

# Young artist's work lives on

By CANDACE ATKINS

From his wheelchair, Dale Duncan Jr. conducted his life. A talented artist, poet and storyteller, the young man made full use of his gifts, despite his terminal disease. Muscular dystrophy was slowly killing him, but he kept on working.

Last April, he wrote, "With Duchenne dystrophy, one is not supposed to live past the age of 15, but I'm 20 years old and going strong. Sure, I'm weaker than I was two years ago, but I'm not dead. I even go to college, and that's a great feat when you think about the mortality rate with this disease." Three weeks ago, Dale died.

Until the end, he continued to produce artwork, mainly intricate pen and ink drawings. His subjects ranged from "Tammy," the family's 13-year-old toy poodle to science fiction-fantasy scenes with mythical figures and ethereal backgrounds. Some of his best works were of marine life. Short descriptions and poetry accompanied his many drawings of whales and dolphins that indicate hours of research about the endangered species.

Of the baby killer whale he wrote:

"To be a baby whale  
safe from any harm  
Beside two huge parents  
never knowing alarm

To be a baby whale  
swimming in the sea  
With a group of others  
always feeling free,  
To be that baby whale  
with someone always near,  
I would never have to worry  
about that thing called fear.

Fear appears to be one thing Duncan did not allow himself to dwell on. Instead, according to one of his writings, "I feel a need to improve myself. And a need to really love life." He credited a new found friend, Joni Ericson, with providing him with "a constant model reminder" for happiness and a positive outlook on life.

Varied interests seemed to be the artist's antidote to negativism or self-pity. He

was a Shakespeare fan, loved science fiction, good music, old movies and comedy. All of his interests were burning ones. According to his father, "Dale, if he was interested in something, would research it completely. He worked very hard."

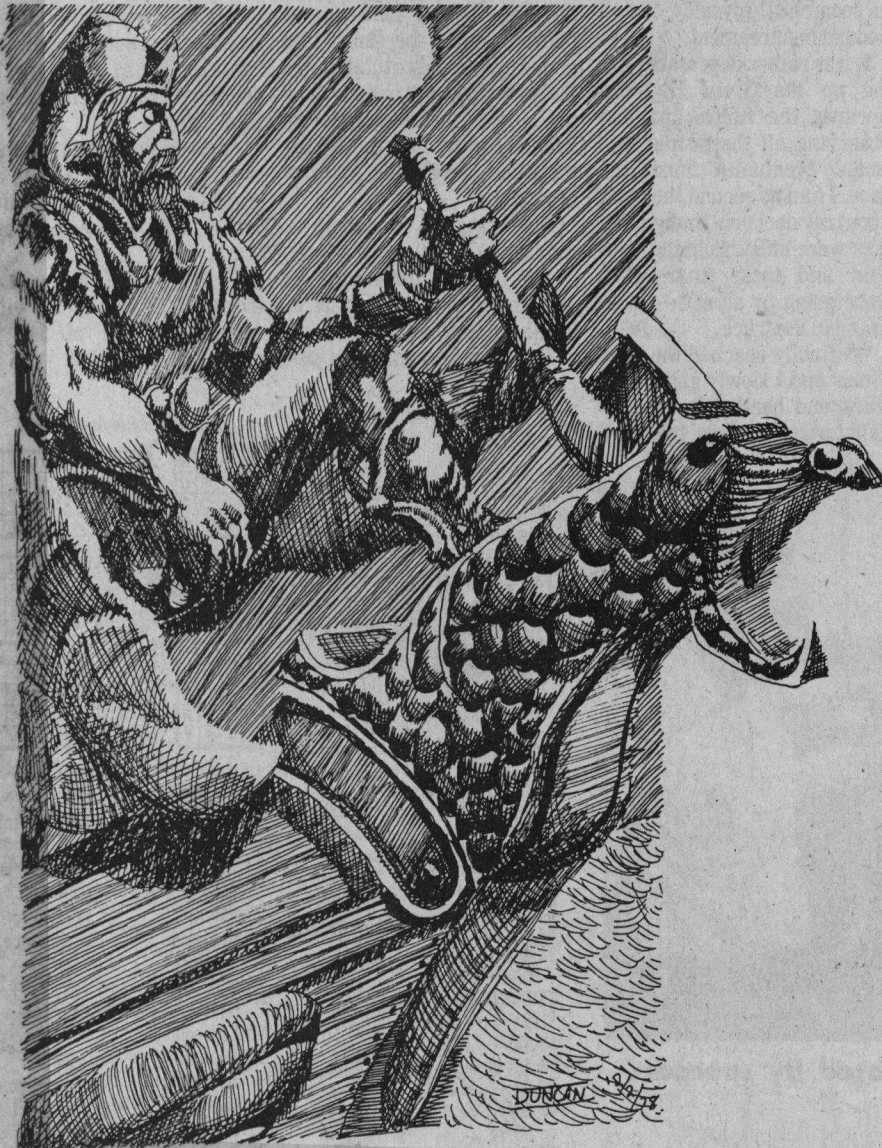
In school, the young man was a competitive student, always going far beyond regular assignments, added his father. Due to the progression of his disease, young Duncan had to study his last 18 months of high school at home, but on graduation day, he attended ceremonies with his classmates writing later, "And then in 1979, I graduated with all the trappings."

It was during his high school years that Duncan grew creatively. "I found my place as an artist, and had an artshow," he wrote of his sophomore year at Soquel High. His parents as always, encouraged him to continue drawing. His father said as long as he could remember, "Dale always had a drawing pad and pencils or crayons. I would tell him how well he drew and asked him to do more."

