Eulogy For Manuel P. Berriozabal,

By Elise D. García, OP

The Buena gente of Esperanza Peace and Justice Center *join in sorrow with María and her beloved community noting the passing of Manuel P. Berriozábal, hombre noble y illustre. The following eulogy was delivered at the* Angelus Funeral Home *on April 30, 2026.*


Manny and María, a love story for the ages.

It is my honor this evening to pay tribute to a highly respected and beloved man—Dr. Manuel Philip Berriozábal—known to some as Dr. B., to others as Uncle Manuel, to most of us as Manny, and to his beloved wife, María Antonietta, as, *My* Manny.

From the moment he turned around and laid eyes on the 30-year-old woman in the aquamarine pantsuit sitting behind him at an archdiocesan meeting in San Antonio, Manny was smitten. In her autobiography, *María, Daughter of Immigrants* by María Antonietta Berriozábal, she writes:

"He had a beard and was wearing a green suit, olive green. As he caught sight of me, a startled look came over his face. He stared at me for what seemed like a very long and awkward time. I have a clear picture of it in my mind. That look was frozen on his face, and behind him, on the wall, was a clock. It seemed to sit on his head, declaring the time: 7:05 p.m. That was the exact moment, on March 20, 1972—the first day of spring—when a new chapter of my life began."

It was also clearly the exact moment when a new chapter in the life of Manuel Berriozábal began.

Many of us know that though Manny was born in San Antonio, on July 12, 1931, he grew up in Missouri. His father came to the U.S. from Durango, Mexico in 1910, during the *Mexican Revolution*, and his mother was the daughter of German immigrants. The family moved to Missouri when he was a year old. He spent his early years living with his German immigrant grandparents in Independence, Missouri, learning German songs, customs and language.

As a gifted and hardworking student, especially in mathematics, Manny became the first in his family, on both sides, to attend college —*Rockhurst College* in Kansas. He eventually earned a Master's degree in mathematics at *Notre Dame University* in 1956, though his studies were interrupted by service in the Army during the *Korean War*. His math skills had him writing programming for the Army's first computers—in the days when a computer occupied a whole room.

It was thanks to the encouragement of a mentor at *Notre Dame*, Dr. Arnold Ross, who became a lifelong friend, that Manny pursued a PhD in mathematics—earning it at *UCLA* in 1961.

We are now about 10 years away from the fateful encounter between the olive green suit and the aquamarine pantsuit. During this chapter of his life Manny taught at *UCLA* and then in New Orleans, at *Tulane University* and *Louisiana State University*. In New Orleans, he began to work on and create pre-college programs in mathematics, understanding that the path to college, particularly for minorities, had to start before students entered college. He began creating *STEM* programs before the acronym was used.

Manny was deeply devoted to his Catholic faith and very involved in his parish as a lector and member of the choir. He also was active in progressive good government groups. His dedication to students, especially those under-represented in the sciences—students of color and girls—was integrally connected to his faith.

When Manny heard that a new public university—the *University of Texas at San Antonio*—was being established in his birthplace, he was interested in joining its faculty. It was on a visit to obtain a position that he met the love of his life at a community-organizing meeting of the *Catholic Archdiocese*.

He somehow finagled his way to sit at the table where María was leading a discussion. She began with a process of getting to know each other. As María writes, *"I really pushed the process."*

María asked this newcomer: *"Manuel, tell me about yourself?"* (He was single). *"Manuel, tell me about your family?"* and *"Manuel, what are your thoughts on the needs of our Mejicano community."*

When the meeting was over, Manny asked her: "Do you think we could go somewhere and continue this interesting discussion?"

María stalled. "I can't. I have work tomorrow."

Manny persisted, "Can we have dinner tomorrow after work?"

"No, I have night school," she said.

"Well, do you think we could have lunch before I leave town?"

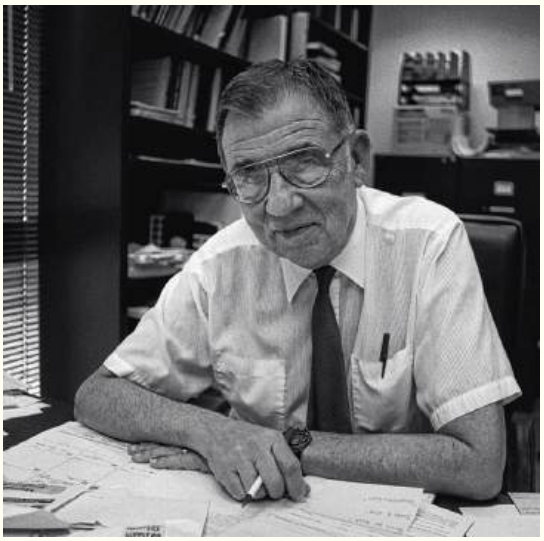
María agreed and in writing her address on a piece of paper where he would pick her up, she prefaced her name with *Miss* María Antonietta Rodríguez, as she wanted to be sure he knew she was not a "Mrs."

