

GOOD-BYE TO OUR DEAR FRIEND NOEL PUGH, 1928-2010

Noel Lesley Pugh, beloved member of the SCNA Hall of Fame, succumbed to prostate cancer on March 13. Pugh, 82, was introduced to most of us at Elysium Fields in Topanga Canyon, where he lived for over 20 years and served as that naturist park's resident artist.

His best known work was the mural alongside the Elysium pool, but he also painted countless other drawings, cartoons, and wall signs that delighted the members and allowed him to make a living doing what he loved best.

For those who did not know him, here is a brief biography:

Noel was born December 28, 1928, in Beaminster (West Dorset), England. He served in the British army after World War II and was stationed in Germany where he learned physical therapy and massage.

As a boy growing up in Bristol, England, he said he had gone skinny-dipping at a local lake, and again, while stationed in Germany, he and other servicemen spent some off-duty time visiting similar swimming holes near Belsen.

After leaving the army he married his sweetheart Pamela Besant and worked as a masseur/training instructor for Union-Castle passenger liners travelling between England and South Africa. Later, while working on the QEII, he discovered the Sandy Bay nude beach in South Africa ("the best nude beach in the world. That's where I got my first ticket for nudity.")

He considered immigrating to South Africa, but the apartheid segregationist policies there changed his mind, so he transferred to the Queen Elizabeth II and worked as a massage therapist on the Atlantic run between England and New York.

"One of my clients during a voyage was an American politician who urged me to come to the States and open a practice there. I had no idea who we was at the time." The

politician? Sen. George McGovern, future Democratic candidate for President.

A few years later when he was offered a job as an artist in New York, he took McGovern up on his sponsorship offer, but his wife refused to come over and they soon divorced.

He said his first official nude sunbathing experience was in New York, he revealed. "It was the first time I actually found organized nudists who met as a group on weekends at the end of Pier 72. It was great!"

To fill some free time, Noel started attending art classes. "I had always enjoyed sketching my surroundings, even as a young boy. On a whim I decided to get some formal training at the famous New York Art Studio. He said his teachers were impressed not only with his pastel and charcoal style but also with the speed of his work, and they suggested he specialize in caricatures. So to supplement his income as a physical therapist, Noel spent his weekends at the beach selling his services as a caricaturist on the boardwalk, "mostly to servicemen on shore leave there with their dates."

A few years later, when his brother died in Palm Springs Noel journeyed to the West Coast to help settle the estate, and he never went back to New York. It was while drawing caricatures one day at Venice beach on weekends that a bearded gentleman walked up to him and asked if he was interested in a day's work at a nearby nudist resort. "The man's name was Ulysses and he and I became friends for life. He picked me up the next day and drove me to Elysium Fields in Topanga. I drew caricatures for the resort's 20th Anniversary party. I fell in love with the place and never left."

He lived there for 22 years in a rented room alongside the club's swimming pool. He also started teaching caricature drawing at a local Community College in Woodland Hills. Life was good.

When Elysium closed in September, 2000, he moved with everyone else to the new Elysium property in Malibu for the year it was open. Noel then moved to Simi Valley down the hill from the Regan Presidential Library.

During the last years of his life he hired himself out as a caricaturist for local parties and events, and he also kept a small group of devoted massage customers.



Above: Noel drawing caricatures at Ricc Bieber's 50th birthday party.

In December 2004, now 76 years old, he suffered a minor stroke, which cost him most of the use of his right side for several months. Two months later he underwent quadruple-bypass heart surgery. It took him nearly a year to regain his “artistic hands” and start painting again.

But a bad knee replacement surgery forced him to stop driving and he was essentially cut off from travel. Still, his many friends visited often and he maintained his chipper attitude toward life.

In January 2010, the prostate cancer, which he had first beaten while at Elysium, suddenly reappeared, but this time the doctors deemed it inoperable.

