

WATER IN THE DESERT **(THE PLUME)**

A DOCUMENTARY FILM BY FRANC CONTRERAS





LOGLINE

Six decades of weapons manufacturing in a Southwestern U.S. desert community has contaminated a crucial aquifer and led to thousands of cancer deaths. The filmmaker and an award-winning author/artist return to their hometown seeking answers about the problem as more toxic chemicals and hundreds more deaths surface.

THE STORY

is set in the vast
Sonoran Desert of **Southern Arizona**



After nearly 40 years, Franc Contreras returns to the Southside of Tucson seeking to understand what caused his mother to die of cancer at the age of the 34.

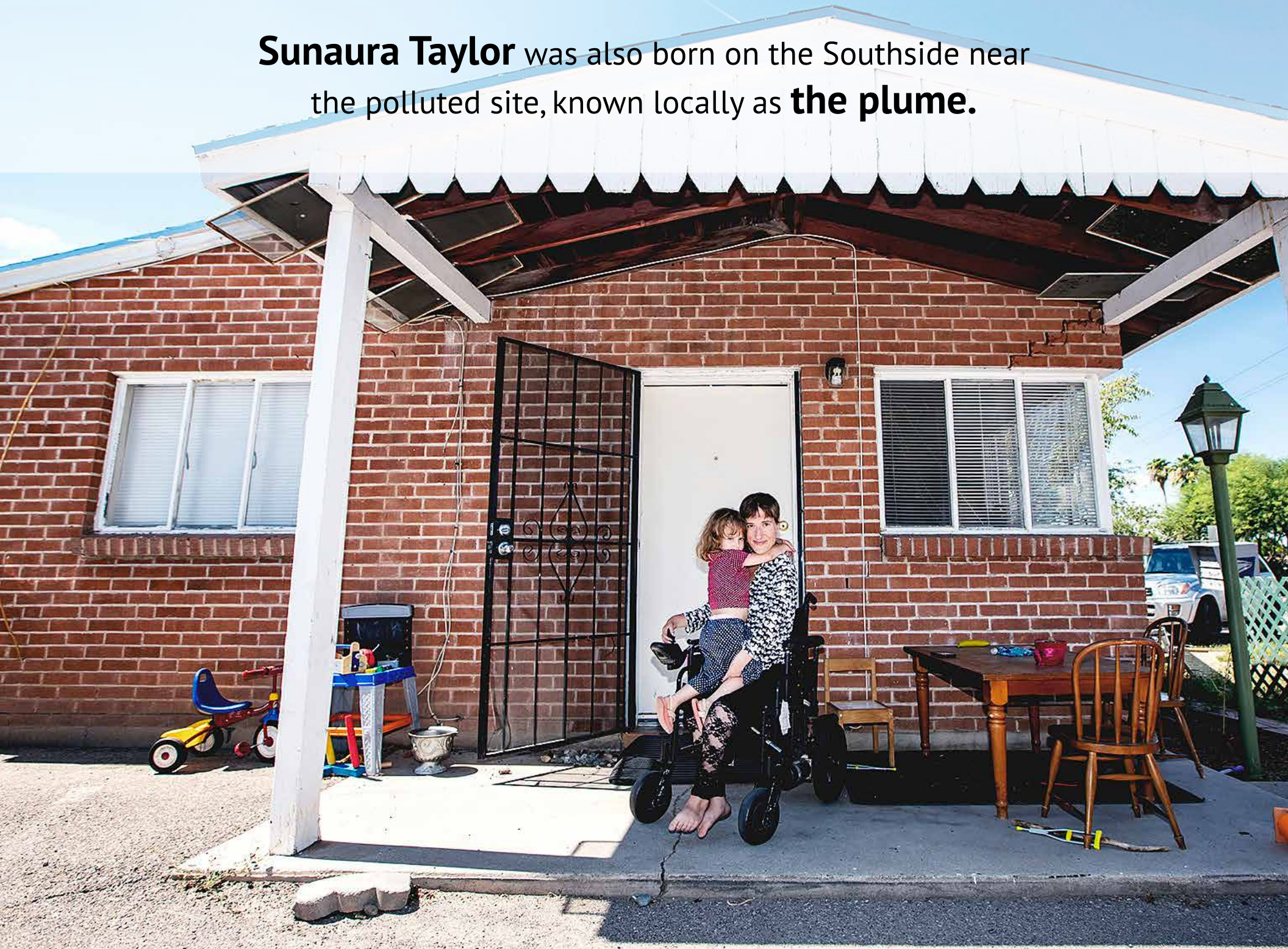


Residents believe the death rate from cancer and other diseases in the mostly Mexican American neighborhood is abnormally high.

