

worked as a shoeshine boy in Times Square and a busboy at hotels in the Catskills during the summer.

He joined the Navy when he was 17, at the tail end of World War II. Later, he was an X-ray technician at Jamaica Bay Hospital in Queens, before attending beauty school. He managed a successful salon in Queens.

He was married three times, each ending in divorce. But his second to Barbara Walton, produced his son and a daughter, Charstar, who also lives in Fort Myers.

In his later years, he moved to California, and continued to pursue filmmaking, but lived in a trailer park. Although "Deep Throat" had grossed more than \$600 million, according to Entertainment Weekly, Mr. Damiano didn't see any of the profits.



COURTESY PHOTO

Director Gerard Damiano Sr. on the Set of "The Story of Joanna" at the Woolworth Mansion, 1975.

"Some people think that he was rich, but they don't know that the producers kept all the money," Mr. Damiano said. "He had some unscrupulous business partners at every turn."

(It's widely believed that associates of the Colombo crime family put up the original \$25,000 to make "Deep Throat.") In 2003, Mr. Damiano moved to Fort Myers, living mostly off Social Security.

But things improved at the end. There was a documentary made in 2005 about the enduring cultural significance of Mr. Damiano's most famous movie, called "Inside Deep Throat." And he enjoyed a quiet social life in Fort Myers, attending theater and art openings and supporting the local arts community.

"He didn't die a wealthy man, but he continued to make films," Mr. Damiano Jr. said. "He wanted to be a filmmaker; that was his dream."



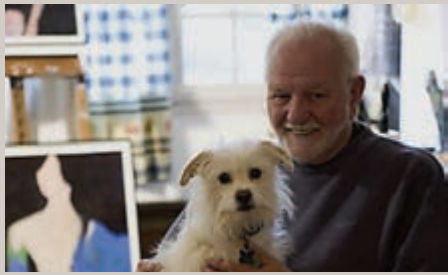
GALE BENNETT

FORT MYERS' OWN CELEBRATED ARTIST, TEACHER

Gale Bennett was an impressionist painter, teacher, graphic artist and music critic who always returned to Fort Myers, although his influence as a teacher and artist was international.

For his ad agency in the 1970s, he designed the menu still used at one of his favorite restaurants, The Veranda.

In 1996, Mr. Bennett opened a school



COURTESY PHOTO

Gale Bennett and his dog Sasha.

called ArtStudy in Giverny, France. There, he took students to paint in Claude Monet's garden.

Mr. Bennett died Easter Sunday in Cape Coral after a stroke, but he had battled illness for some time. He was 68 years old. Even while suffering from brain tumors the last year of his life, his wife Cello Bennett said, he produced more than 30 paintings, which was close to his yearly average.

Mrs. Bennett met her husband seven years ago when they spoke on the phone about a classical music critique he wrote for *The News-Press*.

They celebrated a fifth wedding anniversary the Friday before he died.

"He was my fourth husband," Ms. Bennett said. "I was his sixth wife... I always used to tease him because I would say 'there's a street named in Fort Myers for each of your wives; that's why you can't move away from this area.'"

But it also might have been because of his strong ties to Fort Myers. Mr. Bennett graduated from Fort Myers High School and his mother ran a beauty salon downtown. He played with Barbara B. Mann's children as a boy, and worked at Sydney Davis' men's clothing store in Fort Myers.

"He was really from here," Ms. Bennett said. "We think of Barbara Mann and Berne Davis as the grand dames, but they knew him when he was a little kid. I'm sure when they looked at him with his white hair, and getting ill, they could still see him as a boy."

The first time he left Fort Myers as a teenager, Mr. Bennett hitchhiked to Nebraska with a friend, to seek out a girl his friend was in love with. They came back when he decided he didn't love her after all. Not long after, he left for The School of Visual Arts in New York City.

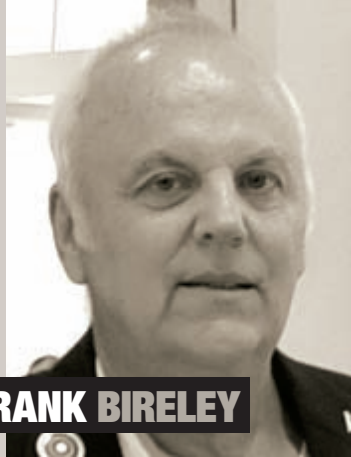
"To me what was so interesting about Gale is, right at the moment when his shows were at galleries in New York and some of his works were chosen to be in the collection at the Museum of Modern art, he came back to Florida," Ms. Bennett said. "He said he missed the nature so much. Central Park just didn't do it."

He also became an art teacher, privately and in various Lee County institutions like The Alliance for the Arts. He is remembered by students as having a generous heart.

