

'Painter of Light' Thomas Kinkade Dies

Known as the "Painter of Light," Thomas Kinkade died Friday, at his home in Los Gatos, Calif. Kinkade, who was perhaps the nation's most collected living artist, was 54.

He appeared to have died of natural causes, according to a statement issued by the family to *The San Jose Mercury News*. An autopsy will be performed Monday.

Born in 1958, Kinkade was raised by his single mother in Placerville, Calif. He attended the University of California Berkeley and the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, Calif., and worked as an artist in the film industry. Known for the classic cottages, lighthouses and churches in his paintings, he also hid messages in his paintings, including the initials of family members and Disney characters.

Kinkade told Assist News Service that he started to see the characteristic of light develop in his work after he became a Christian in 1980. He often used Scripture in his art, which has been reproduced in posters, calendars, magazine covers, cards, collector plates, figurines and more.

He also was a *New York Times* and *USA Today* best-selling author. He co-wrote fiction with Katherine Spencer (Penguin Group USA) and offered many books of his art. The movie *Thomas Kinkade's Christmas Cottage* is semi-autobiographical, telling of how a young boy was propelled to launch a career as an artist after he learns his mother is in danger of losing the family home.

Branching out from art hung on the walls of many an American home, he had houses built in gated communities in California in the likeness of his paintings. His paintings sold for hundreds of dollars up to more than \$10,000 each.

His Media Arts Group, once a publicly traded company, took in \$32 million per quarter from 4,500 dealers across the country, according to the *Mercury News*. His production company, Pacific Metro, filed for bankruptcy protection in 2010. Kinkade was also forced to pay \$860,000 in damages to two former gallery owners in Virginia who felt they were undercut by discount sellers whose prices they were not permitted to match.

He is survived by his wife, Nanette, and four daughters, Merritt, Chandler, Winsor and Everett.