

Local Artist Mary Boyle Dead at 44

By Laura J. MacKay
Bureau Chief

Artist Mary Boyle died Monday at age 44 after a sudden, debilitating illness overcame her exuberant spirit.

All was well until last June, when Mary suffered several inexplicable seizures. It was discovered she had an inoperable malignant brain tumor. The tumor eventually paralyzed her left side, and radiation treatment proved ineffective.

She died at the Hyannis Convalescent Center, where she had spent the last few months.

Mary will be buried in Florida, the home of her adoptive parents, but friends plan to hold a memorial service in Provincetown at a future date (she had no family in this area).

If Mary considered anyplace "home," it was Provincetown, according to her friends.

She lived more than a dozen years on Cape Cod, mostly in Provincetown and Truro, often coming and going. Most recently, she lived in Chatham and Harwich.

"Provincetown was definitely one of her all-time favorite places," said Provincetown resident Lee Robinson, who knew Mary for more than a decade.

Consequently, her death touches many people here.

"It is a tragic thing for someone who enjoyed life so much," said Provincetown resident Jan Kelly. "Mary had a very, very difficult life. It seemed to be one difficulty after another and this brain tumor just seemed to be the culmination of it."

But when friends talk about Mary, they don't dwell on the hardships life dealt her. Instead, they recall her vitality, originality, talent, wit, humor. They laugh rather

than cry, although tears have no doubt been shed.

"She was a very vital spirit that touched us all in a lot of ways you didn't even realize at the time," said Anne Malicoat, a Provincetown resident. "She was very original in both her art and the way she lived. She had a distinctive personality and way of doing things."

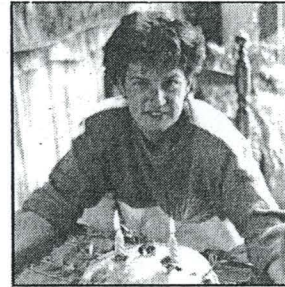
"She had a great sense of humor. She could be absolutely hilarious," Mr. Robinson said.

Her humor was outrageous and unapologetically lewd, even after she became confined to a wheelchair, Ms. Kelly said. "At a party it could be like electricity to be with her....If you had to give a dull dinner party you would invite her to break it all up."

Ms. Kelly recalled "blathering" with Mary at parties — carrying on a conversation by talking nonstop, simultaneously — to the delighted confusion of the other guests.

She had her idiosyncrasies, and she couldn't seem to hold down a job or an apartment, but in Provincetown she didn't have to apologize for those things. As Ms. Kelly put it, "She was one of the norms."

Like many Outer Cape residents, Mary did all kinds of work over the years to make ends meet. According to friends, she worked at The Missing Link joke shop in Provincetown, painted murals in homes and businesses,



Mary Boyle

wrote, worked with computer graphics, drew cartoons for Provincetown Magazine and taught at Truro's Castle Hill Center for the Arts, designed scenery for local theatrical productions, and did a little commercial fishing, among other things.

"There were so many things she could do well she could always get by," Mr. Robinson said.

"She boggles my mind," said Julia McGrady, another Provincetown friend.

While she never gained any prominence as an artist, and showed her work only sporadically, she was quite accomplished as a painter and graphic designer, in the estimation of Mr. Robinson and other acquaintances.

"I wouldn't say she was ambitious," he said. "She worked hard at her art but financial success was not what motivated her."

Ms. Malicoat speculated that Mary's unconventional-ity didn't lend itself to the steps an artist needs to take to build a reputation, like showing work in galleries on a regular basis.

In addition to painting, Mary also wrote poetry and music and played the piano.

One of Mary's more peculiar talents, Mr. Robinson recalled, was an astonishing ability to sign her name forwards and backwards simultaneously by using both hands, creating a mirror image. She could produce the same thing upside down, too.

"It was creepy," he admitted.

Mary's zest for life persisted despite her illness. In an interview with The Cape Codder last month, she spoke in detail of her plans for the future — she was considering developing a program to educate people about the needs of the disabled.

She also reminded us not to put off the things that matter: "Take a walk on the beach today or call a friend even if just to say, 'Hi, I was thinking of you.'"