

ARIZONA *Our history*

Our story **LATINA**

TRAILBLAZERS

Stories of Courage, Hope & Determination

Vol II

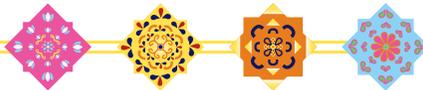


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INTRODUCTION

As educators, social workers, labor leaders, entrepreneurs, scholars, judicial representatives, homemakers, nurses, ranch wives, or political representatives, Latinas and Hispanas have not been strangers in Arizona's history. It is important that their stories be recalled and remembered, and that we recognize their long-standing contributions to the development of our state as we approach Arizona's 100th anniversary of statehood in 2012. After all, these women are among the state's "trailblazers," women who established a strong social, cultural, and political presence prior to Arizona's statehood.

They are women from the families of Tomás de Belderrain, Mariano Urrera, Manuel de León, and Manuel Ygnacio de Arvizu—men who served as military officers in their Spanish presidio in Tubac in the 1750s. They are women whose families established large ranches as early as 1821 in southern Arizona—families like those of Francisco and Leopoldo Carrillo and Manuel Amado. We should know about Latinas like Pancha Acuña and her daughter Faustina, who were already in the Arizona Territory in 1863, accompanied by family members who came to the Prescott area to join in the gold rush. Or Juanita Bachichia, who established a boarding house for gold miners in 1864 on Lynx Creek in central Arizona's gold district. We know about Mexican women like Trinidad Mejía Escalante

Swilling, the "Mother of Phoenix," who came to the Salt River Valley in 1867 and made her first home in Wickenburg. And we know that Anson P. K. Safford, who served as Arizona's territorial governor from 1869 to 1877, met and married two Mexican women: Margarita Grijalva of Tucson, who died in 1880, and Soledad Bonillas, and made them representatives who oversaw the governor's official territorial home. And we must not overlook the women who, along with their families, settled in the rough and tumultuous copper-mining areas like Clifton-Morenci, Globe-Miami, and the Bisbee area by the early 1900s.

The trailblazers that we honor in 2010 have established their own unique presence in Arizona's modern history. Their collective voices give meaning to our lives because their own lives shed light on the power of women's work and value. The power of their actions resolved matters of injustice, racism, poverty, inequality, school segregation, and unionism. And so we honor them and all that they represent as women, as heroines, as leaders, and as sisters. We must not forget the names of Julia Cecilia Cuesta Soto Zozaya, Plácida Elvira García Smith, Dora Ocampo Quesada, Alicia Otilia Ocampo Quesada, Anna Marie Ochoa O'Leary, Carmela Ramírez, and Barbara Rodríguez Mundell—Latina Trailblazers.



Julia Cecilia Cuesta Soto Zozaya **“My Adversity is My Strength.”**

Julia Cecilia Cuesta Soto Zozaya was a woman of strong convictions and filled with a deep sense of civic responsibility and public service, truly a woman of her time. She wouldn't take “no” for an answer when it came to helping those in need. It was a trait she learned from her mother—a trait that would define her, despite personal adversity.

Julia was born to Basque parents, Francisco Cuesta Soto and Maria Blanco Soto, on March 23, 1926, near Oatman, Arizona, a historic mining district near the Colorado River in Mohave County. From the early 1900s to the mid 1940s, Oatman was among the largest gold producers in Arizona. The mining camp attracted gold hunters, health seekers, cowboys, cattlemen, and frontiersmen looking for excitement and an easy way to get rich. The Oatman-Kingman area, however, attracted Julia's father for different reasons: sheepherding and ranching opportunities. His hard work and accomplishments in these two ventures garnered the respect and authority that brought success and prosperity to him and his family.

Julia's father, born in 1874, and mother, born in 1893, were both from Cangas de Onís, Asturias, Spain. At the age of 18, her father



Courtesy of Steve Zozaya

Julia Cuesta Soto Zozaya

immigrated to the United States and settled within the Basque colony in Flagstaff, finding work as a foreman for the George W. Smith Sheep Company. By 1914, he found work on the Martin Ranch, located approximately 20 miles



from Oatman, near the Colorado River, raising and tending sheep and cattle. In the period from 1914 to 1931, Julia's parents raised six sons and two daughters; she was the seventh child. She was educated in the Mohave County public school system and graduated from Kingman High School in 1944.

As a teenager, Julia began to experience serious health and eyesight impairments. Her family was in a quandary, trying to determine what was happening to her. Her parents sought medical assistance from physicians at a University of California medical clinic in Los Angeles. She was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa, an inherited eye disorder that gradually destroys the retina. Over time, young Julia lost her vision entirely.

In 1945, after she graduated from high school, she married Steven Zozaya, a Purple Heart World War II veteran and Kingman native. Steven served with Company G, Arizona, the 158th Infantry Regiment known as the Bushmasters. The couple's only child bears his father's name.

By 1953, at the age of 27, Julia was declared legally blind. Fueled with a new sense of energy, will, and determination to find a purpose in life, she merged her sense of beauty and fashion with her interest in the world of business, and began her first career. Despite the loss of vision, she sold custom jewelry and fashion accessories for the Sarah Coventry Company. In 1957, she



November 1979 cover of *La Luz Magazine*

Courtesy of Steve Zozaya

earned high praise and admiration for her work among her business peers and customers, and reached the top in national sales. She later went back to school to learn more about how to start and successfully manage a business. In 1960, at the age of 34, she completed business training and obtained certification from Lamson Business College, along with an Associate of Arts degree from Phoenix College.



