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Contributing writer

The San Francisco Swords to Plowshares has been helping veterans since 1974. Michal McDonell has donated the sculpture “Stepped Out” for this year’s annual auction on Nov. 11.

Jim Camper grew up in the small town of Manteca, Calif., joined the Army and was sent to Vietnam with the 173rd Airborne Division. He was wounded in June 1966 and remained hospitalized for seven months before returning to Vietnam for a second tour in 1968.

From the foothills surrounding a swimming hole near Knights Ferry, frequented by all sixteen during their school days, Jim collected fourteen 500-pound rocks. Another rock came from Yosemite where the family of Joseph Lewis used to visit. The sixteenth and final rock came from a Pacifica beach in honor of Charles Wright who served in the Navy. Jim chiseled and smoothed each of the rocks by hand, creating areas to insert bronze plaques that named and described each of the sixteen men. The plaques for the memorial were

Photo courtesy Rolf Kriken

created by myself, Rolf
Kriken.

When the plaques were finished, Jim drove them to the Golden Gate Bridge and set them out in formation for their final view of the Bay; then he drove them to the beach for their final view of the Pacific Ocean. The plaques were then permanently installed into the stones and

I share this story of Jim Camper to give you an idea of the impact memorials have on people and how new work takes form, as in this sculpture, "Stepped Out." Jim completed his memorial, but it was not yet over for me. It was important for me

This sculpture arrived out of trying to carry on Jim Camper's promise, "We won't forget."

War causes wounds and suffering that last beyond the battlefield. Swords to Plowshares mission is to heal the wounds, to restore dignity, hope and self-sufficiency to all veterans in need, and to significantly reduce homelessness and poverty among veterans.

Founded in 1974, Swords to Plowshares is a community-based not-for-profit organization that provides counseling and case management, employment and training, housing and legal assistance to homeless and low-income veterans. We promote and protect the rights of veterans through advocacy, public education and partnerships with local, state and national entities.

Over the years the name Swords to Plowshares has become synonymous with excellence in serving veterans in need, a highly visible yet dramatically underserved population. We developed a model of coordinated care based on the philosophy that the many obstacles veterans face — including homelessness, unemployment and disability—are interrelated and require an integrated network of support.

FRONTLINE DROP-IN CENTER: Provides mental health services, including counseling for drug and alcohol problems and PTSD.

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING: Permanent supportive housing combined with options for counseling, academic instruction and vocational training.

— *Rolf Kriken*

