

V101 -Maria Urquides - Arizona HERstory.mp3

Maria Urquides [00:00:09] When they were absent, I'd go and talk to the families. And with a male student. Look, Mr. Peters, he has to get out and help us. And why go to school? He's going to be a ditch digger. Because that and the Mexican people accepted this with the girls. It was a fact that they were going to be married. So they have to learn how to cook, how to take care of children.

Abraham Chanin [00:00:30] What did you answer those families?

Maria Urquides [00:00:32] I told them the time was coming when that would not be so.

Amanda Luberto [00:00:38] What set Maria Urquides apart is that she cared. At a time where Spanish speaking students were expected to learn English on their own in order to keep up in school? Maria saw a world that needed change. Her aspirations and dedication would not only take her to the white House under several different presidents, but it would change the way the country viewed bilingualism. Welcome to Arizona. Herstory on Valley 101, a series by The Arizona Republic and Easy central.com about the unknown women who changed our state's history. I'm producer Amanda Luberto, and today I'm sharing the story of Maria Luisa Laguerra Urquides. She was a teacher that grew up just outside of the Barrio Viejo in Tucson, in an area known as Le. After decades of pushing boundaries and expanding what can be found in the classroom. She became known as the mother of bilingual education. Maria was born on December 8th, 1908 to Marianna and Eladio. Her parents didn't get very far in their structured education, but that was pretty standard for Mexican Americans at the time. In a 1987 interview with Abraham Chanin for a show called Eye Witness to History, Maria says this didn't hold her parents back from instilling a strict work ethic in their house.

Maria Urquides [00:02:25] My father and my mother were just terrific. My father always emphasized education, working hard, giving more than was asked of you, and not to cheat, ever.

Amanda Luberto [00:02:39] Her father worked as the superintendent of streets and parks for the City of Tucson for almost 30 years. He was highly respected around the city and was a self-taught bilingual, according to historian and author Jan Cleere. In 2011, Jan wrote a book called Levi's in Lace Arizona Women Who Made History, and it features a chapter on Maria Urquides she also writes the Western Women column for the Tucson Daily Star, highlighting impactful women in the state's history.

Jan Cleere [00:03:13] Maria never felt disadvantaged as a Hispanic child when she was young, and she actually thrived on the different cultures that were in the Tucson area. She knew the total ten people that came into town with their wood and their maize and their acorns and tortillas to sell. And then, of course, the Chinese. They had roving vegetable carts. They had vegetable gardens on the outskirts of Tucson. So they would bring their vegetables in every day. Actually to one of her father's vacant lots. And they would sell their wares there. One story I love to tell about Maria is their family lived in a house behind a group of houses, which Maria described was filled with, quote, beautiful women. Well, one day one of the women saw Maria and she motioned to. She said, hi, honey, come on over. So Maria said, I got acquainted with these girls and she ran errands for them. She got good tips and she loved to go to the grocer for them, because the grocer always had an extra piece of hard candy for her. One of the women eventually invited Maria in to have

some strawberries with her, and as Maria said, that was the first time she ever had strawberries and cream with pink sugar.

Amanda Luberto [00:04:32] It was clear from a young age that the Tucson community and the cultures around the town were very important to her. When Maria started school, she only spoke Spanish, which was very typical of her age and the time, but students were only allowed to speak English in the classroom, a skill they were expected to learn independently.

Jan Cleere [00:04:56] So Maria and of course a lot of the other Mexican children were often punished if they spoke their native tongue. In fact, students weren't allowed to advance out of the first grade until they had mastered the English language. So many of these children spent two and three years in the first grade. And of course, it was difficult for these children to adapt to this new language because Spanish was spoken in their home. And quite frankly, there was not a lot of instruction. They were expected to pick up English on their own. They could not speak it at all. In the classroom, on the playground, any place at all. So they were very, very limited with these children. And the kids just did the best they could at home.

Amanda Luberto [00:05:38] Mexican mores were naturally present at school. Anglo culture was imposed. A young Maria often found herself stuck in between two worlds that were immiscible. However, Maria was very bright and she picked up on English pretty quickly. This helped her excel in her studies and inspired the desire to become a teacher herself. Going to college or leaving the home in general was not something that Mexican American girls did back then. Jan said that Maria's father encouraged her, but her mother was horrified. Yet in those days, the father made the final decision. So Maria enrolled in the Tempe State Teachers College in the mid 1920s, which you might now know as Arizona State University. This was under one condition, though, that she paid for half of her tuition on her own.

Jan Cleere [00:06:39] The only job she could get was scrubbing toilets at the school. That was all that was available to someone of her culture. So she did it. And that helped her get through school. What also help is she actually finally got a job singing in a restaurant in Tempe. And that restaurant was La Casa Vega, which at that time was owned by Carl Hayden, sister Sally.

