

# Isabel Casillas Sánchez

July 1, 1923 - June 14, 2021



Our querida wife, mother, sister, grandmother, great- and great great grandmother, aunt, comadre, friend, and teacher Isabel Sánchez passed away on June 14, 2021.

Isabel was born in the Westside on July 1, 1923. Her family moved to the Westside after the 1921 flood destroyed their home and business, along with most other structures in Laredito. By 1924, Isabel's grandparents, Teresa and Sebastian Rocha, had moved to the Westside, living on Chihuahua and caring for Isabel's two eldest brothers, Gilberto and Alejandro. By 1926, Isabel's mother Francisca was living on the northern part of the Rocha's lot, at 910 Santiago, with her husband, Dionicio Casillas and younger children, Abelardo and Isabel. In 1931, Isabel's sister Candelaria was born.

Isabel attended Barkley Elementary and then Lanier Junior and High School. She was a member of the Lanier National Honor Society and graduated from Lanier High in 1942. During World War II, Isabel worked the night shift at Kelly Air Force Base and then took a job at the Fernandez Drug Store. One day in 1947, Isabel was walking home from work when Victoria Sánchez, a neighbor living on Vera Cruz, called out, inviting Isabel to meet her eldest son, who had just returned from the Navy. Inside the Sánchez house, Isabel was greeted by the handsome Enrique, who politely stood, shook

her hand, and expressed his pleasure at meeting her. Isabel was very impressed! Their courtship included many long walks around Brackenridge Park and Downtown, punctuated by school and neighborhood dances. In December, Enrique prepared to leave San Antonio to attend school in Chicago. Isabel expressed her distress at his leaving and they both promised to write often. At this emotional moment, Isabel gave Enrique a first kiss.

The couple was married in San Antonio, on August 21,



Isabel sits on her abuela's lap-Teresa Cantú Rocha (1864-1947) who owned a food stand at Military Plaza, later known as Plaza de Zacate. Isabel's mom, Francisca González Casillas (1893-1973), stands at right.



Isabel and her brother, Abelardo, who lived with their parents, Francisca and Dionicio, at 910 Santiago on the Westside of SA.



Isabel worked at the Fernández Drug Store after graduating from Lanier High School in 1942. Her knowledge of San Antonio's Westside inspired Esperanza projects like *Paseo por el Westside*, *Fotohistorias* and the *Museo del Westside*.

1949 and their love affair lasted throughout their lives, marked by Enrique's romantic singing and the couple's



Isabel, at center, with her sister Candelaria (Cande) in front of her and a friend of theirs behind her.

her hand, and expressed his pleasure at meeting her. Isabel was very impressed! Their courtship included many long walks around Brackenridge Park and Downtown, punctuated by school and neighborhood dances. In December, Enrique prepared to leave San Antonio to attend school in Chicago. Isabel expressed her distress at his leaving and they both promised to write often. At this emotional moment, Isabel gave Enrique a first kiss.



## ISABEL CASILLAS

Modesty and knowledge combine to make Isabel a very clever girl. Banker, Advisory Vice-president, Vocational Sewing Vice-president, National Honor Society.

Yearbook photo of senior, Isabel Casillas, with a caption detailing her personality and activities at Sydney Lanier High School on the Westside of San Antonio.

joy in dancing together. Isabel enjoyed their first two years of married life in Chicago, and was overjoyed when Enrique, upon completing school, announced that they would return to San Antonio. With money earned by Isabel during the war, her mother purchased the neighboring lot on Santiago. Over the next twenty years, Isabel and Enrique raised their six children in the house on Santiago. In 1976, because of the government's urban renewal program, the family moved a half-block north where Isabel lived for the rest of her life.

Isabel cherished her beloved Westside and worked hard to support Westside families. As soon as her youngest child started school, Isabel became an education activist, advocating to improve the schools for Westside children. As she told her family: "My children will always have me to help them. I want to help all of the other children whose parents, for whatever reason, can't make sure their kids are getting the education they deserve." Much of Isabel's work in the schools focused on advocacy for individual



Isabel enjoyed taking care of her yard and lived out her life on the Westside of San Antonio that she loved.

students. Mothers would call her if their child was having trouble with a teacher, a bully, or whatever. Often she would accompany parents, helping them muster the courage to talk with teachers or other school officials, or, if the parents could not attend because of other responsibilities, Isabel would talk with the teachers and officials by herself, advocating for another's child.



