

Priscilla Oliver Grijalva

Pioneered the Expanded Nutrition Program in New Mexico

Priscilla Oliver Grijalva (b. Nov. 21 1926–d. May 29, 2017).

Priscilla Oliver Grijalva was born in Los Angeles, CA on Nov. 21, 1926, to Martin Oliver & Florentina Acosta Oliver. She and her parents returned to Mesilla shortly after her birth, and she always considered herself a native New Mexican, attending several area schools, including Mesilla Elementary and Loretto Academy of Las Cruces. During World War II, the family returned to the Los Angeles area, where her father worked to support the war effort. While there, she attended Garfield High School (the school later made famous in the movie *Stand and Deliver*), where she met her future husband, Mike.

Returning to the Mesilla Valley, Priscilla attended New Mexico State University (NMSU), receiving a BA in 1951 and an MS in 1970. She first taught Home Economics at Hatch High School, then taught elementary students in Las Cruces. In 1964, she accepted even bigger responsibilities as home economics teacher, day care coordinator and head of the home education program, serving families in need across Doña Ana county. A few years later, she transitioned to the Peace Corps Training Program at NMSU, serving both as an instructor and a training coordinator.



Priscilla at age 17 in February 1944.



Priscilla Oliver Grijalva and Mike Grijalva with children and grandchildren, in a family photo. Priscilla and Mike were married for 58 years.

Front row: Laura Grijalva, Davina Grijalva, Amanda Lujan, Meagan Donahue, Adam Grijalva.

Second row: Miguel Grijalva, Lillian Grijalva, Christopher Grijalva, Gloria Grijalva Segura, Michael Grijalva.

Third row (center): Priscilla Oliver Grijalva and Mike Grijalva.

Fourth row: Garrett Donahue, Jerry Donahue, Nancy Grijalva Donahue, Rosie Grijalva, David Grijalva.

In 1986, her strong activism promoting nutrition programs for underprivileged children and families secured her place as one of the first five “Outstanding Women of New Mexico.” In July 1987, she became State Extension Nutrition Specialist.

Soon, Priscilla embraced her true passion: training paraprofessionals. She pioneered the Expanded Nutrition Program in Doña Ana County and was highly skilled at helping others learn how to encourage kids and parents to prepare a wide variety of nutritious meals. She convincingly demonstrated that her methods were simple enough that even children and teens could quickly create economical, delicious meals. Soon her techniques were used across the state.

Throughout her life, Priscilla’s expertise was in high demand, and she shared her knowledge not only locally but nationally and internationally. She gave talks about Extension’s Expanded Food and Nutrition Program at meetings and seminars, including to the American Medical Association. She worked in El Salvador

developing, implementing, and conducting effective trainings around family planning. Even when traveling, Priscilla wrote columns for the *Las Cruces Bulletin*, providing weekly advice, recipes, and folklore.

Priscilla was very productive throughout her life, writing articles, and creating highly effective guides and training brochures in both English and Spanish. These learning tools were released statewide through news outlets and directly to Cooperative Extension Service clientele.

Priscilla received many awards from her home state, including the Distinguished Cooperative Extension Service Award in 1973 and Home Economist of the Year in 1985. In 1986, Las Cruces designated the week of August 18 Priscilla Grijalva Week. She belonged to the Sam Steel Society, the Catholic Daughters, the Knights of

Columbus, Ladies Auxiliary, and served as a board member for the Holy Cross Retreat House. Priscilla was known for assisting international students and program participants to get the most from their studies at NMSU.

Priscilla’s five children remember that she was very creative, always busy, yet she never refused a request for help. When she wasn’t writing articles, answering clientele’s questions, or cooking, she was crocheting, knitting, embroidering and/or sewing, often making clothes and gifts for her children and other family members. In addition, she was an accomplished painter of landscapes, played the piano and completed a daily crossword puzzle.

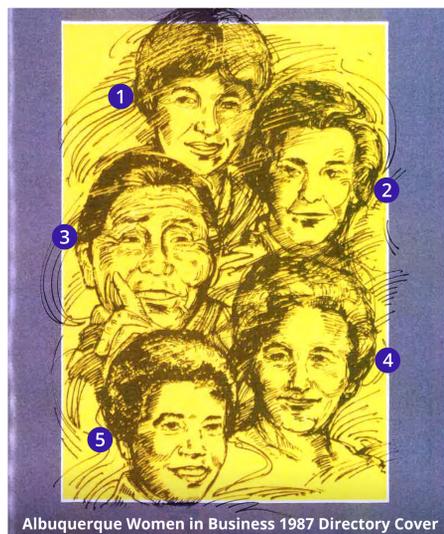
As of 2023, her descendants include fourteen grandchildren, nine great-grandchildren and five great-great grandchildren.



Priscilla discussing the steps for food drying.



Priscilla (left) during her time as the New Mexico State Extension Nutrition Specialist.



1. Priscilla Oliver Grijalva, 2. Mary Coon Walters, 3. Mae Chee Castillo, 4. Alice King, 5. Vera Cushman.



Priscilla in a NMSU employee photo taken near the end of her career.