

Irish, Mary R.

Mary Rettig Irish, a devoted wife whose passion for motherhood paralleled a life devoted to friendship and philanthropy, died Sunday, January 23, 2005, after a long battle with cancer. She was 59. Mrs. Irish was married for 38 years to George B. Irish, president of Hearst Newspapers. They maintained homes in New York City and in Plano, Texas, the Dallas suburb where their two daughters and grandchildren reside. "Families relocate often in the newspaper business," said Jeff Cohen, editor of the Houston Chronicle and a long-time family friend. "Mary embraced the challenge each time. She became involved in the community and always developed a wide circle of interesting friends." As an adult, Mrs. Irish lived in eight cities. She was an enthusiastic traveler who spent much of her free time on trips that took her to four continents. She was an avid tennis player and golfer, and her gardening talent continually amazed her friends and family. One of her greatest pleasures came from the support of charitable organizations, especially those involved with education. "Mary had a compassionate heart for others who didn't have the financial ability to attend a Catholic school," said Kathy Boukissen, director of development at St. Joseph Catholic High School in Fremont, Ohio, which Mrs. Irish attended and where she endowed a scholarship in the name of her parents. "Even though she wasn't living here, she cared about families who wanted a religious education." In a note to the school explaining her gift, she said she wanted to honor the memory of her parents and their regard for the school their children attended. "Both of them gave so much for others," Mrs. Irish wrote. "While they weren't able to complete their education, they sacrificed for the education of their children and so many others." Friends remembered her as always pleasant and, like her parents, imbued with simple values that stressed putting the needs of others first. "She started every day with a smile," said Janice Freeman, a friend from New York with whom she often walked in Central Park. "She was true to herself, whether she was with a movie star or with Janice Freeman. She was totally devoted to her family - George, her daughters and grandchildren. She would do anything to simplify and facilitate their lives. They came first, she came second." Daughter Sandi Irish said her mother was a source of constant support and inspiration. "She's always been there for us, physically and emotionally," she said. "She's definitely helped us make the right decisions as parents. Through the whole cancer, we've drawn strength." Mrs. Irish was born of German parents in Nachod, Czechoslovakia, now the Czech Republic, in the waning days of World War II. She and her parents, Mathias Rettig and Anna Illi Rettig, later immigrated to the United States and made their residence in Fremont, where Mrs. Irish and her husband were married in 1966. The Irishes moved to New York in 1993, when her husband was transferred to corporate headquarters and later appointed president of Hearst Newspapers. Mrs. Irish was active in charity work and was a frequent volunteer at the Call Again Thrift Shop in New York City, which benefited Brandeis University. In addition to her husband, George, Mrs. Irish is survived by their two daughters, Sandra Lynn Irish and Christine Marie Irish Sheedy, both of Dallas; a third daughter, Diane Leslie Irish, died in infancy. Other survivors include son-in-law, Malcolm Sheedy; two grandchildren, Carson Matthew Irish and Samuel Joseph Sheedy; and two brothers, Mathias Rettig, of Kent, Ohio, and John Rettig, of Fremont, Ohio. Burial will be in Fremont. In lieu of flowers, the family asks that memorial contributions be made to either St. Joseph's Central Catholic High School, 702 Croghan Street, Fremont, Ohio 43420, for the Mary Irish Center for Language Arts and Journalism or to the Anointed Hands Hospice, 445 E. FM Road 1382, Cedar Hill, Texas, 76104.