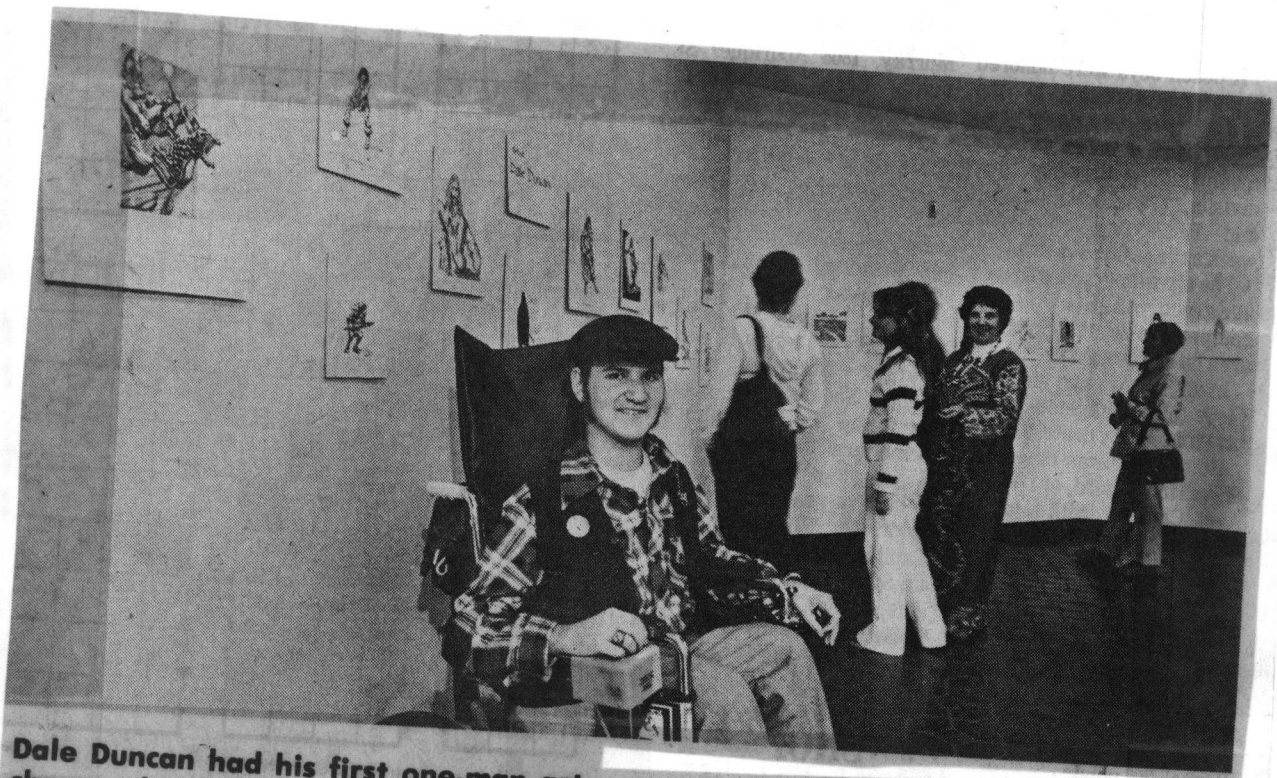
His mother, Emmy Duncan, added that she asked her son to date his works so they would be in chronological order. Today, Mrs. Duncan is able to see her son's art in what she calls periods: cars and vans, science fiction, fantasy, marinelif and his latest series on flowers and animals.

There are exhibits of his work at The Blue Rose in the new Mercantile Mall in Capitola and at the Forty-First Avenue Fish Market, 1820-G 41st Ave., Capitola. Bell, Book and Candle in Capitola village stocks marine-life notepaper and prints by Duncan which may be purchased. In November, there will be an exhibit of his works at Aptos Library.

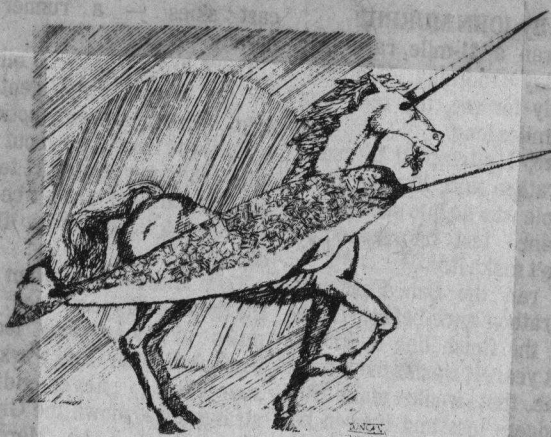
With the wide popularity of his art, Duncan's parents said he remained modest and critical of his efforts. He would work late at night on a drawing, wanting it to be perfect before he went to bed. "I would say to him, 'How



Much of the young man's art centered around mythical figures.



Dale Duncan had his first one-man art show early in 1979.



about going to bed, Dale,' " remembered Mrs. Duncan, "and he'd say, 'No way, Mom!'"

Duncan would draw pictures to illustrate his school papers and draw cartoons for his family and friends. Some were of his co-workers on the Quad Squad, a group of handicapped persons who patrol Capitola's village for parking violators. Dale Duncan was the Squad's mascot. According to him, "We became friends and I was their unofficial mascot. The word 'mascot' summons up pictures of a little kid playing

with the big kids, but that's what I did that summer — played."

Until his death on June 26, Duncan continued to play. He attended a summer camp for persons with muscular dystrophy the week before he died, and intended to return next summer.

His mother knows he meant for his art to be enjoyed, and plans to sell some of the prints. She said while he would be pleased to know a lot of people will be able to own his work, he would still question all of the fuss the family is making over his art.