

Tavern owner known as advocate for abused | Gorde also was court interpreter OBITUARY

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Paula Gorde ran a tavern, took in abused women and their families, and worked for 40 years as a Spanish language interpreter in the courts.

She could cook and sew, too. "She could take a man's overcoat and turn it into a snowsuit for kids," her daughter, Lona Morales, said of Gorde, who died Tuesday of complications of a stroke. She was 92.

The oldest of six children, Gorde came to America from the Jalisco state of Mexico. She was 7 years old. Her family moved to Fond du Lac. When she was 12, her father died and she helped raise the family, Morales said.

She moved to Milwaukee around 1940, shortly after marrying her first husband. Soon after moving here, she got a job as a translator for the Spanish-speaking, her daughter said.

"She enjoyed it because she believed in the law," Morales

Gorde said. "She believed in justice and she believed in the system."

She also believed that women should not live with abuse. Over the years, she and her second husband, Christ Gorde, took in abused women and their children from the neighborhood. They never charged them for the room and board. They once took in a family of seven. Gorde would accompany the women to court, if it got to that point, but she never pushed.

"She would say, 'You don't have to live like that. If you want to, that's your decision.' But she'd say, 'If you want help, I can take you to the right people,' her daughter said.

People in her south side neighborhood knew she would help these women. "People would come to her. She was known - that she could help you," her daughter said.

In the mid-1970s, Gorde and her husband opened Paula's Tavern at S. 25th and W. Scott streets. They lived upstairs.

"She was famous for the food. She had chicken fries and fish fries and Mexican food - tacos, tostadas, beans and rice," her daughter said. She was also famous for serving coffee to people who had had enough to drink.

The tavern closed in 1989, but Gorde continued to live on the south side. Her new mission: Block watch captain. She received a certificate from her alderman for the block watch work and kept at it even as her health declined. She'd sit in her yard and watch, write notes of suspicious characters, call in a report. She could be seen in her motorized chair, sometimes late at night, checking the block, her daughter said.

Gorde suffered a stroke in 2011, and another one this year. After that, she worried about having to move. She worried about dying alone. But she died as she wished.

"I was there holding her hand, talking to her," Morales said.

"She worked hard. She could be hard as nails. She was just my mom."

Besides her daughter, Gorde is survived by a son, Christ II; 11 grandchildren, 25 great-grandchildren and 28 great-great grandchildren.

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PAULA M. GORDE Services will be Saturday at the Congregation of the Great Spirit, 1000 W. Lapham Blvd., with visitation from 9 a.m. until the Mass at 11 a.m.

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