable Lincoln connection on that sad day in March. Mike was, also, responsible for taking care of one other Marine who had passed away during that fight, **Peder Armstrong**, Class of 1967, until his body could be helicoptered out of the war zone. Someone from my class; someone I had known. I feel thankful that Mike was there.

It is truly a small world. If you run across Mike, give him a hug. He has a gift for gab, but is full of stories you will want to hear, and will share a good laugh. Mike has a great support group including his lovely wife, Cheryl, of 34 years, school buddies - one I met, **Bob Little**, who's been a friend and sidekick since grade school, and some retired military vets. Take a moment and visit his website. There are many folks all over the world who are forever grateful to Mike for his talent as an artist, his big heart and who think that he is a true hero for what he does.

- Jackie Bauer King ('67)

(\*) See Media Coverage at <http://www.fallenheroesproject.org/>



Vincent Santaniello



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