

## Paper Mache for 7-25-25 by Guest Columnist, Jason Lewis

*(For many years, Yuba Sutter Arts & Culture has been able to offer arts programs specifically for Veterans, their families and active duty service members. One of our most popular has been our Ceramics for Veterans classes which continue thanks to funding provided by Sutter Yuba Behavioral Health. Last year, through our artist in residence, Drew Sallee, we met Jason Lewis, a U.S. Army Veteran and master ceramist. It was a match made in heaven and ever since January, Jason has been teaching weekly classes to Veterans alongside fellow ceramics artist, Amy Davis. I invited Jason to write an article for Paper Mache about his life, his passion for the arts and what his ceramics practice has meant to him.)*

“Ceramics found me in Woodstock elementary school in Connecticut during a childhood defined by instability, foster care, and small miracles. As I moved around throughout my young life, finally arriving at Sutter High School, I had grown to truly love clay. I had won many awards and gained recognition and began to realize ceramics offered something life never had; stability, beauty, and permanence. For the first time, I was able to create something beautiful with my own hands—and through the firing process, it could last indefinitely, unlike many of the life circumstances I had experienced. That transformation—from raw earth to shaped, fired, and glazed form—was deeply meaningful to me. It showed me that something lasting and beautiful could emerge from pressure, heat, and time. That idea struck me then and has fueled my passion for ceramics ever since.

I enlisted in the U.S. Army at Naval Station Pearl Harbor. Over the next decade, I served in uniform—deploying to Afghanistan, working at the Defense Intelligence Agency Analysis Center, the National Ground Intelligence Center in Virginia, and later serving in the J2 Directorate for the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the Pentagon. Everywhere I’ve gone in life, during both high and low times, ceramics has been there. It has been a quiet strength, always in the background—reminding me of who I am, and how, with the right persuasion, I can shape my own life.

I’ve shared my story and passion with others as a ceramics instructor through the military’s Morale, Welfare, and Recreation program—teaching ceramics to fellow service members at locations including Goodfellow AFB in Texas, Fort Stewart in Georgia, and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Most recently one of the more meaningful turns in my life came during a season of personal transformation and recovery. In an unexpected moment of grace, I crossed paths with my high school ceramics teacher, also a veteran, and someone whose influence had reintroduced me to the medium years before. Our reconnection was emotional and profound, and it reminded me how deeply ceramics had always been woven into my life. That encounter reignited my passion for clay unlike anyone else on earth could do and ultimately led me to my work now as an instructor for Yuba Sutter Arts & Culture’s Ceramics for Veterans program. Through that journey, I was also blessed recently to receive a generous donation of an entire studio’s worth of ceramics tools and equipment—an incredible gift that will hopefully allow us to expand our ceramics fingerprint to many more hands within our community.”

*(Jason has contributed in many ways to our renewed Ceramics for Veterans program. We are in search of a donated work space to enable us to expand our program and fully utilize the gift he has received of wheels, kilns and tools. To learn more about our Veterans art programs and everything else we offer the community go to [yubasutterarts.org](http://yubasutterarts.org).)*