During that time, her husband was developing the Zozaya Construction Company and needed her help to make the business a success. Embarking on her second career, Julia became the company's business manager and administrator of employee relations, working directly with department heads and supervisors in personnel matters. With her easy and self-assured way and ability to communicate and express her respect for the value of work, she, in turn, gained the respect of those around her. She knew she had found her niche and turned her



Courtesy of Steve Zozaya

Julia and Steve Zozaya



KNNN logo

adversity into the desire to help others. “That’s what you have to do,” said Julia. “There’s no sense sitting around and feeling sorry for yourself as long as you can help someone.”

From 1966 to 1982, Julia worked on her third career. She served as information specialist for the State of Arizona, developing programs to assist the poor, designing workshops and seminars for racial and ethnic minorities to help them learn about social services, and meeting with state and federal representatives to discuss and plan strategies to bring economic stability to working families and single mothers.

In 1972, Julia embarked on her fourth career and sought to obtain a license to operate a 24-hour radio station within the boundaries of her home to inform the Spanish-speaking community of resources and services available to them. Over the next nine years, she found herself entrenched in a fierce battle with a Hollywood celebrity living in Carefree who also



sought a license to operate an FM radio station in Phoenix; heated arguments ensued. The Federal Communications Commission review board engaged the two parties in discussions, numerous reviews of applications, and hearings, all to no avail. The U.S. Court of Appeals issued judgments that were accepted and contested, and the matter moved slowly through the court system. Finally, on May 7, 1981, the Federal Communications Commission granted her a license to operate a 24-hour Spanish-language FM radio station in Phoenix, and she became owner and general manager. That year, KNNN-FM became the third Spanish-language radio station in the Valley of the Sun, joining KPHX and KIFN in efforts to provide news, information, music, and entertainment to the Mexican and Mexican American community in Maricopa County.

Julia's fifth career began in 1992 when she became the first blind person to pass Arizona's examination for a real estate salesperson's license. She attended the Bud Crawley School of Real Estate, where accommodations were made for her lack of vision. The Arizona Department of Economic Security provided her with a human "note taker" who accompanied her to class and with class lecture tape recordings that she copied and studied at home. The Arizona Department of Real Estate arranged for her to take the salesperson's examination with assistance from the examination supervisor who read the



Courtesy of Steve Zozaya

Julia Cuesta Soto Zozaya

questions to her. She passed the examination easily, an accomplishment that was remarkable to many. With her participation, the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA), which became law on July 26, 1990, made this "first" possible in the real estate industry of Arizona. A short time later, Century 21 Heinemann Real Estate in Phoenix hired Julia. Her Arizona license enabled



her to work with Century 21 offices in Mexico, buying and listing real estate properties in Arizona and across the international border.

Julia's sixth career in 1997 met with great success. She completed the requirements to secure licenses to sell life insurance, property and casualty insurance, and the transactions of securities for Primerica Financial Services, a member of Citigroup. "This was a feat never before accomplished by anyone in the Primerica Financial Services Family," said Huel Cox, Jr., senior vice president of Primerica Financial

Services in Phoenix. Not one to rest on such praise, she soon established a financial

training center for the Spanish-speaking community of Maricopa County, emphasizing career development strategies and financial stability. She also mentored young associates in their own new careers with Primerica, earning their respect and admiration.

Through her love of business and communication, Julia is locally and nationally known for her volunteerism and community service. She belonged to many organizations, including the Arizona Federation of the Blind, the Arizona Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), where she served as national vice president from 1968 to 1997. She was also actively involved with the Arizona-Mexico Commission, the Division for the Handicapped and the Blind of the Arizona State Department of Education, the Arizona State Committee for the Employment of the Handicapped, American Women in Radio and Television, and the Arizona Metropolitan Broadcasters Association. They all attest to her dedication and commitment to serving others.

Julia exemplified moral courage, strength, and a strong will to succeed. Despite her visual impairment, her compassion for others and her relentless drive to achieve serves as an example for others who can make a difference in their own communities. She died on May 3, 2004, at the age of 78. She was, indeed, a trailblazer, a woman of substance. Her adversity was her strength.

Courtesy of Steve Zozaya

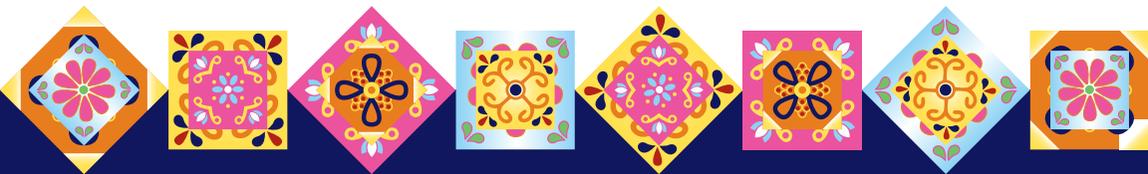


Left to right: Ray Gano, Mauricio Mendez; Seated: Julia Cuesta Soto Zozaya

As educators, social workers, labor leaders, entrepreneurs, homemakers, nurses, ranch wives, or political representatives, Latinas and Hispanas have long been at the forefront of Arizona's history. It is important that we recognize the impact of their individual contributions and imperative that their collective stories be recalled and shared, especially as we approach Arizona's 100th anniversary of statehood.

The life journeys of these women are filled with compelling stories that reflect the strength of their vision, their courageous actions, and their thoughtful advocacy. Their outstanding leadership formed strong cultural cornerstones, laying the foundation for women in leadership roles today.

And so we honor them and all that they represent, pioneers who forged our rich cultural heritage and strong role models.



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