

Mary Lou Hely

Staff Writer
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Mary Lou Hely, died on September 16, 2026, in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, at the age of 74. She had been diagnosed with ALS almost two years prior but lived with realism, patience, and a vibrancy of spirit with that terminal condition up to her death.

Mary Lou was raised in Westfield, New Jersey with her parents and six siblings. She graduated from Westfield High School in 1969 where she was active in the Student Council, the Sports Council, and as a varsity cheerleader. In 1973, she graduated from Florida Southern College. From both high school and college, she developed many lifelong friends.

Mary Lou felt passionately about building a thriving career and life independently, despite the challenges of doing so for women at the time. She was an early entrant into the field of computer network servicing, starting with the development of word processors. In 1979, her work placed her on an extended cruise aboard the USS Nimitz to support the new word processor systems on the ship. She was the only woman on the ship with 5,000 men.

For the great majority of her career, she worked in Silicon Valley while residing first in San Mateo, and then in Half Moon Bay, California. Among the companies she contributed to were Synoptics and Cisco Systems. She concluded her career with Siemens Ultrasound.

Over her decades in California, she was involved in community activities such as volunteering with Hospice, the Crisis Intervention Center, and the AIDS Legal Referral Panel. She also served as a Planned Parenthood escort and was named to and served on the board of Meals on Wheels of San Francisco.

Upon retirement, Mary Lou elected to return to the East Coast to be closer to her extended family. She purchased a home in the former Lancaster Press Building. In Lancaster, she made many dear friends, often cared for and loved spending time with her grand-niece Delaney, was active in the Lancaster Downtowners, volunteered with the Lancaster County Food Hub, and ushered at the Fulton Theatre. Throughout her adult life, she cherished her cats and was a doting mom to them, despite having a feline allergy.

Mary Lou was predeceased by her parents, Dr. Charles Hely and Anne (Nancy) Hely, her older sister, Anne (Nancy) Patterson, and sister-in-law Susan Volpe Hely. She is survived by her siblings, Judge Charles Hely (Ret.) of Needham, MA; Daniel Hely, M.D. and his spouse Kim of Carlisle, PA; James Hely and his spouse Lois of Westfield, NJ; Elizabeth Hely and her spouse Bruce Simon of Durham, NC; Kathleen Hely and her spouse Orville Augustin of Aurora, CO; and her two beloved cats, Dickens and Gabe.

She is also survived by numerous nieces and nephews with whom she maintained loving contact, including by taking them on trips all over the globe. These are Nicole Ittner, Carolyn Hely, Steve Hely, Meghan Hely Walsh, Rosy Hely Reed, Charlie Hely, Peter Hely, Brian Hely, Christine Hely Gorman, Andy Simon, Suzy Simon, Margot Simon, and Brian Augustin.

In advance of her death, Mary Lou agreed to donate her brain to the University of Maryland Brain and Tissue Bank. Memorial donations could be made to the Lancaster County Food Hub or ProjectALS.org.

A celebration of her life is being planned for a future date in Lancaster.



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