Isabel Casillas and Enrique Sánchez were married on August 21, 1949 and their love affair lasted throughout their lives. They were married over 70 years.

Isabel was a forceful advocate for Westside schools, active at every level of SAISD. She would not hesitate to call the SAISD Superintendent directly if a problem required it. She gave public testimony to the School Board, wrote letters, and attended meetings. Isabel was instrumental in creating Parent-Teacher Associations at Ruiz Elementary, and she was active in the Cooper Junior High, Lanier High School, and City-wide PTAs. She became a regular visitor to those schools and formed deep friendships with many of the children and their families. In addition, Isabel was a forceful advocate for policy changes that would benefit Westside schools to the SAISD School Board.

In the late 1990s, the high school principal at Lanier High School expelled Isabel from the Lanier PTA because none of her children were current Lanier students. Shocked, Isabel and other parents searched for new ways to support Lanier students. They began fundraising for the Fuentes-Sanchez Lanier Scholarship Fund. During the past twenty years, the Fund has raised and distributed over \$200,000 to recent Lanier graduates bound for college. As to the principal who forced her out of the Lanier PTA, Isabel



Isabel with her young children celebrating the youngest child's birthday, Leticia Sánchez, who turned one year old. Graciela stands next to her little sister with her brothers (l to r) Bernard, Xavier, Fernando and Gustavo standing behind their mother.



Isabel was instrumental in creating PTAs in Westside schools that her children attended and was also active in Citywide PTAs.

remembered “She left after a couple of years, so I went back to the Lanier PTA ... I outlasted her.” Isabel’s work in the schools included advocacy for individual students, work for the PTAs, and testimony before the SAISD School Board.

In addition to her educational advocacy, Isabel was active in many progressive campaigns in San Antonio, including struggles over cultural arts and free speech, protection for

and father of seven; Bernard, a chef, gardener, and creative entrepreneur; Fernando (Margaret), a Latin-American scholar, writer, and father of two; Gustavo, a master of U.S. Presidential history, sports buff, and loyal son who has helped his parents care for their home for many years; Graciela (Amy), a social justice and cultural advocate, and Director of Esperanza Peace & Justice Center; and Leticia, valued academic advisor to thousands of Palo Alto and University of Houston students, neighborhood activist, and Flamenco dancer. Isabel took great joy in her nine grandchildren: Xavier Jr, Rhys, Maricella, Danielle, Enrique, Juanita, Cecilia, Benjamin, and Claudia; her twelve great-grandchildren: Shaiann, Jaykob, Juliana, Dominic, Sophia, Jayla, Lilly, Jesalyn, Maxwell, Parker, Camilla, and Adelyn; and her one great-great-grandchild Mazikeen.

the Edwards Aquifer, maintenance of public space, and historical preservation in the Westside. Finally, Isabel was a much-treasured member of the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center, the Historic Westside Residents Association, the Corazones de Esperanza, and the Westside Preservation Alliance.

Isabel was enormously proud of each of her children: Xavier (Diana), a musician, HEB store manager,



At the 70th anniversary celebration of Isabel and Enrique’s marriage, all six children: Xavier (pink shirt), Bernard (white shirt), Fernando (pink polo shirt), Gustavo (black shirt), Graciela (red huipil top), Leticia (white full length huipil) and their families were present.

“I feel like God gave me a big heart because so many people have come and said, ‘Oh, I wish you were my mother.’ ... Maybe they’re kidding. But I always tell them, ‘There’s space in my heart for you, so come in.’”

For a more complete biography of Isabel Casillas Sánchez please check out the Museo del Westside @ [www.museodelwestside.org](http://www.museodelwestside.org)

## In memory of Isabel

Donations will be accepted for the:  
**Fuentes-Sánchez Lanier Scholarship Fund**  
1710 Vera Cruz, SA TX 78207



Isabel Sánchez and Amelia Fuentes prepare for another Fuentes Sánchez Lanier Scholarship Dance which raised over \$200,000 over the years for students at Lanier High.