

# MENTOR RECOGNITION

Occasionally in life one comes across an individual who leaves an indelible mark with them. The greatest thing about that is when you meet someone with whom your relationship continues to grow like a fine wine grape vine. This has happened to me and it continues to grow today.

Since I was a little kid growing up in Greece, I was always amazed with birds and especially a whoopee bird that my uncle had mounted (mummified would be more accurate with our standards today) on top of their wardrobe. Every time we visited my dad's sister I always sat in front on this bird and gazed onto to it as though as if it had some magic power. This was in the early 1960's for the record. That bird was the single cause that I became interested in taxidermy. The second time that my interest was sparked was when I went to Greece to visit in the summer of 1978. I visited one of my cousins for dinner and her husband was outside in the garage "mounting" a couple of birds. Then I returned to PA got married and I shot this nice pheasant cock bird that I had mounted by a current master taxidermist. I was in awe when I first saw it up on the wall and vowed to learn how that is done, not really to take it up as a profession.

I have been struggling ever since some by VCR tape instruction, some DVD's some personal interaction ... the entire time I had not realized that while on the ever-learning path, the "glue" that keeps it all together is an appropriate mentor. So, one day during one of the Outdoor Sportsman shows I met my Mentor at one of the malls. I just said hello and moved on; next time I saw him at the Cabela's show I spoke with him in a little greater detail. So, the day came that I had to do some fish and I thought I should buy a couple of new DVDs' that would have probably used most modern methods and products. I called a West Virginia producer and purchased a couple of

DVDs' of my hero. I watched how easy he made things look with his professional experience and off course, I could not even come close to his work. I dared get on the taxi.net and asked him a couple questions directly in private message. He was very polite and responded right away, but his answers seemed vague to me. So, he actually offered if I was ever in the area to stop by his shop. Now, this week that I am writing this, I have been married to my lovely wife, Maria, for 40 years; after I met this person face-to-face and we interacted a little, I feel that not only is he as



Written by John Peslis (right) about his mentor, Frank Kotula (left)

expensive as my wife, but we probably were Siamese twins joined at the head. The first thing he did is to ask me about what equipment I use and what paints, what methods etc. He surgically went through and explained how I could make a few changes and change of my equipment and it would improve my results but only in paint adhesion, etc. Okkkkk, now I am a Greek and this guy was "talking Greek to me". In the limited time and space that I have I must say, I have fallen in love with way he does things, I have fallen in love with his family and I feel like I can talk with him about anything. I have panicked a couple of times and his saying was "you know where I am right, get your .ss up here". Needless to say, he has saved my butt a couple of times, he has given me advice which is not taught in any class, school or situation.

Being Greek I truly know who Mentor was in Mythology, well, I have met the real contemporary Mentor in Frank Kotula. The only way that I can express my gratitude is to say through this medium, I love you Frank! Thank you for being a real Mentor that never lets someone down and for your best quality, thank you for being a real FRIEND.

