

## Self Portrait

By Aaron Stevens

Starting at the top of my new creation and working my way down, I begin with the outline, jagged and rough. Continuing, I darken the inside of the torn outside edge. It is lighter in some areas so that the image is formed with depth and height, with some shading to make the picture come to life and show the details of the true picture. The letters are lighter on the cap so they will stand out and can be read from a distance. The letters on the forehead are the opposite, outlined in bold, dark lines so they too can be seen well.

These new friends are just the same, some bold and straight out in your face. Others, though less bold, still stand out, and together they combine to start forming the picture that is me. They all contributed in their own ways. Mari saying more than enthusiastically, "Hi, I'm Mari. Who are you?" on the first day at my new school. Then dear old Boyce slowly but surely turning me into the wild child that I have come to enjoy being. Butcher, though much more reserved, helped me learn to think before acting in all situations. He also made me not just accept my beliefs but question and understand them. Butcher was reserved, but outgoing in his own way, never just sitting in the shadows, but never completely out of the light either.

I continue on to the rest of picture, going to the cool guy with his shades hiding his eyes so no one can see what's really going on beneath his exterior. I use the dark lines to shape the sunglasses and shade over the eye to almost hide it, yet keep it still visible enough to be there. Along with his cool guy signature earring, he just emanates a vibe that says cool and relaxed, as if he doesn't have a care in the world. Using short strokes, I create the rough beard that he has

coming out of the slightly longer strokes which make up his side burns. Just another hipster trademark this guy has going for him.

The RA camp counselors were the rockinest people I have ever met! Many of them came back year after year, and I don't think I have ever met any cooler guys. Because my father was the director, I got to know them really well. I would go for "Lad and Dad" weekend and they would collectively be my "dad" for the weekend, because my dad was working. But I didn't mind because they were so cool, and I wanted to be just like them. So of course I would do what they would do, and go where they went. We would always go out to dinner before the rest of the campers got there, I would eat the pizza they ate and order whatever they got to drink because I wanted to be them. They were all different, some showing their spirituality not just on their sleeves but everywhere, and some a bit more modest with it. They all showed in their own cool way that not just the geeks and weirdoes were into religion.

Then on to the other eye; it's almost the exact opposite. Not covered up and not "cool," but more soft and relaxed. It is deep, and looking at it, I can see through the eye and into the person. The iris, dark on the outside and lighter towards the pupil, until it becomes the darkness that is the pupil. The eye is sorrowful and looks as though it has been through many ordeals. Beneath that there seems to be another person, vibrant and new in their own way. Moving from one to the other, this one does not look as new and fresh as the other, making the picture not just one person of one type, but one person of many different faces.

As I started at my new church in Chatham, I met a woman that as you look at her you can easily see that she has not been handed the best of lives. She is forced to wear leg braces and walk with a cane because of rheumatoid arthritis. The moment you start talking to her she steps out of everything and only cares for you. Aunt Wendy, though not my real aunt, acts as though I

am her nephew giving me inspiration and advice on life. She has taught me so many things, the most important being to not only think of the moment. She asks, “What kind of legacy do you want to leave?” making me think about what my actions will say about me to others. It has helped me decide what to do in many a situation. It has helped me decide where I want my life to go and what kinds of goals I want to set for myself.

Moving on to the ear, shading it so that it looks like a funnel, pulling every sound into it. It is open to take in everything. It sits on the side of the face, almost out of the way, but very important to the whole. If it were not there, people would notice and wonder why it isn't there, though many people would not look at it first when they see the picture, since it is there. It is simply expected to be there.

All people can hear, but few actually listen with this important, yet underappreciated, part of the face. Something that my mother always impressed upon me: listening is key. Even though many times when she told me this I would only hear what she said not, listen to it. She expressed it so much, though, that I started to listen, and realized it really is beneficial to all when people listen, instead of just hear, what others are saying. It changes the whole conversation, and makes it more worthwhile for both parties. Without this tiny, seemingly insignificant, advice I know that I wouldn't work as well with others, and I would not be where I am today.

As I continue onto the mouth, using the outline from the last segment to create this one, I change modes. The mouth is a difficult part of the face to create. The movement of the pencil here is different from anywhere else. The mouth has no visible border and yet, it has to have one, or the eye will be deceived and think the lips don't exist in the picture. So using only shadows, I create this “outline” of the lips existing with actual fullness and shape, in three dimensions, a feat that is somewhat difficult to achieve.

All words have their time, place and specific use. Lizzie was a master of this. She always knew when to say what and when to stand up and say “um, no.” She was an expert with her words, and though she never sat down and said, “Don’t do this here” or, “Do this here,” the way I saw her use her words, I learned when and how to use mine. She knew that nice words weren’t always what were needed. Sometimes the harsh and powerful ones needed to be said. She somehow inherently understood this and helped me grasp it as well, helping me affirm myself as me.

As the face is becoming a whole, I have to fill in the empty gap that is in the center of the picture. This piece is almost worse than the lips: the nose. The nose, yet again, has no true “outline.” It just exists on the face. This part of the picture is difficult to sketch and shade, because the shading is the only thing that shows its existence. But with some work and serious concentration, it can be accomplished. With the final piece in place and finished, the picture comes together as one, even though it has taken many different faces; they have come together to make up the one whole face.