

A romantic free spirit; an unconventional life.

Mary McHale Wood spent twelve years of that life (1987-1999) living and working in San Juan, Puerto Rico. A truly gifted person, Mary invested her creative energy into the Puerto Rican community in a variety of ways.

Soon after her arrival, Mary's love of books brought her to the *Casa del Libro* in the historic Old San Juan district. Extremely well read in American, British and Latin American literature, she considered it a privilege to work as a volunteer in the rare book collection.

Later, she worked for several years as a reporter and editor at *Caribbean Business*, a weekly newspaper published by Casiano Communications. She was also an active member of the Overseas Press Club of San Juan. From 1997-1999, she worked in the press office of the Governor of Puerto Rico.

Through her newspaper work, Mary observed and recorded political and social events on the contemporary Puerto Rican scene. Privately, she channeled her power of observation and strong sense of social justice into creative writing, primarily poetry and short stories. Her many artistic talents also included drawing, singing and composing, and floral arrangement.

A perfectionist at heart, Mary held herself and others to extremely high standards. Young reporters and writers whom she mentored remember her for her quick intelligence and dark wit, but also for her compassion for society's marginalized populations. Outspoken and at times opinionated, Mary would not tolerate mediocrity or hypocrisy in her public or private life.

Despite her chronic diabetes-related health problems, Mary enjoyed traveling and immersed herself in different cultures. In Puerto Rico, she preferred to spend her time on the breezy balcony of her mountaintop home, contemplating the stunning view of the San Juan harbor. In her later years, after moving to an apartment in Old San Juan, she could frequently be seen sitting in the outdoor café at Plaza de Armas, drinking coffee and chatting with the many artists (among them Jack Delano and Rafael Tufiño), writers and musicians who were her neighbors and friends.

When not in the plaza, Mary also loved to sit on the rooftop of her apartment building, sharing a few beers and special snacks with friends, watching the

seagulls circling over the bay and the softening sunlight as it covered the nearby cathedral at dusk.

Passionate and sensitive, a quirky maverick who retained the enthusiasm of a child, Mary McHale Wood lived a richly textured life. She knew hers would not be a long life, and perhaps for that reason she was committed to living every moment to the fullest. She is fondly remembered by her friends and neighbors, who occasionally catch a glimpse of her sitting at the café at Plaza de Armas.

– Catherine Blackburn, 2006