Of course, before going out with him, María did her research, calling the pastor of *Our Lady of Guadalupe Church*

who had invited Manny to the meeting. Father Edmundo Rodríguez was a friend of both. His "Ahhh!" and laughter when she called to ask about the man he had brought the night before gave away his matchmaking approval before he said a word. Edmundo told her that he had met the man in New Orleans and that Manny was a leader in that archdiocese, doing work with Latinas and Latinos.

Before Manny returned to New Orleans, they both knew—even though they didn't confess it, until later—that they had found the love of their lives.

They married three years later, on August 9, 1975, living in New Orleans until the following summer when Manny obtained the position he sought at *UTSA*. In 1976 they both returned home, each beginning legendary careers in service to their San Antonio community—and beyond.



On June 20, 2023, *UTSA* celebrated the re-naming of the *Prefreshman Engineering Program (PREP)* after the program's founder, Manuel P. Berriozábal. Photo: *UTSA* archives

As we know, Manny went on to found the extraordinarily successful *UTSA Pre-Freshman Engineering Program* (*PREP*) in 1979, a pioneering mathematics-based academic enrichment initiative that was later replicated on 25 college campuses across Texas and in 8 other states as *Proyecto Access*. The *UTSA PREP* program today bears the founder's name—and has expanded to over 125 Texas school districts. It boasts more than 50,000 Texas alumni, and universities across the country have adopted the innovative model.

—The idea was first disparaged because critics didn't think young people would want to devote their summers to learning about mathematics, logical thinking, abstract reasoning, and computer science. Manny persisted. That fall, an anonymous member of the *Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board* expressed his opposition to approving an engineering program at *UTSA*, stating, "The Mexican American community is not where engineers come from anyway."

Manny took those words as an insult to both "our community and me" – but he also viewed them as a challenge for *PREP* and himself. Manny persisted.

His resulting impact on the lives of so many people is immeasurable. Here are a few words former students have posted online:

PREP made such an impact in my life. Using skills I learned there when I went to college, I really felt prepared. He changed the lives of so many, especially mine. Being a kid from the westside and learning logic and advanced algebra made me feel invincible.

While I didn't stay in STEM, PREP was instrumental in creating a higher ed pathway for me. I've come full circle and teach at the first university I ever stepped foot in as a PREP student.

From a parent: *My daughter did PREP and has made a career out of high school aquatic biology. What a legacy. What a love story for the ages.*

It is the love story for the ages of María and Manny. Their mutual support for one another was unconditional – and inspirational.

With deep pride, Manny supported his brilliant and pioneering wife in her extraordinary public service work, her speaking out on behalf of the community—even when he knew she could be arrested—and her mentoring of hundreds of young women. Manny supported his wife through the painful years of tender care for her parents as their lives were coming to an end. A feminist man, as María says, Manny was "my huge pillar and my love."

Equally matched was the deep pride María had in Manny, supporting him through all the years as he grew his brilliant, visionary and award-winning *PREP* program. She was there right by his side throughout what she called *"Manny's Ordeal"* – a seven-year period when this man of impeccable integrity and selfless public dedication was wrongly subjected to unconscionable calumny. Manny, as always, persisted. And they made it through together. In her final accompaniment through the last years of Manny's life, María tenderly cared for him as Alzheimer's slowly stole his brilliant mind.

Somewhere in his soul and consciousness, Manny found a way to extend a deep bow of gratitude to his beloved wife, his pillar. He waited until 1:23 am on April 15, the day after María's 85th birthday on April 14, to cross over to the other side of the veil.

It is there where he now awaits, watching over her with loving care – and letting María know that in the goodness of time, together, all shall be well.

An untold multitude are deeply grateful for the witness of Manny's extraordinary life and legacy for the common good of all God's people and our beloved Earth home. And for the witness of his love and devotion to his beloved soul mate who, for more than 54 years, never stopped sweeping him off his feet.

BIO: *Elise D. García, OP serves as Prioress of the* Dominican Sisters *of Adrian, Michigan. She was Co-Director with Carol Coston, OP, of* Santuario Sisterfarm, *an eco-spirituality sanctuary in the Texas Hill Country co-founded in 2002 by* Dominican Sisters *and Latinas of the Borderlands to cultivate diversity – biodiversity and cultural diversity, living in right relationship with the whole Earth community. María Antonietta Berriozábal served as President. It closed in 2011 but its website, www.sisterfarm.org/ still communicates its message.*