It's among the most contaminated sites in the United States.



Sunaura Taylor was also born on the Southside near the polluted site, known locally as **the plume**.




Sunaura's parents told her that **military weapons makers dumped toxic chemicals** into the desert, which caused her disability. She too is seeking answers.



A woman with short brown hair, wearing a black and white patterned top, is leaning over a table. She is looking at a binder held by a man. The man has dark hair, wears glasses, and a light blue button-down shirt. He is looking down at the binder. The binder is open, showing several pages with text and some red tabs. The background shows a room with bookshelves filled with books, a bicycle, and some toys on a shelf. The lighting is warm and indoor.

As the story unfolds, Franc and Sunaura meet **activists and experts** who **explain the complexity** of the problem.

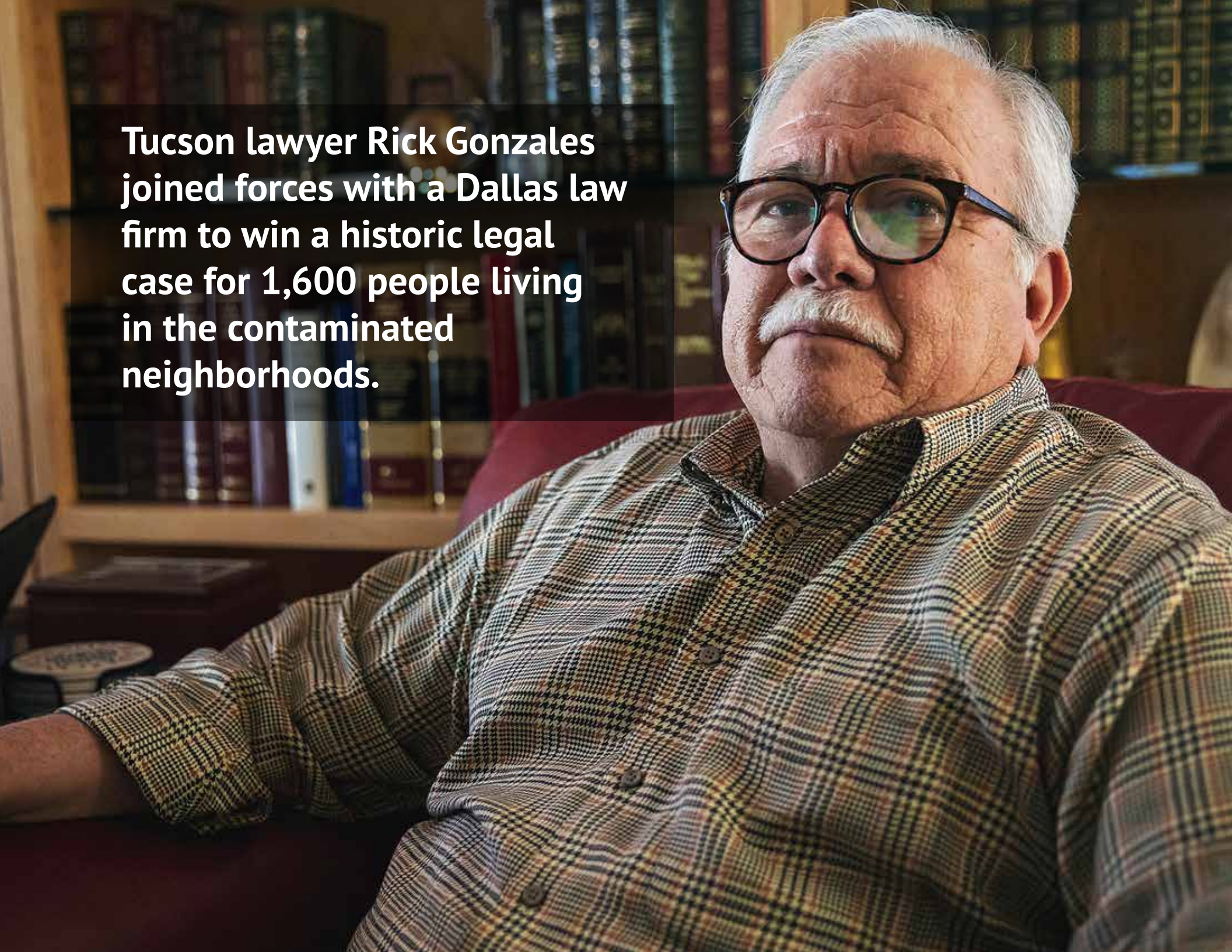
A portrait of Jane Kay, a woman with voluminous, curly, reddish-brown hair. She is wearing a dark red, ribbed, long-sleeved top and a black choker necklace with small, dark, round beads. She has a slight smile and is looking directly at the camera. The background is a plain, light gray wall.

