

## Creating, Teaching, Healing

# MEET DEBBY TENDLER OF NEWTOWN

by Joanna Gilchrist

"Where do you draw the line," asks Debby Tendler, MPS, ATR a Newtown sculptor who creates powerfully graceful works; teaches art enthusiastically; and who incidentally is a certified art therapist. "Where do you draw the line between artist, teacher and therapist? My students come to sculpt, paint, or draw and in the process (she emphasizes 'process') discover a new self-awareness. When you're creating, a tremendous amount of personal growth and healing takes place," she explains noting that the journey to self-discovery is especially rewarding to artists when their responses to the world are spelled out in stone. That kind of permanence is a huge stepping-stone to personal confidence and success.

Considering Debby's credentials and affiliations, it is indeed difficult to put a label on her. To her students, she is the master instructor - the teacher, but not a "today, we're going to work on eyes" kind of teacher. Rather she lets students journey into their own artistic comfort zone. Sure her students are working with an artist; after all her work is in many a private collection. She has also exhibited at the Lyme Academy; will be included in her upcoming hometown's Cyrenius Booth Library exhibit, and the Annual Rock Ridge Art Show.

With a background rich in pro-



Deb Tendler

*Contributed Photo*

fessional experience as a teacher, registered art therapist and stone sculptor, it doesn't really matter what title you want to pin on her. She is an amalgamation of sorts completely integrating the artist, teacher, and sculptor into a beautifully complete entity.

Yes, some of her students resolve problems and inner conflicts as they chisel away at stress and come to know creativity as a tool to self-awareness and confidence. Her students call her teacher. She is a master artist. "I enjoy showing students how to use their innate creative expression to access deeper levels of personal understanding, well being and empowerment." Debby firmly believes that the

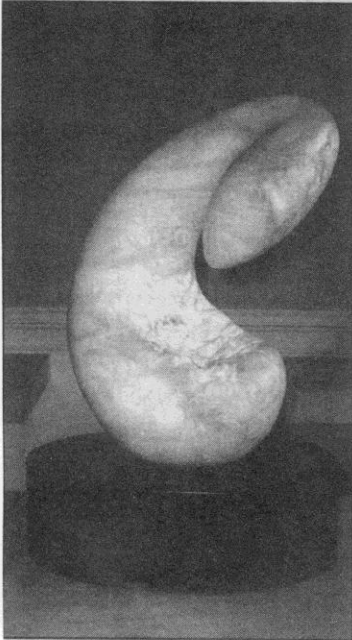
capacity of the human spirit to heal through the creative process is unique.

She certainly practices what she preaches. Before you even step into Debby's studio, you are enveloped by a sense of peace and tranquility. The grounds are park like with water and natural gardens as far as the eye can see. She is a gracious host and genuinely enjoys sharing her knowledge and skill with others.

Mostly she sculpts. "The stone metaphor is strong," she says, her turquoise blue shirt accenting a recent tan and spotlighting her dark curly hair. "How do we chip away at our problems?" she asks. As you look around the studio with sculpture ranging from light to dark, graceful to powerful, it's easy to see the answer.

Students literally and artistically chip away at a piece of alabaster, or sculpt from clay until they create a new form. She offers me a glass of white tea, the latest star on the health drink list. She stands by one of her sculptures and caresses it gently with her hand while she stands strong and confident.

"My work in stone reflects my voice as a woman, mother, and daughter." Her art, so much a presence in her home as well as in her studio is a visual record of sorts. It



Sculpture by Debby Tandler



marks her own transformation from being a "good girl" of the 1950s to being a woman in the new millennium. One of her sculptures, a striking piece titled "Denial" is made of a striated gray alabaster and features a head of white hair. There is no black (no darkness)

within this piece. In a heart shaped swan piece, there's movement from the entire representation to a more abstract rendering, which immediately suggests a letting go, a newfound freedom.

"In order to get to the sculpture inside a block of stone, it's necessary to chip away everything that is in the way. How can this not be therapeutic?" she asks. She continues and again the metaphor of stone comes across loudly and clearly, "Stone has its own voice. You can't hammer at it too hard or you'll break it."

Her sculpting students take that advice to heart. Her students have noth-

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ing but praise for their teacher/mentor. "Since I have been going to Deb's Sculpting Studio, I have developed a more positive attitude towards ME as person. I feel really good when I leave her studio, feeling I have accomplished something that I never thought I could do! Debby has given me a sense of self-worth I knew I had, but did not know that I could actually believe in. I look forward to our weekly "get-together" with great enthusiasm," said one student.

Another student said that "Working in stone (with Debby) at the studio has helped me a great deal after experiencing a profound personal loss. A parallel for life, the stone does own ul-



Debby Tandler, Art Therapist at work on a Sculpture.

time power and control over its form and future. However, I have come to realize that I do possess the tools to create and the right to expect beauty from something very raw."

Anyone who wants to learn to sculpt and create from Debby gets additional bonuses through the "process" of creating - a sense of well being and confidence, stress reduction and personal, emotional healing. One thing's for sure, you won't suffer from artist's block in this Newtown studio.

If you're looking to learn how to sculpt or some form of creative expression and/or want to rid yourself of artistic blockage, then you want to consider contacting Debby by phone at: 203-482-3614 or by e-mail at [dtendler@debbytendler.com](mailto:dtendler@debbytendler.com)

*Readers who wish to contact JoAnna Gilchrist about Art events can contact her at [Jrochman@earthlink.net](mailto:Jrochman@earthlink.net)*