



Isabel Casillas Sánchez July 1, 1923 – June 14, 2021,

# Abuela de la Esperanza, Guardian of the Westside

Aside from being present and active in most of the Esperanza's programs and progressive campaigns to preserve the cultural arts, the environment and the rights of Buena Gente, Isabel's commitment to the Westside of San Antonio inspired the Esperanza to engage in a whole range of programming and actions related to the Westside.

With the preservation and development of El Rinconcito de Esperanza, El Museo del Westside, MujerArtes'

Clay Arts Cooperative, Lerma's Nite Club and with the formation of groups like the Westside Preservation Alliance, The Corazones of the Esperanza, 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday's Genealogy group and the

Historic Westside Residents' Association—the Esperanza community set out to preserve and protect the culture, history, homes and landmarks of the Westside with Isabel's

constant presence who insisted that *"those who live in and love the Westside must care for it: because no one else will protect our people, our homes, and our plantitas."*



## dále Shine al Westside

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The Westside Preservation Alliance, a consortium of community activists, scholars and residents came together after the demolition of an iconic Westside landmark, the rooftop dance arena, *La Gloria*. The erasure of that Westside treasure prompted Esperanza to add historic preservation of working class and Mexican American Westside barrios to the list of social justice issues to advocate for and with the WPA has worked to save buildings like the Maldonado House in a national campaign called, *This Place Matters*.



Left: Graciela Sánchez, Director of the Esperanza researched her own family roots with her parents, Enrique and Isabel, during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday Genealogy group sessions held at Casa de Cuentos.

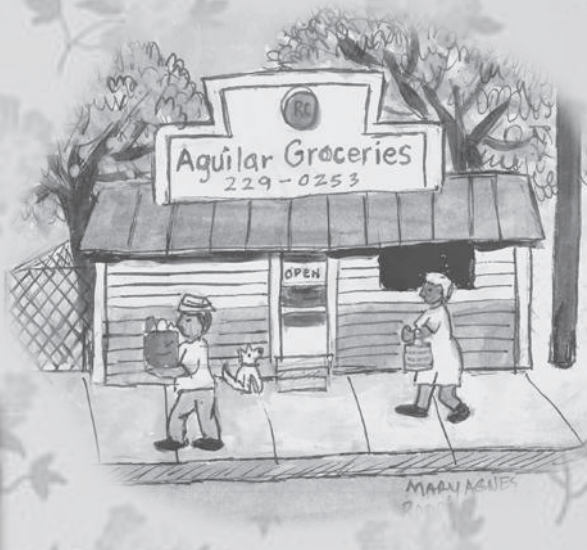


At right: Isabel shared her memories at a workshop on the *Chili Queens of San Antonio* hosted by the San Antonio Public Library. Her maternal grandmother, Teresa Cantú Rocha, owned a food stand on Military Plaza (aka Plaza de Zacate).



Isabel and Enrique kept their marriage alive for over 70 years with music and dance pictured here dancing outdoors at the Rinconcito de Esperanza.





At left Isabel & Enrique Sánchez exit City Council Chambers after asking for funds for the restoration of Lerma's night club. At right, the book & CD, *Still Here*, with life stories of Westside elders including the story of the Sanchezes pictured on the back cover. Isabel is also one of the featured women in el Museo del Westside.



Isabel and Enrique at Casa de Cuentos where they engaged in community meetings, annual events and social gatherings.



Isabel poses next to a photobanner of her grandmother, Teresa, who holds Isabel as an infant on her lap. Above, Isabel's mother, Francisca Casillas is the subject of another banner, part of the *En Aquellos Tiempos...*, *Fotohistorias del Westside* project of the Esperanza Center.



“They always say that the Westside of San Antonio is a bad neighborhood and people always ask me why I still live in the old barrio. But there is such beauty in this community, in its people. We may be poor, but we’re good and decent people. I’ve stayed in this neighborhood because I love it.”

—Isabel Casillas Sánchez, who chose to stay in her barrio for 95 of her 97 years.