Amanda Luberto [00:07:06] Carl Hayden was a seven term Democratic U.S. Senator for Arizona. The Hayden family was Arizona through and through. With roots stretching back to the 1800s. Carl and his sisters were born in Tempe before it was even named Tempe, and he was a Democratic representative way back in the territorial days. Senator Hayden was succeeded by another famous Arizonan, Barry Goldwater. Finding out that Maria or Geddes had ties to the Hayden family seemed very fitting of her character.

Jan Cleere [00:07:42] And so she worked for Sally Hayden at La Casa The Eye, and was able to get through school. She graduated in 1928, and she was valedictorian of her class, so it ended up to be a good experience, even though she struggled to get through school. And unfortunately, her father died six months after she graduated. And at that time, even though Maria was the youngest of five children, she became head of the household.

Amanda Luberto [00:08:07] Maria returned to Tucson after college to help take care of her family, and got a job teaching at Davis Elementary School. In 1928, Davis was a segregated school. Thus her students were predominantly Mexican, Mexican American, or

from the Akie tribe. She was a perfect fit for the school because she was bilingual, but teachers were still reprimanded for speaking anything but English.

Jan Cleere [00:08:36] I love a quote from Maria that I've seen where she says, if I ever go to hell, it'll be for scolding students to speak Spanish. Because she always felt that she needed first to communicate with the children. Then she could teach them. This is what she had to put up with. Maria got herself in trouble with school administrators on more than one occasion. As you can imagine, and one of the first times was she taught her children to sing a couple of songs for a program they were putting on. But she taught them to speak it in Spanish because of that, of course, what they knew. But as soon as the administrators heard the songs, they told her she could not have the children sing it, that she had to translate into English before so they could perform. So it went on from there. She kept bumping up against these brick walls and trying to educate these children.

Amanda Luberto [00:09:38] Even though she spent time toeing line between what was allowed and what could help her students learn. Maria. Okay, this looked back on this time fondly.

Maria Urquides [00:09:49] I had a beautiful time. I. I was a social service worker as well as a teacher. I knew a single family.

Amanda Luberto [00:10:05] After 20 years at Davis, Maria was transferred to a new school. She started at Sam Hughes Elementary in 1948, with the majority of her students came from upper middle class white families. This is where Maria first started to notice the difference in education and resources in the different areas of town.

Jan Cleere [00:10:28] Because here at Sam Hughes, they had a beautiful green playground where the Davis kids had a dirt playground. In fact, she tried to get some trees once to grow on the Davis playground and no one would water them for her. But at Sam Hughes, the kids actually had a library. Davis schools had no library. So Maria's argument was that these students could learn from each other, regardless of their culture or their background. And this was when she began her crusade to introduce bilingual, bicultural teaching programs in schools, not just in Arizona, but all across the country. And this was going to become her lifelong endeavor.

Amanda Luberto [00:11:13] And that Eyewitness to History interview, Maria described being at Sam Hughes as a new challenge, but that children are just children.

Maria Urquides [00:11:23] When I moved from Davis into Sam Hughes, I saw the difference between the education that these two groups of students were getting and how alienated they really were. And I thought, my heavens, this you know, we have to bring these youngsters together because they're going to be the future of Tucson.

Amanda Luberto [00:11:46] During this time in her life. She also went back to school. She got her bachelor's degree in education from the University of Arizona and even went on to get her master's. Her work in classroom by cultural ism and focus on ensuring her minority students were getting just as good of an education, was catching people's eye around Tucson. So when Pueblo High School opened in 1956 with a new teaching philosophy. Cultivating an environment for students to lead regardless of their race, language, or culture background. Maria or Geddes was tapped to join a new innovative bilingual program.

Dr. Maritza de la Trinidad [00:12:28] The principal at that time was Albert Brooks, and he asked her if she would mind teaching and moving to Pueblo High School in order to start and be a part of this new Spanish language program, because he knew about her use of Spanish in the classroom and her advocacy and really her belief in bilingualism.

Amanda Luberto [00:12:49] This is Doctor Maritza de la Trinidad. She is an educational historian whose focus is on Mexican-American education in the southwest.

Dr. Maritza de la Trinidad [00:13:00] She understood the importance of learning English, but she did not believe it had to be at the expense of the native language.

Amanda Luberto [00:13:08] Maria found joy in being both bilingual and bicultural, and had noticed that Mexican-American students were graduating high school without a grasp on either English or Spanish. She described them as existing in a vacuum. Mexican-American students who had been forced into English only educations have lost their ability to write and read in their native language, and knew very little about their heritage. She was disturbed when students allowed teachers to anglicized their names to make it easier on their instructors and white classmates. She knew that fostering a better connection to their roots resulted in higher self-esteem and thus higher test scores.