"So many thousands of students have taken his classes," said Sanibel resident Sheila Hoen, Mr. Bennett's student since 2001. "I think he loved teaching — loved it. And people loved him for that. He made everyone feel, and do, their very best work."

David Robinson, the former president of Edison College, was an art student of Mr. Bennett's for 15 years after he retired from Edison. Now he said he's teaching his 10 grandchildren some of the things he learned.

"He said all you have to do is look at nature to get your structure, your form, your color," Mr. Robinson said. "... I can honestly say when I began taking painting from him it's like having cataracts lifted from your eyes."



FRANK BIRELEY

A PHILANTHROPIC LEADER IN LEE COUNTY

Frank Bireley had been an unrelenting patron of the arts, health care and education in Southwest Florida, both financially and as a volunteer, since he retired here in 1987.

"He was such an amazing patron of the arts," said Andrew Kurtz, director of the Southwest Florida Symphony. "He touched a lot of lives in the community and his philanthropy was for cancer and the medical community, but I don't think there was an arts organization that he did not support."

Mr. Bireley died in August after a lengthy battle with cancer. He was 71.

Long before he came to the Sunshine State, Mr. Bireley grew up on a street near where Frank Sinatra lived in North Hollywood, Calif.

His father was the creator of Bireley's Orange Drink. The elder Mr. Bireley later developed machines used to squeeze orange juice that were leased to growers in California and Florida. They were a wealthy, but low-key family, said Betty Bireley, Frank's wife of 50 years.

She remembered that Frank's father "was polished, like British proper — any female walked in and he stood and acknowledged her."



COURTESY PHOTO

Air Force Sgt. Frank Bireley.

Her husband, she said, was easier going by nature.

After high school, Mr. Bireley served four years in the Air Force where he received a commendation medal for meritorious performance. He met his future wife at Hamilton Air Force Base near San Francisco, where they both worked programming computers. They liked to go to the movies in Mr. Bireley's Cadillac and listen to comedian Jack Benny on the radio.

"We'd go to Coconut Grove, the Hollywood Bowl, the Palladium," Ms. Bireley said. "They were swish places where all the movie stars went."

Mr. Bireley graduated from California State University, San Francisco, and spent his career with IBM. He retired to Fort Myers in 1987 and began a new career in philanthropy.

He has left what Lee Memorial Health System CEO Jim Nathan called "a legacy of love."

Mr. Bireley helped causes such as Habitat for Humanity, The Children's Hospital of Southwest Florida, Lee Cancer Care, The United Way, The Music Foundation, Abuse Counseling and Treatment Center, Kiwanis Club, Barbara's Friends and many more.

He was one of the driving forces behind the new Regional Cancer Center to open this October, where the coffee shop will be named after him.

"It was kind of appropriate because Frank liked to eat," Ms. Bireley said. "He liked good food."

She added, "I don't think there's anything Frank didn't like."



ALAN ARCIERI

A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Alan Arcieri was a psychic and spiritual medium who suffered from muscular dystrophy. Even in the last five years of his life he continued to summon those who, like him, had "crossed over."

Mr. Arcieri, 56, died in December at his Cape Coral home of complications from muscular dystrophy and diabetes.

Despite his illness, he had continued hosting a Friday morning psychic talk show on 105.5 the Beat, a job he held for nearly a decade. He also wrote a book called "Earth School 101," which addresses the mystery of existence.

"That's really his legacy," said his wife, Diana Arcieri, 59.

She met him 28 years ago when he was a car salesman on Long Island, N.Y. As Mr. Arcieri began to embrace his psychic abilities more fully, she said, they would help coma patients at hospitals on Long Island by speaking with them telepathically.

"He would communicate through the EKG," Ms. Arcieri said.

After they moved to Florida 24 years ago, the Arcieris were representatives for clients in the wholesale clothing industry, to make ends meet. But Mr. Arcieri was eventually able to support the family, which included his stepdaughter Alicia Merlob, through his psychic readings and "galleries," in which he performed for larger groups.

Ms. Merlob became his caretaker and assistant in the last year of his life. She had moved out of the house as a teenager but developed a newfound respect for her step-father's work.

"I really got to know who he was," she said. "We would talk about everything from soup to nuts. And sometimes we would have opposing views. But it was great because we challenged each other. And I think that was the best part of my relationship with him. I think he met his match when he met me. I think that's what fueled our relationship, that expanding, that constant push to learn more."

"I developed a tremendous amount of respect for what he did as a profession. The fact of the sheer volume of lives he helped changed."

Clients would come to his home office and "when I would escort them out I could see they were visibly changed," she said.

Brenda de Sousa, a Fort Myers psychic and friend of Mr. Arcieri's, said, "He would show people a whole world of comfort that they really didn't know existed." ■