Realizing he was dying, Noel said he was now motivated Noel to enjoy life one day at a time. “I have been extremely lucky being able to do work I enjoy and to have

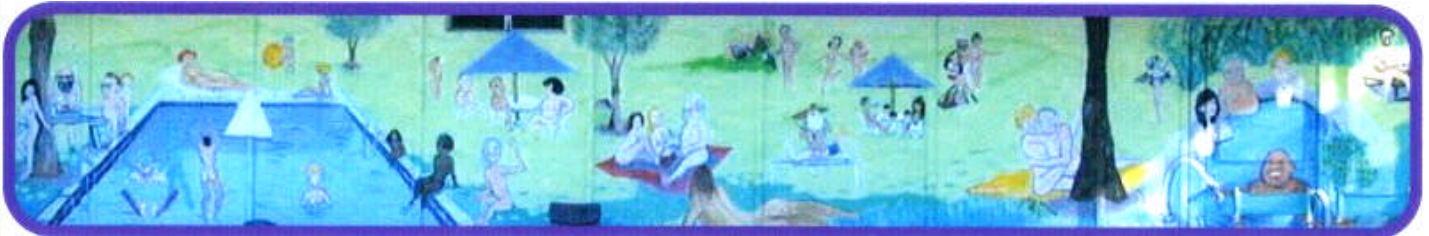
made some deep and long-term friendships. What more could a man want?”

Noel moved to a hospice in Santa Barbara the first week in March and late in the afternoon of March 11, he slipped into a coma and died 36 hours later very peacefully in his sleep.

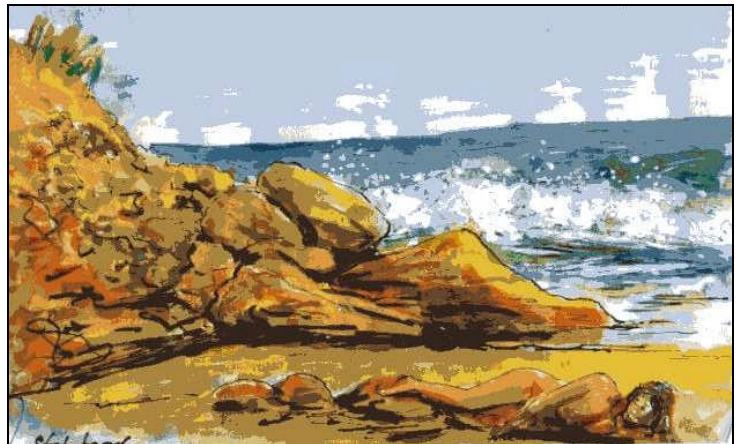
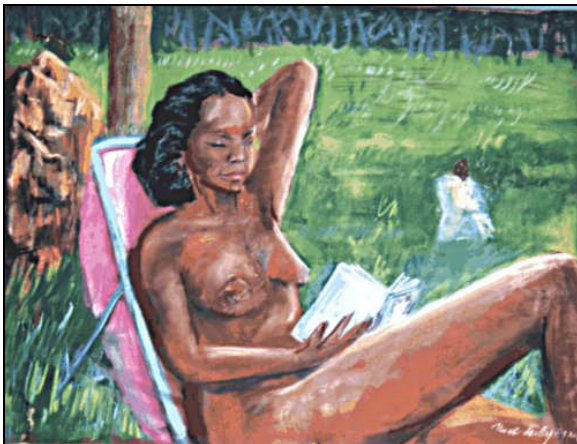
A memorial service was held in Santa Barbara on March 28, attended by many of his old buddies.

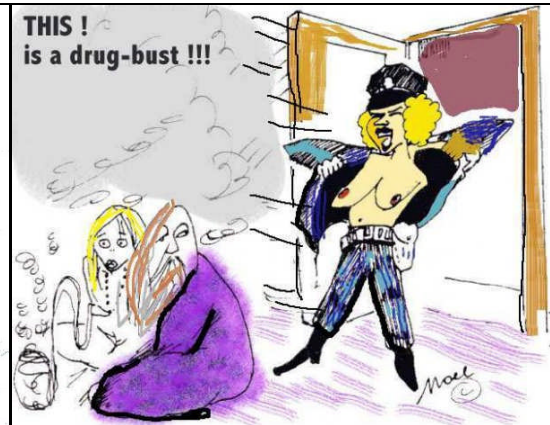
Many others, including Elysium’s Betty Meltzer, sent poignant letters that were read. *[Note of historical interest: Noel and Betty were married for a short time; their wedding at Elysium on July 4, 1983, was attended by several hundred club members dressed in Renaissance Faire costumes.]*

God speed, Noel! And as you liked to say, “Cheerio!”



Above: The famous Elysium member’s mural covered 30 feet alongside the pool. It was a very successful fundraiser, as people paid to have their likeness placed in their favorite location on the grounds. Below: other samples of his work over the years:





Noel's first Elysium caricature from the 20th Reunion Party