

About the Cover Art

Joseph D. Shelleman, a U.S. Army veteran, is the *Journal of Rehabilitation Research and Development's* (JRRD's) 2005 featured cover artist. His piece entitled "Autumn," an acrylic landscape painted on canvas, was selected from among entries in the 2004 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival.

The festival is the culmination of a yearlong fine arts competition open to all veterans receiving care at Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facilities. Visual art entries are divided into 47 categories, covering techniques from painting, drawing, and sculpting to carving, knitting, and photography.

JRRD cover art is selected from entries in the Special Recognition and Vietnam Experience categories, capturing the essence of VA's commitment to heal veterans both physically and emotionally.

This year's artist placed second nationally in the festival's Special Recognition category. Artists who enter their artwork in this category have overcome disability in pursuit of creative self-expression. Joe was diagnosed with Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS), an inflammatory disorder of the peripheral nerves outside the brain and spinal cord, while stationed in Korea in 1981. Two years later, Joe was honorably discharged from the Army with 100 percent medical disability. GBS is characterized by the rapid onset of weakness and, often, paralysis of the legs, arms, breathing muscles, and face.

"My disability slowed me down. I had to find ways to occupy my time," said Joe. "My mother kept urging me to take up painting again, a hobby I had in high school. So I did."

Years of physical therapy have restored some function to Joe's hands. Although he has minimal ability to pinch between his thumbs and forefingers, Joe has adopted a method to hold his brushes, but he does not need the use any special equipment to paint.

"Painting releases my pent-up frustration brought on by my disability, explained Joe. "Painting also provides a way to meet other veterans interested in art."

Joe walks the trails around his hometown of Grand Junction, Colorado, searching for subjects in nature. With camera in hand, Joe snaps photographs of landscapes and seasons he thinks might make a good acrylic painting. One such walk along the San Miguel River in Telluride, Colorado, was the impetus for "Autumn."

"I'm inspired knowing people enjoy my artwork. My parents, my wife, my art instructor Sharon Hoffman, and Sandy Trombetta, a recreational therapist in Grand Junction, encouraged me to paint. I thank them for that," commented Joe on being selected JRRD's newest featured artist. "I never thought my painting would bring me so far."

