My name is Jim Stevens and I’m a Detourist. In 1970, while a sergeant in the Army, I was shot in the head during a combat mission in Vietnam. It left me with bullet fragments in my head and severe migraines. Twenty-three years later, in 1993, the fragments combined with a migraine to cause a stroke in my visual cortex, leaving me suddenly and legally blind, with only a pindot of vision remaining in both eyes.

I lost my job teaching at the University of Colorado, my wife left the family, and I was suddenly the blind single parent of two young pre-teen daughters. I also stopped doing the artwork I had done as a hobby but loved so much.

In 2000, at the urging of my daughters, I determined to reinvent myself and become a full-time artist despite my disability. I began by finding and making a variety of special lenses to help with my technical skills and then I struggled for the next two years to relearn my craft without the eyesight an artist so desperately needs.

It was two very, very long years of mistakes and frustration vented in torn up drawings, ripped up canvases, and sculptures and carvings thrown against walls. But I finally got tired of cleaning up the mess from my tantrums and realized that the only way I would ever succeed was to quit the self-pity and focus. Just start over, and over again, whatever the setbacks until I mastered using the lenses and each needed skill.

At the same time, again at the urging of my daughters, I also began the unlikely study of the martial arts. My girls thought it could help with my emotional issues.

Despite the setbacks and frustrations, I refused to quit either of my new life goals and to remind myself that nothing is impossible, I wrote the following words: “A man with a vision is never truly blind.”

Today, my award winning art is galleried across the country, my work is collected internationally, I’ve had three books on art published by Schiffer Publishing, I’ve been honored by the Kennedy Center as a Kennedy Center Registered VSA Artist in both the visual and literary arts, and in my spare time I’ve created two completely new styles of contemporary art.

At age 51, I also became the only legally blind man (and oldest man) to ever win the men's fighting competition at the martial arts “Tournament of Champions” – an event with martial artists of all ages from across the country. And my sensei made sure no one knew I was blind until after the competition was over. I left the tournament with a broken nose, three cracked ribs, a torn rotator cuff, a dislocated knee – and the first place trophy as Tournament Champion.

I am also the first blind American martial artist to ever be awarded a black belt in Shaolin Kenpo karate. I have since also been awarded a black belt in Taekwondo karate.

Whenever I felt overwhelmed by the challenges in front of me, my youngest daughter would softly remind me, "Daddy, you promised not to quit." That little reminder was always enough to make me stiffen my backbone and keep moving forward with my life.

I lost my eyesight in just 30 minutes. My career, my wife, my future, and my self-worth soon followed. I finally had to accept being blind, but once I did, I also accepted the fact that to have a life, I would have to reinvent my life.

Today, I have a new career as an award winning, internationally collected artist and author.

Three-time Emmy award winning screenwriter Paul Cooper found out about me and is working on a screenplay about my life. In his words, "It's a story that needs to be told."

The national PBS NewsHour program posted a video segment from the Rocky Mountain PBS show “Arts Distriict” about my art that can be seen at: <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/art/a-veteran-makes-art-from-fishing-lines-and-hes-blind/>

To be honest, however, I should add that despite my accomplishments, I am still occasionally reminded that I have a visual disability. I tried to fix a small problem on the roof on my home but fell off, causing a tear my abdominal wall. At the hospital, the surgeon looked at me and said, "Jim, you're blind. We don't want you on the roof."

Turns out, this was good advice. Belated, but sensible.

That is why…I #LoveMyDetour.

Jim Stevens Bio

Jim Stevens is legally blind as a result of combat wounds suffered while serving in the US Army. A former college professor, he is now a multidisciplinary artist and author. Stevens has three published books on art and his works have won numerous Best of Show awards including the Veterans Administration’s National Gold Medal for Fine Art and the Sargent Art Supply Company’s National Award for Fine Art. While his educational degrees are in Publishing and English, he studied art from an early age as apprentice to master oil and watercolor painters, sculptors and stone and gem carvers. His diverse skill set and love of art in its many forms eventually guided him to the creation of his signature paintings on layered monofilament line and acrylic panels. His paintings have captured the imagination of art lovers world wide.