



## Dr. Barbara June Mahler

January 26, 1959 - April 29, 2023

From the moment Barbara was born in 1959, she brought love, light, and laughter into this world. She grew up in Lafayette, California, where many of her life-long friendships began. As the story goes, her first spoken word was "Nonsense!" At age 10, she charmed her family with her Tahitian dancing skills. Displaying brilliance as a child, she excelled at academia, choosing to take Russian and music. At her high school senior concert, she played to perfection the piano solo in "Rhapsody in Blue" and the piccolo solo in "Stars and Stripes Forever." And later, her family and friends truly appreciated her fluency in French as she escorted them at various times on trips through Paris, Montpellier (where she did postdoctoral studies), Rouen (where she and Pete spent a year as visiting scientists), and the French countryside (where they relished spending time at their property in Languedoc, their home away from home).

It seemed that everything Barbara became interested in she excelled at. She graduated from high school with perfect grades and won nearly every scholarship available to her. She accepted a full scholarship to Boston University for a double instrument major in music. After she graduated Phi Beta Kappa, she took some time to refocus and went to work in restaurants and became the fastest, most efficient bartender wherever she worked. When she no longer wanted to tend bar, she worked as Pastry Chef at a restaurant where her brother was Chef. All the while, she played professionally in a flute

and harp duo.

Barbara moved from California to Texas with her sister in the mid-1980s. While continuing with music, she turned her attention to science-she started in the biological sciences and emerged with a master's and then a Ph.D. in the geosciences from the University of Texas at Austin. She had a long history of impacting both local and national environmental issues.

Barbara had a 27-year career with the U.S. Geological Survey as a Research Hydrologist in Austin. Along the way, she met her partner in all things-life and science-Peter Van Metre. Together, they were a remarkable husband and wife duo tackling both local and national environmental issues, often against concerted industry pushback. Barbara published over 70 papers in prestigious scientific journals and countless U.S. Geological Survey reports. She was a remarkable scientist, colleague, teacher, and mentor.

Her accomplishments and successes far exceeded her ego. She was generous with her time and knowledge, made even hard dirty work collecting mud samples fun, and shared laughter and joy along the way. She also continued playing the flute professionally with the Austin Chamber Ensemble and in the orchestra for Gilbert and Sullivan Austin. She was a long-time instructor and adjunct faculty member at the University of Texas at Austin. She and Pete set about successfully rehabilitating an heirloom apple orchard in Kingston, New Mexico, where they split their time. Barbara loved animals, reading, dancing, singing, live music, backpacking, hiking, baking, her family, and her friends.

Barbara and Pete were both taken from us too soon as a result of a tragic motor vehicle accident almost two years ago that took Pete's life and seriously injured Barbara. She has struggled valiantly with the resulting traumatic brain injury that ultimately took her life. Barbara was preceded in death by her

beloved husband, Peter Chapman Van Metre, and her parents, Peggy and Leonard Mahler. She is survived by her brother, David L. Mahler (wife Lili), and her sister, Nancy M. Dixon (husband Mark), and Pete's three children, Laura Baum (husband Aaron), Emily Krinsky (husband Jordan), Sam Van Metre (soon-to-be-wife Josie), and four grandchildren.

In lieu of flowers, the family suggests a donation in Barbara's memory to one of several causes that were dear to her heart: Save Mount Diablo, the National Resources Defense Council, the Austin Sustainable Food Center, the Nature Conservancy, as well as the Texas Husky Rescue, where their beloved Bella was adopted.

Barbara will be laid to rest in a private family ceremony at Eloise Woods Natural Burial Park, next to Pete. The family will host a celebration of life in Austin in the fall. Details for the fall celebration of life will be forthcoming and will be posted on Barbara's CaringBridge site (<https://www.caringbridge.org/visit/barbaramahler>), where many have followed her journey since the accident. All are invited to share stories and memories of Barbara and her full and incredible life.

# Cemetery Details

## **Eloise Woods Natural Burial Park**

115 Northside Lane  
Cedar Creek, TX 78612  
(512) 796-5240  
<http://eloisewoods.com>

# Tribute Wall

GL

“ *Barbara was a post-doctoral fellow in Montpellier, France. I am deeply saddened by her death, and her memory remains with me. My condolences to her family. Gérard Lods.*

Gerard Lods - January 08, 2025 at 01:01 PM



“ *Barbara used to call me her "argentinian brother" for she spent two unforgettable months at home in Paraná, Argentina, as a student on an AFS exchange program in winter 1976. My family never forgot her kindness, her joy nor the sweetness of her smile. I will always remember the many times we enjoyed playing piano together. So Barb, you will be with us forever. Jorge Suarez Verdier*

Jorge Suarez Verdier - November 03, 2024 at 09:27 PM

SO

“ *Barbara and I spent very good times when she was on a student exchange program. Our friendship will last forever*

Soledad - January 10, 2024 at 11:13 AM

SO

*She studied in Argentina for two months in 1975 in a little town called Parana. She lived with my family and I at that time. Barbara will live forever in my heart*

Soledad - January 10, 2024 at 01:59 PM

TF

“ *Barbara and I were the two pianists in our Stanley Junior High orchestra. She was by far the better pianist, but was always generous with her tips and praise, and always so kind. She has left us too early, but it sounds like her life after High School was amazing and well-lived. Considering our classes in common during high school were mainly science, it is very appropriate that both she and I ended up with this as a career. RIP Barbara*  
*Tom Fraser, Acalanes Class of 1977*

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**Tom Fraser** - November 15, 2023 at 10:30 PM