Early Life

María Isabel Lora Olivo, affectionately known as Chabela, was born November 19, 1918, in the city of Montecristi, Dominican Republic. She was the daughter of Eligio Lora, a native of the city of Puerto Plata, a place known for its natural beauty as the “bride of the Atlantic.” Her mother was Laura de la Paz Olivo, a native of the city of Monte Cristi, located on the northwest side of the Dominican Republic. From this union, Maricusa, María Isabel, and Eligio were born. María Isabel had another brother named Luis, from her father’s side. She spent her childhood in San Pedro de Macorís, on the east side of the island, where she would eventually learn about the gospel of our Lord Jesus.¹

She became acquainted with the Adventist message in a providential way through the Leonor family in San Pedro de Macorís. They invited her to assist the Adventist church, along with her sister Maricusa. At the same time, a friend of her Aunt Lucia invited them to another church of a different denomination; but over time, they decided to attend the Adventist church exclusively. She began attending church when she was nine years old and soon became the choir’s “mascot.” The choir was directed by Brother Cricket, and she would later sing there for the glory of God.²

After some time, her older sister, Maricusa, made the decision to be baptized in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Pastor Peter Nygaard, an American missionary, baptized her. However, Chabela did not want to be baptized at that time because she liked secular music and her dream was to be a singer to delight the world. However, God had other wonderful plans since she had a sincere heart and wished to be obedient to God’s word.³

Finally, the day came when María Isabel decided to be baptized and Pastor Nygaard officiated at the ceremony. She and her sister began to study the Bible with her Aunt Lucia and her grandmother, María Lora, who had been
baptized in the Adventist church in San Pedro de Macorís. María Isabel had the privilege of meeting the pioneer who brought the Adventist message to the Dominican Republic. Colporteur Charles Moulton had arrived from Puerto Rico in 1907. María Isabel was a student in the children's Bible class whose teacher, Liliana, was Charles's daughter.

Education and Marriage

She studied only through eighth grade. However, this was not an obstacle for María Isabel to feel comfortable; get involved in society and in the church; and make great contributions to different areas of the church. María Isabel had the habit of writing and she had papers spread out everywhere with notes that she would later use for her work at the radio station and at church.

María Isabel married Chichí Martínez in the city of La Romana on the east side of the country. Her second marriage was to Antonio Pereira and they had one daughter, Cidelisse Eugenia Pereira Lora.

Career and Ministry

Her intense work for God's cause was divided into two areas, the denomination and the local church. She worked as secretary for the Escuela Radio Postal La Voz de la Esperanza program, first as a volunteer from 1960 to 1965 and then as an employee from 1965 to 1984. With great commitment, she was very faithful in correcting the lessons that interested people completed and sent in. Sometimes, in order to not be late with work, she took part of her money and paid another person so that everything was done on time and those who knew Christ could be baptized in the Adventist church.

As María Isabel served as director of the Dorcas Society for the church, she would visit the homes of those most needy and help them get what they needed for the house, whether it was a bed or a home appliance. She would obtain many of these items on her own credit, and the store would approve it because she was a good client who always paid on time. She would also put together food baskets for the needy during the Christmas season. Besides being director of the Dorcas Society, she was also director of deaconesses and church secretary.

She collaborated with the Bible Society in her eagerness for people to receive a copy of the Bible. She was a teacher and director of the children's department at her local Mella Avenue Church, the country's first organized church in 50 years. She had an overflowing passion to work with children and youth and help them in their training and preparation to be leaders. She instructed the girls on how to do the work and then those same girls became the children's teachers. She would mentor future leaders of the church.

Pioneer
She was a pioneer for *La Voz de la Esperanza*, being its secretary for 25 years. She worked as a partner with pastors and leaders of local churches, providing follow-up to all students of *La Voz de la Esperanza* and carrying the message of peace, hope, and love.\(^{11}\)

**Places of Missionary Work**

Her first mission field was her local church where she served in different departments and at the Radio School of *La Voz de la Esperanza*. However, she was an active missionary, giving Bible studies and being a faithful collaborator with evangelists Efraín Murillo and David Gómez. Many people joined the church and, as a result, there was great growth.\(^{12}\)

**Ministries She Initiated**

She formed the first children's choir of the Mella Adventist Church and the country. This church was established in 1917 and was the first to be organized in the Dominican Republic, becoming a center for the development of Adventist work throughout the country.\(^{13}\)

**Baptisms**

As a result of the work at the Escuela Radio Postal, more than 2,000 people were studying the Bible and receiving the correspondence lessons. This resulted in hundreds of people giving their lives to Jesus. In addition, with her ministry in the local church and with her support for the evangelists of the conference, many others came to the feet of Christ.\(^{14}\)

**Publications: A Project Almost to Become a Reality**

As a connoisseur of the history of Adventism in the Dominican Republic and being the protagonist of many of the events, as well as a student in the Sabbath school taught by the daughter of the man who brought Adventism to the country, she was preparing a book to tell that story. She had many compilations, testimonies, and photographs, but because of her death, she could not finish writing the story.\(^{15}\)

**Acknowledgments**

She received many awards for her work in favor of children and the Dorcas Society of the Dominican Union Conference, Central Dominican Conference, her local church, and other entities. Among the people who recognized her work was the renowned Adventist singer, Del Delker, for her work at the station and at the Escuela Radio Postal *La Voz de la Esperanza*.\(^{16}\)
Later Life

Chabela Lora worked for 25 years for the Adventist system, five of which were as a volunteer, all in La Voz de la Esperanza. She retired on January 1, 1984, but continued actively working at her local church and at Radio Amanecer Internacional, where she spent part of her time as a collaborator in the radio ministry.\(^{17}\)

Her love for the children and youth of the church was ever present until her death on December 7, 2011, in Santo Domingo, capital of the Dominican Republic. She was buried wearing the Adventist Pathfinders’ uniform.\(^{18}\)

Contributions and Legacy

The work of María Isabel Lora Olivo was full of enthusiasm, dedication, and unselfish love for the work of God. Her passion was to work for God and properly train the children and youth of the church, molding them into faithful members and proper citizens of society.\(^{19}\) Her spirit of service in favor of the poor, sick, and unfortunate made her a faithful witness to the eternal gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

NOTES

1. Maricusa Lora, Chabela Lora's sister, telephone interview by author.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Maricusa Lora, Chabela Lora's sister, telephone interview by author.

7. Ruth Batista provided materials such as Chabela Lora's letters, photos, and awards from the Escuela Radio Postal and the Mella Church.

8. Luz María de Luna, former director of children's ministry of Central Dominican Conference, provided important historical data.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Maricusa Lora, Chabela Lora's sister, telephone interview by author.
12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. Ruth Batista, Chabela Lora's granddaughter, telephone interview by author.

16. Ruth Batista provided materials such as Chabela Lora's letters, photos, and awards from the Escuela Radio Postal and the Mella Church.

17. Maricusa Lora, Chabela Lora's sister, telephone interview by author.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.