

ARIZONA *Our history*
Our story **LATINA**
TRAILBLAZERS

Stories of Courage, Hope & Determination

Vol II

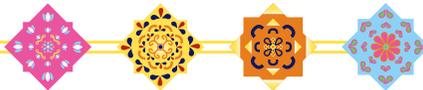


ARIZONA *Our history*
Our story **LATINA**
TRAILBLAZERS
Stories of Courage, Hope & Determination

Vol II

BY
CHRISTINE MARIN, PH.D.

PUBLISHED BY
LATINO PERSPECTIVES MEDIA
AND
RAUL H. CASTRO INSTITUTE



Copyright © 2010

by Latino Perspectives Media and Raul H. Castro Institute

Phoenix, Arizona

Edited by: Maria Enciso, Micaela Rios, Michelle Klinger / Phoenix College

Designed by: J. Alfredo Hernández / Phoenix College

All rights reserved, including the right of reproduction in whole or in part in any form.

The publishers grant permission to individual teachers to reproduce the contents of this book for educational purposes and classroom use.

Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty: While the author and the publishers have used their best efforts in preparing this publication, they make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of its contents and specifically disclaim any intent to defame or slight any people, places or organizations.

Printed in the United States of America

April 2010



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.

Barbara Rodríguez Mundell
Presiding Judge, Maricopa County Superior Court System



Barbara Rodríguez Mundell is today the presiding judge of the Superior Court in Maricopa County, yet she never set out to be a judge. Arizona Chief Justice Charles E. Jones notified Barbara on December 7, 2004, her 49th birthday, she had been selected to become the presiding judge of the Maricopa County Superior Court system, a five-year appointment, which became effective on July 1, 2005. She is the first female and the first Hispanic to ever hold this position. As the presiding judge, she oversees the work of approximately 95 judges, 58 commissioners, more than 4,000 staff members including probation officers, 25 justice courts, and 23 municipal courts in Maricopa County.

Born in 1955 to a Mexican American fieldworker's family in South Phoenix, Barbara grew up in a loving home with two siblings and her parents, Frank and Malena Rodríguez. Her parents were humble, hard-working people; neither had completed elementary school. Both the oldest children in their respective families, her mother and father had to drop out of school in order to help support the household. Barbara grew up aware of the tremendous sacrifices her parents made for their families and for their own



Barbara Rodríguez Mundell; 1972

Courtesy of Barbara Rodríguez Mundell

children. In fact, the person she credits most for her drive to achieve and improve the lives of others is her father.





Barbara Rodríguez Mundell with César Chávez and other youth during one of Chávez's visits to Phoenix

In an effort to demonstrate the importance of an education, Barbara's father hauled the family to an onion field early one Saturday morning. The entire family picked onions for eight hours and still did not make enough money to cover the cost of lunch. This left a huge impression with Barbara.

Barbara attended Sierra Vista Elementary School in South Phoenix. At Sierra Vista, she found encouragement and support from her teachers. One teacher in particular, Ms.

Katherine Kutis, Barbara's English teacher, was the one who encouraged her to campaign for the student council. Although Barbara was unsure about this, she followed her teacher's recommendation and won, becoming the student council secretary. This experience helped Barbara gain self-confidence. She also learned to trust those who believed in her. Ms. Kutis recognized Barbara's potential and believed in her abilities. In 2005, Barbara accepted an invitation from the school to be the guest speaker at their eighth

grade graduation ceremony. She spoke to the students at the same elementary school where she was student council secretary. Her message to the young students was to pursue education, to always give their best, and that no dream is too big.

While her family life was supportive, Barbara lived in an environment where families like hers faced economic struggles and hardships—and racism. What she saw and experienced as a young girl convinced her that the creation and enforcement of laws to protect the poor and disadvantaged were the avenues to social change and the end of economic exploitation and discrimination. Her beloved parents had instilled in her the value and importance of hard work and education and to hold on to her dreams of success. She was not allowed to date in high school, which led her to believe she would never marry. She began planning a law career while a student at South Mountain High School.

