

MAY ARTIST OF THE MONTH - FRAN NAUGHTON

(from May 2010 VAL Newsletter)



Fran Naughton's artistic life began in first grade when her teacher brought her to the convent after school and bribed her with chocolates to complete a drawing she had started in class. The crayon drawing won first prize in the Boston Archdiocese Art Fair.

Fran chose art as her minor because no major was available at the state college she attended. She loved every class and wished she had the opportunity to take more. Between classes, she would visit the Museum of Art near the school and sketch or just enjoy her favorite paintings. Upon graduation, Fran wanted to become an art teacher, but there were few openings so she became an elementary school teacher, using her art in every lesson that she could, from pictures on the blackboard to displays in the classroom to art lessons for her students. Fran moved from Boston to New York and married Pat. They had a son Patrick a year later. She loved teaching and was selected "Special Education Teacher of the Year". Fran was honored considering the number of teachers in the City. Teaching and raising a family took up most of her time, but New York City offered many venues for artistic endeavors, including the Art Student League, and classes at the museums which she took advantage of whenever possible.

When Fran was asked to be a teacher representative to the Annenberg Advisory Council, she was astounded by the first meeting which was held in the boardroom of the New York Philharmonic at Lincoln Center. The City was receiving an Annenberg initiative grant for \$12 million dollars and the heads of every artistic venue in the City were present. Among those present were Arthur Mitchell of the Dance Theater of Harlem, the president of The Fashion Institute; the president of Cooper Union and Kitty Carlisle, who was then Cultural Ambassador for New York State. Fran wondered what her role would be, among all these high profile people. During that first meeting, she realized that she was the "inside person", who could really tell people how the money given to schools could impact children's lives. One of her special education students, who had had only negative things said about him, was chosen from a screening in the school to attend a scholarship program at The Dance Theater of Harlem. It changed his perception of himself and others' perception of him—it changed his life.

When Fran was on sabbatical in 1996, she concentrated on painting. When one of her paintings won a prize and sold for \$450, she was so excited that she went to Europe to take photos and paint. Fortunately, and also unfortunately, when she went back to work, she was offered a job mentoring teachers and conducting workshops throughout the City, which allowed little time to do anything else.

Fran considers breaking her ankle on the way to work one of the luckiest "breaks" she could have had as the recovery of three months forced her to retire and think about what to do with the rest of her life.

When she and her husband Pat visited the Villages, they looked at each other and said that it would be crazy not to live here. Fran could not believe the opportunities available here to artists. It was like a candy store for a child. She has gone to many workshops and classes from pastel painting with Walt Roman, to watercolor with Jan Ramsey, to colored pencil presently with Nan Klein, but her first love is acrylic painting, taking classes with Pat Ford.

Some of her artwork will be on display at Citizens Bank in Spanish Springs during the month of May.