Dr. Maritza de la Trinidad [00:13:53] So she went to Pueblo High School, and there she met another teacher by the name of Adalberto Guerrero, who was a Spanish teacher for many years. Also was recruited by Albert Brooks to Pueblo High School to teach Spanish language skills and to teach Spanish language courses. There they both met a man by the name of Henkel, Yama and Henkel. Yeah, but he has an interesting background. Henkel Yamo is a Japanese gentleman and he was a Spanish teacher as well. And so what they did at Pueblo High School was develop a program that was called Spanish for Spanish speakers. Teaching Spanish to native Spanish speakers was also important to not just to maintain their language, but to strengthen their language and strengthen their language skills. Because what's unique about these, these teachers is that they understood that in order to learn another language, you must be strong in your primary language, in your home language, in your first language.

Amanda Luberto [00:14:59] Her work in bilingual education and by cultural ism was not only getting recognition in Tucson and in Arizona. What was getting the attention of U.S. presidents? Maria was involved in the National Education Association, or NEA, even before joining Pueblo High School. Here's Jan Clear again.

Jan Cleere [00:15:20] President Harry Truman at that time recognized her dedication to the students of all backgrounds. So he appointed her to a program that was going on called the white House Conference on Children and Youth. She actually sat on that committee or board, whatever you want to call it, through several presidents. But Harry Truman was the first one that recognized that Maria had quite a background and contribution that could really make a difference.

Amanda Luberto [00:15:47] During her eyewitness interview, Maria beams speaking of this time in her life.

Maria Urquides [00:15:52] Johnson named me to some committees, and Kennedy and I used to be able to sit in the Blue Room with Lady Bird Johnson and Eunice Kennedy talking about women and about poverty. And then I would sit in city and the Blue Room, come back to Myers Street, go and sit down and eat my tortilla or my chili Konkani with my

hand. And I thought, this is beautiful. To be able to live in two cultures like this, you know, and this everyone should experience. And I thought that bilingual education was the link.

Amanda Luberto [00:16:29] Back home, Maria was about to expand bilingual and bicultural education across the southwest. She was friends with the regional director of the NEA, Monroe Sweetland. And according to doctor de la Trinidad, this kickstarted Maria's next adventure.

Dr. Maritza de la Trinidad [00:16:46] He gave her \$2,000 to organize a committee to do a study of southwestern schools. And so this committee was composed of Maria Wood, kids Hank Koyama, Adalberto Guerrero, Rosita Cota, and other teachers. And they each took a state. They each went to California, New Mexico, Texas, Arizona, and they each looked at and visited maybe two schools in each state. And they divided the work amongst them. And so they looked at programs from kindergarten to 12th. So elementary, middle school or junior high and high school. What was being done in terms of Spanish language instruction? And what they found was that there were school districts and there was funding being provided and being allocated to develop these Spanish language classes and Spanish language programs.

Amanda Luberto [00:17:40] They came back, compiled their information together, and produced a report called The Invisible Minority. This 1966 study fundamentally changed education in the United States. All of this happened before the Bilingual Education Act that was signed by President Johnson in 1968.

Dr. Maritza de la Trinidad [00:18:03] They held a national conference in 1967, in Tucson on the bilingual education. From that conference came legislators, who also saw the value of bilingualism and possibly creating a funding source to fund bilingual programs. And several of those legislators were Ralph Yarborough from Texas, Joseph Bernal from Texas, and others from New Mexico. And I think Stewart Udall from Arizona may have been in attendance. And so other legislators from across the country also had constituents that were bilingual may not have been Spanish, but they realized that a type of program or bilingual education would also benefit them.

Amanda Luberto [00:18:46] This conference snowballed into making Maria's dreams come true.

Jan Cleere [00:18:52] John Kennedy got involved at this point, and he placed Maria on a state advisory committee to the Civil Rights Commission, and President Johnson picked up on that and asked her to sit on the national advisory committee to the Commissioner of Education on Mexican American education. So all of this encompassed everything Maria was hoping it would. And fortunately, and it was through not just Maria, but teachers like her that in 1968, Congress passed the Bilingual Education Act that provided school districts with federal funds to establish educational programs for children with limited English speaking abilities. Now, this was the very first time Congress had approved funding for bilingual education, and it encouraged instruction in English, but also promoted multicultural awareness. And in that very first year that this pass, there were 76 bilingual education programs initiated for students who spoke 14 different. And then the following year, Congress gave them over \$7 million for bilingual education. Her accomplishments in the area of education, social welfare, civil rights, human relations, and community relations are really illustrated by the numerous professional organizations she belong to, including the Tucson Education Association, the Arizona Education Board of Governors, the Arizona State Welfare Board, the Arizona State Manpower Advisory Committee, the Pima

Association for juveniles, the National Council of Christians and Jews, the Alianza Hispano Americana, the NAACP, the Congress of Parents and Teachers, Catholic Daughters of America, the Urban League, the YMCA, and the Red cross. She was a member of all these organizations because of her work. So she was recognized not just in Tucson, not just at the local level, but the state level and then the national level as well.

