

Picture Profile

In a 10-Minute Sitting, Caricaturist Captures the Personality

By K.C. Myers

Charles P. Duffy, known simply as Duffy, has been doing caricatures for exactly 40 years.

During that time, he has gotten the snap drawing of a complete stranger down to a science.

"From the time I first began, in 1953, to 1993, I must have sat for at least five minutes with 150,000 people," he said. "Somewhere in my memory are stored the hobbies, professions and appearances of thousands of people."

The art of the caricature is to interpret broadly the general appearance by emphasizing features. If something is big, the caricaturist makes it bigger. If something is small, he makes it smaller. The result is a telling juxtaposition of what is and what could be, had God been a cartoonist.

There is a psychological element as well. If done correctly, the caricature expresses something more than simple appearance. Duffy asks his subjects where they come from and what they do for a living. Then he just talks or sings and draws furiously and soon, he's got you.

I sat for him for half an hour, while we talked mostly about him. At the end he presented me with an image that resembled my personality and life more than it did my appearance. Without my saying much at all about myself, he saw I was an eager, happy-go-lucky woman working hard in an offbeat seacoast town. Ain't that the truth.



Caricaturist Charles P. Duffy draws a portrait of Cape Codder reporter K.C. Myers.

When I saw my caricature, I said, "You can tell I'm a flirt."

He said, "No. I can tell you want people to like you."

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you don't get paid to insult people. When he began at Steel Pier in Atlantic City, he would do the insulting drawings, the funny ones. People crowded around him and laughed. But then no one else would sit down because they were too embarrassed. Hence, he is kind to the face and body and restricts humor to the background. It could be said that such a drawing is dishonest or doesn't say anything about the person. But had he drawn a gross exaggeration of my bad points, I would not have thought he recognized me at all — because surely, I am a blue-eyed bombshell with all the best intentions. It just takes a genius to see it.

Duffy is a family man. He's been married to a teacher for 34 years. His 30-year-old son is a doctor. His daughter is an archaeologist. In addition to his caricaturing, he's done advertising and illustration, but he

finds himself, at 63, toiling on the streets.

He likes working for himself outdoors, doing art. He doesn't mind making close to a poverty-level income, because caricatures are what he believes he was meant to do.

"It's interesting work," he said. "I've had semi-intimate conversations with thousands of strangers. I've interviewed more people than Johnny Carson. They tell me stuff an analyst would take four visits to get."

He attributes his intuitive sense about people to experience. "When I see someone now, I look back in my files to other people they remind me of. I might not remember an engineer from 1955, but I'd remem-



The finished product: Duffy's caricature of K.C. Myers.

ber a man with pens in his shirt, a military belt, a quarter-inch checkered shirt, and I'd be pretty sure he was an engineer.

"I know a cop because they walk in like they own the place," he said. "I know a doctor because he acts likes he knows everything but is not telling. A hood has a similar air to a cop because he solves everything with violence and he's certain he can handle anything that

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way. The difference is cops are righteous about it."

Duffy works seven days a week, 12 hours a day, from 11 am to 11 pm with some breaks to eat and so on. It takes him five minutes to draw a black and white caricature and 15 minutes for one in color.

His life as a caricature artist began in 1953 when he answered an ad in The New York Times asking for cartoonists to work in a resort town — Atlantic City, as it happened — for a minimum of \$200 a week. Of course, it didn't say he had to draw 500 caricatures a week making 60 percent of \$1.50 per drawing to earn that \$200 minimum. But he found out. He's worked at the New York World's Fair and state fairs, conventions,

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hotels, restaurants and malls.

One of his friends from the World's Fair, Jim Green, brought him to Provincetown in 1968. Mr. Green owns Picture Yourself Portraits, a portrait and caricature store in the Whaler Mall whose staff includes four portrait artists and one caricaturist.

Duffy's prices are lower than Mr. Green's because Mr.

Green's artists spend more time on each picture and use more elaborate equipment. Duffy prefers the covered porch at Keely's Kites to the indoor store. He doesn't mind the cold and wind of outdoors.

What he does mind are grandmothers. "They look over your shoulder and tell you what to do." And drunks. "They think they're smart, but they talk stupid and you can't tell them to go away because they don't listen."

A black and white caricature by Duffy is \$15; a color caricature is \$25. You can find Duffy at Keely's Kites, 240 Commercial Street, Provincetown. At Picture Yourself Portraits, 247 Commercial Street, a black and white caricature is \$25 or \$50 and a color caricature is \$40 or \$80, depending on the size.