

Senior Profile: Marty Lehman

By Caleb Cochran, Volunteer, Sudbury Senior Center

Accomplished watercolor artist Marty Lehman can't talk about painting for long without paying tribute to Sandy Wilensky, the beloved Sudbury Senior Center teacher who passed away in February.

"Sandy was really a remarkable person and she was a wonderful, gifted artist, and an excellent teacher," says Marty, who began taking classes at the Senior Center more than 10 years ago. He recalls an art show sponsored by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for which Sandy suggested that her class submit a group project showcasing the doors of Sudbury.

"The committee didn't know quite what to make of it," Marty says. "Everyone else had submitted individual paintings." When the Sudbury group arrived at the exhibition space in Boston, they found the entire selection of paintings displayed prominently and judged as a group, just as they had hoped.

The following year, the theme of the show was "freedom."

"Sandy said, 'Everyone is going to paint the Liberty Bell, the American flag, and eagles,'" Marty remembers. "Someone in the class said, 'Why don't we paint butterflies? Butterflies are free.'" The class again submitted their work as a group. "Everyone else painted an eagle, a flag, or the Liberty Bell," Marty laughs. The class chartered a miniature school bus and traveled together to Boston, where they won various awards. "It was awesome," says Marty.

A retired architect, Marty first began painting in 2008 after he visited the Concord Art Association and met a watercolor artist named Tom Sutherland. He was so impressed with Sutherland's work that he went home and told his wife about him. For Marty's birthday that spring, his wife, daughter, and daughter-in-law signed him up for a course taught by Sutherland. "It changed my life," Marty says.

He soon enrolled in a watercolor class at the Sudbury Senior Center, where Sandy soon became his teacher. Since then, Marty has displayed his work in juried shows at the Concord Art Association and the Marlborough Public Library, and has had four very successful shows at the Scandinavian Living Center in West Newton.

Born and raised in Ohio, near the Kentucky border ("steel mills, shoe factories," he says), Marty knew by age 16 that he wanted to be an architect. He knew no architects himself—and neither of his parents went to college—but he was a good student, and had his mind made up. So at the prompting of a neighbor, Marty visited Cornell and promptly decided it was the place for him.

After graduating in 1960, Marty moved to Stockholm, where he fell in love with his future wife and with Sweden—the subject of many of his paintings. Marty returned to the U.S. and served in the Air Force before embarking on his nearly 50-year career in architecture, with positions at Cambridge Seven, Stahl Associates, and DIGITAL, where he served as a corporate architect.

Marty describes the process of painting as very similar to architecture school, where he would often “get totally immersed” in a project, working in the studio until the wee hours of the morning. “It’s not like in accounting,” he says, “where everything has to add up at the end. In architecture, you just keep designing, because you always think, ‘I can make it better.’ It’s the same with painting, once you get rolling.”

Now in his mid-80s, Marty is still rolling, now inspiring others with his work in much the same way Tom Sutherland inspired him back in 2008.

To see Marty Lehman’s work, visit [www.martylehman.net](http://www.martylehman.net).