Amanda Luberto [00:20:58] Maria was 60 years old with 40 years of teaching under her belt when the Bilingual Education Act was finally passed. Maria, or canvas, started as an eager, bright student in a barrio in Tucson. She wanted to learn and to teach and to ensure that no child felt like an outsider. In 1974, the Tucson Unified School District named her Canvas Elementary School after her. In 1978, she officially retired from teaching. Maria died at the age of 85, in June 1994, in Tucson. In 2002, she was inducted into the Arizona Women's Hall of Fame. And there's even an award named after her at the University of Arizona, which honors notable contributions by academic professionals and bilingual education on behalf of children. She is best known as the mother of bilingual education. But even for all she accomplished, she didn't believe her job was finished. I want to leave you here with this section from the Eyewitness to History interview between Maria and Tucson journalist Abraham Chanin.

Abraham Chanin [00:22:30] He had a lot of opposition, a.

Maria Urquides [00:22:31] Lot of opposition. And the strange part about it is that much of the opposition came from the Mexican-American, though.

Abraham Chanin [00:22:38] Why was that?

Maria Urquides [00:22:39] Because the Anglo society has done a very good job of indoctrinating us with the fact that we could not succeed unless we learned English. I would say in saying, you have to forget English. I was saying you learn English and Spanish both. And so that was a tough decision they had to make because they really thought, well, no, they have to learn English.

Abraham Chanin [00:22:59] Now, you fought the battle on a national level and you won it.

Maria Urquides [00:23:02] Well, I think the battle hasn't been won yet.

Abraham Chanin [00:23:06] We have bilingual programs in Arizona. Yes. Are they what they should be?

Maria Urquides [00:23:10] Well, I would say that. No, I want the Anglo to get a two. Right now, it's only the Mexican American that is getting the Spanish instruction. And they are becoming bilingual. And this is wonderful. But besides that, they know who they are. And they have learned that that being a Mexican is wonderful. It's beautiful. We have contributed because through the teaching of the language, they have also taught the culture. And they're very proud now of being Mexican Americans. There was a time, you know, when it wasn't so hot.

Abraham Chanin [00:23:45] Now, let me just let's get a little more point about it. You're not fully satisfied with the program today, though? No. Why?

Maria Urquides [00:23:52] Because I think that the English speaking students should be getting it, too. Also, they're not really becoming bilingual by culturally becoming bilingual,

but they're they're not learning very much about the other culture, either. And they're becoming bilingual. All right. But not by culture.

Abraham Chanin [00:24:09] Are they teaching enough history about the Hispanic contribution to Arizona and the Mexican culture of our neighbors? Just the South, to us.

Maria Urquides [00:24:17] To the Mexican American? But do you see the Anglos that they're not enough? Yeah, no. And this is what has contributed to the image of the Mexican American himself. Who knows? That is what his contributions to civilization has been, and they're proud of it. But what I wanted was for the Anglo together to so that they would learn as if we would learn how to live with each other and respect each other the way we did way back when I was first.

Abraham Chanin [00:24:44] All right.

Amanda Luberto [00:24:53] Thank you so much for listening to this week's episode of Valley 101 and season two of Arizona Herstory. If you've missed the other episodes in season two, be sure to visit our website to go and find them. This episode was written and produced by me, Amanda Lou Berto. Haley Monahan provided additional supporting episode Oversight is by Kara Anderson. Music for this episode comes from Universal Production Music. Additional audio is credited to the University of Arizona Libraries. You can follow all Arizona Republic podcasts on social media at A-Z. C podcasts. Next week on the finale of Arizona Herstory Season two.

Amanda Luberto [00:25:39] The brother d e said, why not name it after Dona? And I'm betting that she found that a little overwhelming because she was so shy. But she loved.

Amanda Luberto [00:25:51] It. And of course, now it's kind of made.

Amanda Luberto [00:25:53] The place famous.

Amanda Luberto [00:25:55] We'll hear the story of the namesake of Arizona's favorite Red Rock city. Valley 101 is an Arizona Republic and azcentral.com Production. I'm Amanda Luberto. Thank you again for listening. We'll see you next week.