

## **New Exhibition At Booth Library**

### **Stories Behind Stone**

BY NANCY K. CREVIER

When children grow up and mothering takes up less time, many women find themselves asking, "What am I going to do now?" Newtown artist and art therapist Debby Tendler was no different, and her answer to that question has taken form over the past decade and is now on view on the second floor of C.H. Booth Library through October 5.

"A Woman's Journey to the Self" is the theme of the exhibition of seven stone sculptures that reflect Ms Tendler's growth from a woman of "shoulds" to a powerful woman of the new age.

In seeking an answer to who she could become, Ms Tendler took a stone sculpting class in 1995.

"It reopened my creativity," she said. "My creativity was never acknowledged along the way. As a young woman growing up in the 1950s, I was told there were certain things women could do: a secretary, a nurse, a teacher, a wife."

With sculpting she was able to uncover her core self. Stone carving allowed her to put issues and emotions into her work and see how they were expressed.

"I found that art always says something back to the artist," Ms Tendler said.

As she worked through her own personal struggles with who she could become, Ms Tendler realized that she wanted to help other women become empowered and make decisions that were right for them. "I loved what I was getting from stone sculpting and I love engaging people on a deep level."

She returned to school to study psychotherapy and received her masters in professional services in 2001 from Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. After more than 1,000 hours of clinical training, in 2004 Ms Tendler was certified as a registered art therapist. "When you go back to school and you know what you want, you are so focused."

What she wanted was for women to dare to take risks and go out into the world and use new confidence to speak out.

"Women know what they want, but they don't always speak it," said Ms Tendler. She has seen how empowerment issues are worked out through artwork, especially sculpture. "We are so drawn away from our authentic selves. I think my purpose in life is to help women live an authentic life."

Sculpting in stone, said Ms Tendler, is the perfect metaphor of risk taking. "You have to take that risk that when you tap that stone what you hope will happen, does happen." It is possible that the stone will break or crack in a way you don't expect, she said, something she has experienced more than once. "Risk taking in stone teaches you that you can take risks in life."

Her own sculptures are the evolution of her relationships with her mother and with her daughter, as well as expressions of her journey toward midlife. Mother-daughter relationships are expressed in Ms Tendler's works at the library, as in "The Holding," a rich red alabaster carving of a child nestled in a mother's arms.

"Reconciliation," a bronze cast of two intertwined swans that was originally carved from white alabaster, is another piece that evolved from her personal struggles.

"I love 'Reconciliation.' After years of trying to understand my relationship with my mother, I realized what I didn't like about her was also in me. When I could accept all of my pieces, I could accept all of who my mother was," said Ms Tendler. "That stonework was my journey to who I am."

It is her shell sculpture, "Gift of the Sea," that probably best expresses who she has become, said Ms Tendler. "It's transparent, and it has a very feminine form. It is very curvaceous. The color, orange, is fiery and I like that. I'm passionate about what I do now."

Except for "Reconciliation," all of her pieces on exhibit are created from alabaster, a soft and very workable stone. She selects the stones for her art from a warehouse in New York City - although she admitted that it is possible that the stones pick her.

"I think there is an energy between me and the stone, definitely," she said. Every piece she creates is a discovery for Ms Tendler. "There is an ebb and flow. I put a lot of my emotional angst in my work."

The C.H. Booth Library showing is the first time Ms Tendler has exhibited the collection together.

"I hope that this show will be more about what people feel than about what they see," she said. "There is nothing better than to hear someone say that they were moved by a piece, or even that they got chills looking at it. Chills are your soul at a heart-felt level. Even if someone doesn't like a piece, I like that they felt something from it."

"A Woman's Journey to the Self" can be viewed during regular library hours, Monday through Thursday, 10 am to 8 pm; Friday, noon to 8 pm; Saturday, 10 am to 5 pm; and Sunday, noon to 5 pm, now through October 5. For more information about Ms Tendler's art therapy and workshops, visit [DebbyTendler.com](http://DebbyTendler.com).

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