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**“Oklahoma Hosts May 2015 National Military Experience & the Arts Symposium to Include Filmmakers, Poets, Flute Makers, Actors and *Marine-led* Dance Troupes”**

**OKLAHOMA CITY --** *FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE* - - Jason Poudrier, Oklahoma Army veteran and Purple Heart recipient, is the local coordinator of the upcoming Military Experience & the Arts symposium in Lawton, scheduled for **Thursday, May 14th through Sunday, May 17th**, on the campus of Cameron University. Poudrier, a writing professor at Cameron, is also the proud author of two books of war-related poetry: “Red Fields” and “In the Rubble at Our Feet.” Writing and poetry workshops are just two examples of the types of activities military veterans can expect as part of the 4-day series of workshops, performances and educational offerings.

“Veterans, such as myself, learn how to better express our personal narratives through the study of the work of other veteran-writers. Most importantly, we learn the ways of the craft through guided-practice and instruction. The result is writing worth reading,” Poudrier said. “From the time I attended the first MEA symposium at Eastern Kentucky University, I have been in discussions with Travis Martin, the founder and former president of the organization, about bringing the symposium to Cameron University, which is housed in a military community lacking structured artistic outlets for military members,” said Poudrier. The MEA symposium includes art therapy programs; painting; music; creative writing classes; performance art; cinematic art; art exhibitions, historical lectures and workshops tailored to veteran-issues and concerns; post-traumatic stress support; social support; and lodging/meals for veteran-attendees who are disabled or geographically or financially constrained.

Benjamin Patton, filmmaker, author, developmental psychologist and the youngest grandson of World War II’s infamous General George S. Patton Jr., will be on-hand educating veterans on the finer points of documentary filmmaking, in a format created to assist with processing traumatic, war-related experiences. Patton will also share excerpts from his book, “Growing Up Patton: Heroes, History and Family Wisdom.”

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“ I grew up with a very strong sense of service, particularly with regard to military personnel and uniformed personnel, that we really need to make an effort to acknowledge the service of those who, as my dad used to say, ‘missed a meal or heard a shot fired in anger,’” Patton said. “We do what we can to give back to that community and make their lives as fulfilling and rich as possible.

“My main focus right now is the work I’m doing for the Patton Veterans Project, which is to serve the military community, you might say, in a different way; by providing a therapeutic intervention involving filmmaking to help veterans cope with service-related stress . . . and their families,” Patton said.

“Our motto or slogan at our organization is ‘listen, collaborate, empower.’ Those three words are very significant. What has prepared me more than anything else (to work with veterans) is being around the military my whole life, albeit as an army dependent and a friend to many people in the military of my own generation who joined the military, unlike myself. Being immersed in that culture for much of my life has been a great preparation. I think it gives you a sort of empathy for what they’re dealing with. Being immersed in that world has made me a better listener, which is a very important part of what we do,” said Patton. More information can be found at <http://www.iwastherefilms.org/>

Doug Berky, in a similar fashion to Patton, grew up on military bases for most of his life, as his father spent 20 years in the Air Force. Berky did not plan to follow suit and left that environment behind, temporarily, which is how he initially discovered the cathartic power of the theater. Berky is now an independent actor who travels the world conducting Humor and Healing workshops, performing for various military audiences, refugee camps and civilian victims of war-torn countries. Berky will take the stage at MEA Oklahoma utilizing universally-themed, ancient stories to address veterans and military families. “The ‘Tiger’s Whisker’ is an ancient story from Korea. It’s about a woman’s journey whose husband comes home from war and her trying to find the silver bullet that will help him deal with the trauma he suffered in that experience,” Berky said. “The centerpiece of what I do, why I was invited to the symposium, is this particular story that is about healing the wounds of war.” Additional story selections can be found at: <http://www.dougberkytheatre.com/>

Popular Oklahoma artist and Vietnam veteran Albert Gray Eagle, is on the roster to perform music and teach authentic flute-making techniques. “I hope if it is just one person I can reach and give hope to . . . I am blessed to allow that to go through,” Gray Eagle said. “If you can help someone, by all means, that is your duty as a human being.”

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Gray Eagle notes one of the most touching experiences of his years as an artist. He was lucky enough to meet a couple of individuals, planning a United Service Organization or USO Tour, at another national creative arts festival, not unlike the symposium planned for Cameron; together, they collaborated on a tangible way to honor today’s current generation of veterans:

“I had made two-thousand flutes and wanted to find a way to get them to Iraq and Afghanistan to the soldiers,” Gray Eagle said. “They went to Afghanistan and found these soldiers. They took the time to give individual flutes to these soldiers . . . and some of the emails I got back were just awesome. It was a blessing! A Navajo soldier from way back on the Arizona reservation got one and it helped him heal while he was there. Privates, specialists, major generals … even a commander of one of the posts in Hawaii received one and accepted it for his post. For two people to come into my life like that and allow me to fulfill something I always wanted to do … and to do it and take the time to find the American Indian soldiers stationed over there . . . I told them I didn’t care who got one because culturally they belong to everyone in the world,” Gray Eagle said. For flute-making materials and educational offerings, log on to: <http://www.imaginativz.com/>

Roman Baca, a dancer, choreographer and former U.S. Marine is on the symposium schedule as well. Baca is the artistic director of Exit 12, a New York City based, dance and performing arts company. Exit 12 is well known for communicating complex military issues and experiences to audiences through movement and expression. For additional information on Exit 12, log-on to <http://exit12danceco.com/>

 Registration for MEA Oklahoma is currently open and costs $20 per person. **Veterans of every generation are invited and encouraged to attend**. Background, as well as updates on guest speakers and workshop facilitators can be found at <http://www.militaryexperience.org>.

**About MEA**: **Military Experience & the Arts (MEA) is a national 501(C) 3 non-profit organization dedicated to serving military veterans and the artistic experience primarily through honoring creative expression in writing, poetry, music and the performing and visual arts.**

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