She attended Arizona State University, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science in 1978. Her goal was to study law, which she viewed as “the great equalizer,” whose practitioners have the abilities and skills to correct injustice. “The law is a tool to be used to ensure fairness for all regardless of race, gender, or creed,” she has often said. Barbara was accepted into the College of Law at Arizona State University, now called the Sandra Day O’Connor School of Law, the leading law school in the

Phoenix metropolitan area and a partner with one of the premier public research universities in the nation, Arizona State University. Course-work was rigorous, challenging, time consuming, and demanding. Long days and nights at the law library became a familiar and tiring routine for Barbara. Coupled with her drive to achieve success was her parents’ examples of



Barbara Rodríguez Mundell; 1966

Courtesy of Barbara Rodríguez Mundell



quiet strength and courage in times of adversity and change. Barbara persevered and received her juris doctorate degree in 1981. She then studied for and passed the Arizona Bar exam.

Barbara became an associate counsel for Swenson's Ice Cream Corporation. She entered



Courtesy of Barbara Rodríguez Mundell

Barbara Rodríguez Mundell; 1978, college graduation

private practice in 1983, and for the next four years, she provided representation in workers' compensation and Social Security cases, earning the respect and admiration of her colleagues and judicial administrators. She ended the decade of the 1980s as an administrative law judge with the Arizona Industrial Commission, hearing and resolving cases and issuing formal written decisions in matters involving workers' compensation.

"I never consciously set out to become a judge," she has often stated. But in 1991, she became a judge in the Superior Court of Maricopa County, presiding over civil cases. The work offered Barbara many opportunities over the years to learn the intricacies of the law and test her own skills and knowledge of Arizona's court system programs and their functions. The next decade would bring Barbara new challenges and well-deserved recognition of her work well beyond her own expectations. She has served in all of the major departments in the court system: civil, criminal, family, juvenile, probate, and mental health.

Barbara is very active in her community and is a member of the National Association of Women Judges, a board member of the National Center for State Courts, and is a past president of Los Abogados Hispanic Bar Association. Additionally, Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government selected Judge Rodríguez Mundell to serve as a member of its Executive Session for State Court Leaders in 2008 for a

three-year period, addressing the topic of court leaders in the 21st century. She has received numerous awards for her commitment and dedication. In 2006, she received the Governor's Office of Highway Safety award from Governor Janet Napolitano for the Spanish-speaking DUI probationary program. This innovative program conducts counseling, AA meetings, and court proceedings in Spanish to help convicted DUI offenders learn coping skills to maintain their sobriety. Also in 2006, she received the Special Recognition Award by Valle del Sol at the 16th Annual Profiles of Success Awards Celebration. In 2008, she received the Racial Justice Leadership Award from the YWCA. This award honored her as the first Hispanic woman to serve as presiding judge of the Maricopa County Superior Court and, more importantly, for her work bridging the gap between Latinos and the court system. In 2009, she received the Mark Santana Law-Related Education Award for her exceptional contributions in furthering education and understanding of the role of the law in our democratic society.

The Honorable Barbara Rodríguez Mundell is living the American Dream, the dream that began in South Phoenix under humble beginnings, which shaped her personality and drive to succeed. It is a dream forged by her parents and inspired by their sacrifices and realized through her hard work. She has said that the little girl from South Phoenix is still inside, always with



Superior Court Presiding Judge Barbara Rodríguez Mundell

Courtesy of Barbara Rodríguez Mundell

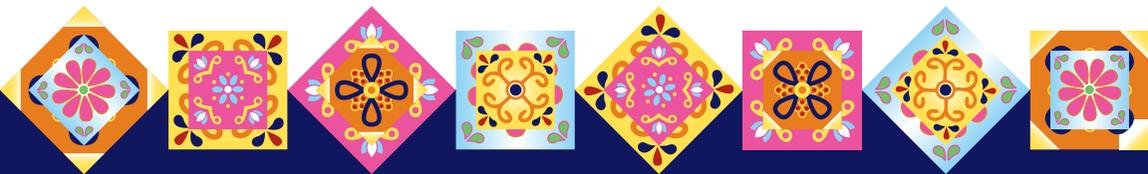
her, always a part of her. Presiding Judge Barbara Rodríguez Mundell has overcome her own challenges and has become a successful attorney and judge, based on her talent and will and strength of character.



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.



Raul H. Castro Institute
PUBLIC POLICY | EDUCATION | LEADERSHIP



Latino Perspectives magazine