

Honoring the Life and Legacy of Mary Louise Lopez



At ThriveWell Cancer Foundation, we are deeply honored to be among the beneficiaries of the *Mary Louise Lopez Trust*, a meaningful legacy established through the beautiful and impactful work of the late Mary Louise Lopez, an accomplished artist whose creativity and spirit live on through her art.

This generous gift was made possible by her lifelong friend, Irene Peche, who oversees the trust and continues to share Mary Louise's artwork with the world through www.mlopezart.com. Irene's dedication to supporting ThriveWell is rooted in a personal connection. Mary Louise's life was tragically touched by cancer, and through this trust, Irene ensures Mary Louise's memory contributes to the healing and hope of others.

We are privileged to share the following tribute, written by Irene, celebrating the vibrant life and enduring legacy of Mary Louise Lopez.

A Life of Service, Art, and Soul: Remembering Mary Louise Lopez **By Irene Peche**

How can I begin the life story of Mary Louise Lopez? She had so many opportunities in her life to do so much with her many talents. She became a pianist at an early age, which led her to serve others as they performed. She also had many trips as a teenager with youth groups who visited other churches to work with young people in those churches. Later, she worked with other young people visiting churches that needed work done in their churches., She met many friends in these work camps. She became the church organist for a Pastor who needed help.

She worked for her church denomination as a volunteer for two years to repay her college scholarship. She worked in the Rio Grande Valley as a kindergarten assistant and gained a lifelong friend. Her next placement was in El Paso, where she lived and worked in a church facility, and spoke of the families she met and her fellow workers she enjoyed.

Once her two years of church work were finished, she returned to San Antonio. While home, a friend from one of the old work camps came to try to find a teaching job. Mary Louise went with her to a job interview with the superintendent. Her friend did not get a job, but Mary Louise did. She had not planned to become a teacher, but once she did, she decided to go back to school and get a master's degree in education. She chose to get a M.A. degree in Education, which meant she had to write a thesis. She found her thesis in the college library years later. She was a very creative and dedicated teacher, and she would work with her students who needed extra help at every opportunity, even after school. When bilingual education was proposed, she was one of the first teachers

from her school chosen to work in the program. Materials were very hard to find, which inspired her to write some stories and songs in Spanish.

Teaching was her main job, but art, which she used in her classroom, began to get her interest more and more. She did pen and ink drawings, watercolor birds and woodblock prints, but soon batik became her main interest. About this time, she started to go to art shows on weekends. At one particular show in Austin, she met a sculptor who encouraged her to try stone sculpture. He invited her to his studio and gave her some stone samples to take with her. She turned out some pieces that totally surprised him. She thoroughly loved working on sculpture, which was all handmade. No power tools were ever used. So now her interests in more media were developing. She did many stained-glass designs, conte, charcoal, some wood sculpture, furniture, and finally larger watercolor and acrylics.

She became very interested in the Hispanic culture of the Southwest, Texas, and finally traveling to Central and South America opened her eyes and heart to the people of those areas. Everywhere she went, she made it a point to seek out the artist doing the creation of his/her work. She would engage them in conversations and praise their work. She even insisted on buying a young girl's weaving that the father said wasn't very good, but for the child and Mary Louise it was a treasure she had to buy.

She had a wonderful time enjoying the conversations and smiles exchanged with the people too often ignored or disrespected by tourists. Actually, for her, this was the best part of the trips. It was kind of unbelievable how much she seemed to be enjoyed by the people she talked to, there were a lot of smiles and waves as she left them. I think that was why she was so inspired to paint them, she felt they were proud people doing what made them proud of their talent and culture. She used a phrase on her website that I think says so much about her and the people she represents in her work.

“My work endeavors to reflect the strength, pride, and endurance of cultures close to my roots. My work depicts indigenous people in their social and cultural context. Their strength, pride and quiet serenity are attributes that are very important in my representation of them. Thus, the message of my work: here are a people with a sense of strength, pride and serenity in themselves and their heritage. They represent the best that is in all of us.”

She definitely believed in her closing statement, which is part of her introduction to her website. She put her whole self into her work, and I believe it definitely shows. She left a large legacy of work to be shared beyond her lifetime. www.mlopezart.com