

# Rise Up

2017 Honor Card

One summer morning thirty years ago I crossed paths with a homeless fellow by the name of Mike Saavedra. What I didn't realize at the time was this chance encounter was truly a godsend. It is one that has led me on a journey to encourage not only the needy and homeless but to inspire others to "Rise Up" and help those who have stumbled along life's path. Through my friendship with Mike, God pricked my heart and stirred my soul as he laid upon me the desire to help those less fortunate. Each year, I create a new painting for the Honor Card program. Now in its 30th year, I am always humbled by the impact of God's hand on this program and faithfully providing the inspiration for each new painting. Sometimes it's a song, sometimes it's a story from the Bible and sometimes it is someone I meet. The vision for this year's Honor Card came to me from all three sources.



From the moment I heard it, Andra Day's powerful, soulful ballad "Rise Up" has resonated with me. She says her goal was to remind each of us of our value and purpose. We're not here just to exist; we're here to impact people in their lives. The song has a powerful message, and it is one that genuinely reinforces the purpose of the Honor Card Program.

In biblical times, Nehemiah was a powerhouse that encouraged others to "Rise Up" and make a difference. While in exile, he had risen through the ranks to the respected position of cupbearer for a Persian king. Word came to Nehemiah that his hometown was in ruins and that his people were vulnerable to the worst kind of enemies. He sensed a purpose and calling to take action to restore

the walls to protect his hometown. Nehemiah inspired others to step forward and to rise up to rebuild Jerusalem.

That dedication to restoration is what I see as I crisscross the state visiting agencies that use the Honor Card as a voice for their outreach and a fundraiser for their support.

Then, there was the visitor who landed literally on my doorstep. Last December just before the holidays I heard a noise behind the gallery. When I went to inspect, I found a homeless fellow on my loading dock. John Wilder was his name, and when he looked at me, he so reminded me of Mike. Something in his eyes just made it seem as if my original homeless friend Mike had returned for a visit.

That brief meeting led to an afternoon of conversation and reflection for both of us. John is a native of Greensboro whose life circumstances fell heavy upon him and somewhere along the way he relinquished his soul to the state of chronic homelessness. He said he fought it for years, but the tide turned on him time and time again. I haven't seen John since that day, but his nature reminded me so much of Mike.

*Not Forgotten* the very first Honor Card image, and it remains one of the most popular pieces I've ever painted. Mike was with me when I began working on that painting, and he effectively posed as the homeless person in that image. As I began working on *Rise Up*, this year's painting, I kept reflecting on that time and that may be why there is a familiar atmosphere in this piece. Mike passed away nearly 27 years ago but his influence is felt in every new Honor Card.

Andra Day's poignant words summarize it well: "I'll rise like the day, I'll rise up unafraid, all we need is hope, all we have is each other, I'll rise up and I'll do it a thousand times again." My heartfelt thanks to all the volunteers who Rise Up and so graciously give of their time, talent and money. I encourage all of us to follow their example and to Rise Up once again and to be there for our friends in need.



Blessings.

Bill