

# MARTHA PRENTISS

July 7, 1949–December 1, 2019

Exuberance is the quality that I most associate with Martha Prentiss. She had a joy for life and expressed it without restraint. Martha turned 70 on July 7, 2019 and celebrated with a group of friends at Tong's Thai that included me, Graciela and Michael. We had also been with her at the *Esperanza's* 30th anniversary celebration, August, 2017—and many times before.

Our history with Martha began in the late 80s when the LGBTQ community was hardly visible in San Antonio—in fact, everyone was either a lesbian or a gay man and mostly focused on the AIDS crisis. Martha was already a mover and shaker in the Lesbian community having been a founder of the collective that set up the *Las Mujeres Bookstore* in 1981. She also created the *LISA Line, Lesbian Information San Antonio*, a telephone answering service—that did everything from save lives to giving out info for the lesbian community. From there the lesbian publication, *WomanSpace*, was started and ran from 1988 to 2007. *La Voz de Esperanza*, too, began publication in November, 1988. We were bound at the heart with Martha from the beginning of *Esperanza's* history.

Then there were the *Tuesday Night Discussions* that Martha initiated with lesbian bar owner, Kay Ford, who owned *The Jezebel* and later, *The Circle*. The *Esperanza's* Network group, *ELLAS*, a statewide Latina Lesbian group, soon held tardeadas and workshops there, too. From that, the *Texas Lesbian Conference (TLC)* came into being with Martha coordinating with Dallas lesbians to begin a 14 year history of the *TLC* in 1989. Martha also served as co-chair of the *TLC* in 1990 and in 1994. The *TLC* was held at the Menger Hotel in 1990, next to the Alamo! The *Esperanza* hosted a Lesbian film night for the *TLC* at the *Guadalupe Theater* that the religious right protested starting a media campaign against the *Esperanza* that lasted several years culminating in the defunding of the *Esperanza* by the City of San Antonio. Martha would serve as a boardmember of the *Esperanza* at a very crucial time in our history rallying support for the *Esperanza* in the LGBT community as we filed suit

against the City to recover our funding. Martha also served on the *SALGA* (San Antonio Lesbian Gay Assembly) board and worked with the *Human Rights Campaign Fund (HRCF)* that later honored her at a *Black Tie Dinner*.

Martha was also a multi-talented artist. In 1990 at the 2nd lesbian and gay art exhibit at the *Esperanza*, Martha showed a piece entitled, *Read My Hips*, a collage of feminist newspaper clippings covering the torso of a woman. During the ensuing years she worked hard to support lesbian artists helping to queerate art exhibits at the *Esperanza*. I did not fully appreciate Martha's acting talents until I saw her perform as Gertrude Stein at *JumpStart* in 2001. She was so comfortable and piquant as Gertrude Stein, as only Martha could be. When I learned that she had a small part in the TV series, *Friday Night Lights*—I watched so I could see her on TV. Whether a small part or the main role in acting, Martha was superb.

Martha's craftsmanship as a silversmith and jeweler was legendary. One of my best friends asked Martha to design a baby spoon for her little girl—she came up with a nopalito spoon that is still cherished by that baby now a grown woman. Martha's jewelry was showcased at the *Esperanza's Peace Market* for many years. Now, her iconic San Antonio and woman-centered pieces will continue to be produced and sold through Jane Iris Designs (<http://bit.ly/prentiss-jewelry>).

Finally, who could forget Martha's legendary fundraising Cancer parties that went on annually for years in Martha's own backyard bringing lesbians from throughout San Antonio to celebrate her and her Cancer buddies, Jan Olsen and Frances Timmons. Martha, known as the mayor of Lesbian San Antonio, knew how to make community and in her fight against *Lewy Body Dementia* in the last few years, her community of friends surrounded her with love and labor that brought her life to a fitting end.

**A Celebration of Martha Prentiss—the Last Cancer Party**—will be held on January 4, 2020 at 3pm at *The Public Theater* of San Antonio, 800 W. Ashby in San Antonio.

Martha Prentiss, siempre presente!  
—Gloria A. Ramirez



Martha at Esperanza's 30th celebration.



Martha at Esperanza's old space on N. Flores.



Martha's last visit to Esperanza's Peace Market in 2018 with lifelong friend, Rhonda Chase.



At her 70th birthday on July 7, 2019 with friends.