

Frida Kahlo's Backbone

By Michael Leach, PhD



Frida Kahlo, 1932. Photograph by Guillermo Kahlo (1871-1941). Public domain / Wikimedia Commons

Frida Kahlo was born in July 1907
in old Coyoacán, Mexico.
She was six years old going on 47
when polio struck her down.
She survived with a shriveled leg
and threw herself into sports.
Proud parents stoked the bright fire
of young Frida's quick mind.
At 18, Frida was in a motor crash
that fractured her to pieces.
Though she was lucky to be alive,
her life goals burned to ash.
Frida went from aspiring doctor to
patient trapped in body casts.
She was alone, in pain and unable
to ambulate for near a year.
She began to create oil paintings
that mirrored her pained life.
Diego Rivera loved her portraits
of her own body and mind.
They became a married couple –
old painter & new painter.
Frida suffered a miscarriage then
painted her beloved fetus.
In her art, she birthed herself into
a bloodstained landscape.



Frida Kahlo, 1919. Photograph by Guillermo Kahlo (1871-1941). Public domain / Wikimedia Commons



Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, 1932. Image credit: [Carl Van Vechten Photographs collection](#), Library of Congress

The resilient love between Diego & Frida was often tested. Diego's affair with Frida's sister made Frida crop her hair. Frida divided into two Fridas with the power of self-nurture. She processed her darkest memories while soaking in bathwater. She offset the darkness with vibrant strokes of color and humor. Her art was exhibited and praised in Mexico, the US and Europe. Picasso praised her art and gave her gold, hand-shaped earrings. Frida connected with art lovers who felt her loneliness and pain. She had many orthopedic surgeries, only to continue suffering. She painted a still life of watermelon pieces as the end closed in. Frida Kahlo left her body in July 1954 in old Coyoacán, Mexico. Her body of work captured a tendency to show plenty of backbone.

About the Author



Dr. Michael J. Leach is employed as a Data and Quality Specialist at the Loddon Mallee Integrated Cancer Service, which is located in a hospital setting. He is also a published epidemiologist, writer, poet and visual artist with a background in pharmacy and a keen interest in history. In terms of rehabilitation research, his work on quality of life at seven years post-stroke has been published in the Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery & Psychiatry. Michael's poetry is published or forthcoming in the Medical Journal of Australia, Medical Humanities, The Galway Review, A New Ulster, The Haiku Journal, Pulse – Voices from the Heart of Medicine, and Survive & Thrive: A Journal for Medical Humanities and Narrative as Medicine.

Michael writes poetry to convey the poignancy and beauty that he perceives in life, be it in the present day or in the pages of history. His health-related poems arise out of an inclination to reflect on patient journeys and empathise with patients. Michael currently lives in his birthplace of Bendigo, Australia.



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