Journalist Jane Kay broke the story
about how the carcinogen Trichloroethylene
(TCE) got into Tucson's underground water supply.

Melinda Bernal was a **school teacher and activist** in the affected area. In the early 1980s, she pressured her husband, a lawyer, to take up the case.




Tucson lawyer Rick Gonzales joined forces with a Dallas law firm to win a historic legal case for 1,600 people living in the contaminated neighborhoods.





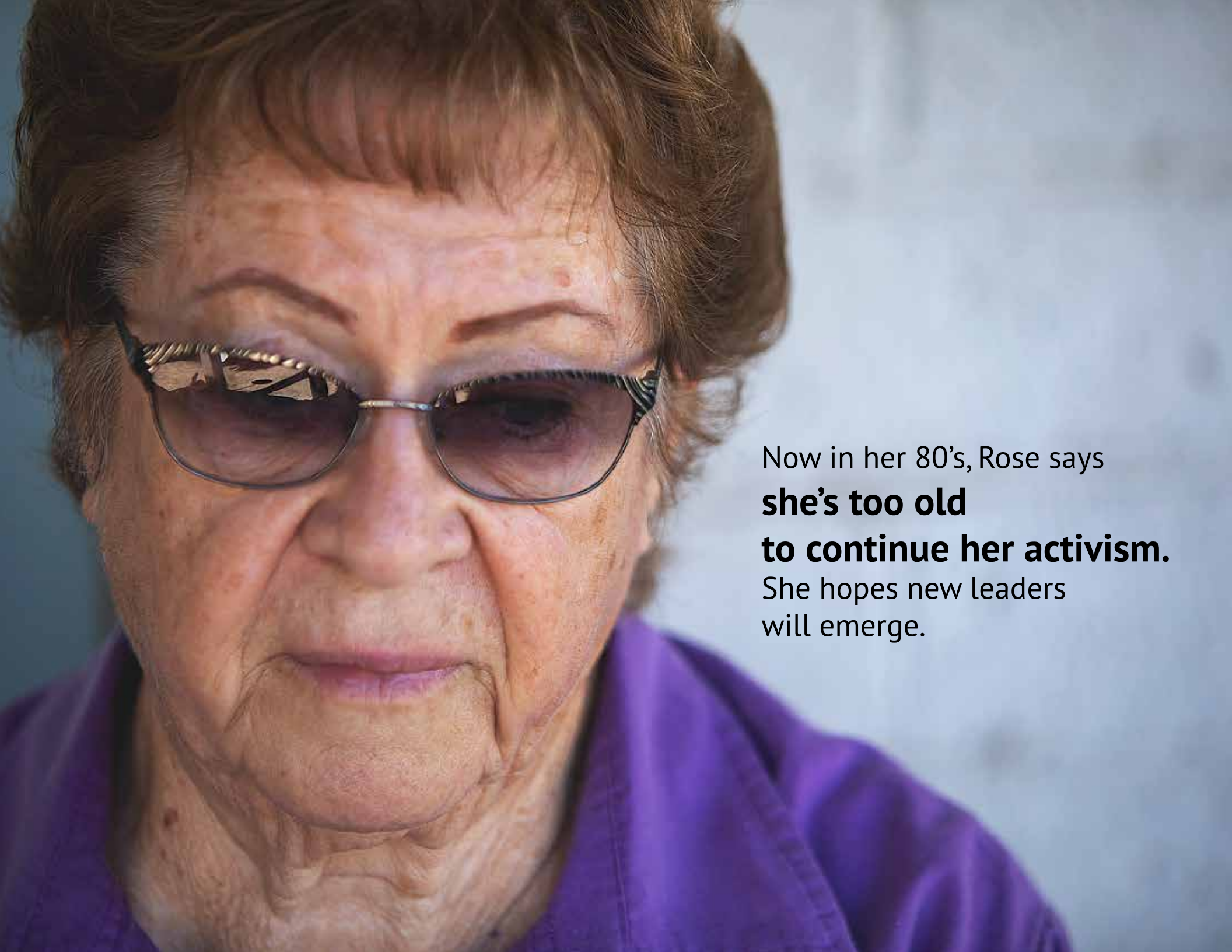
Sunaura's family was among the winners of a financial settlement paid to some who suffered damages from the water contamination.

A man with dark hair and glasses, wearing a blue button-down shirt, is shown in profile, looking down. He is in a library or study, with bookshelves filled with books in the background. The lighting is warm and focused on the man.

Franc's family and thousands of others never knew or were never told about the lawsuit.

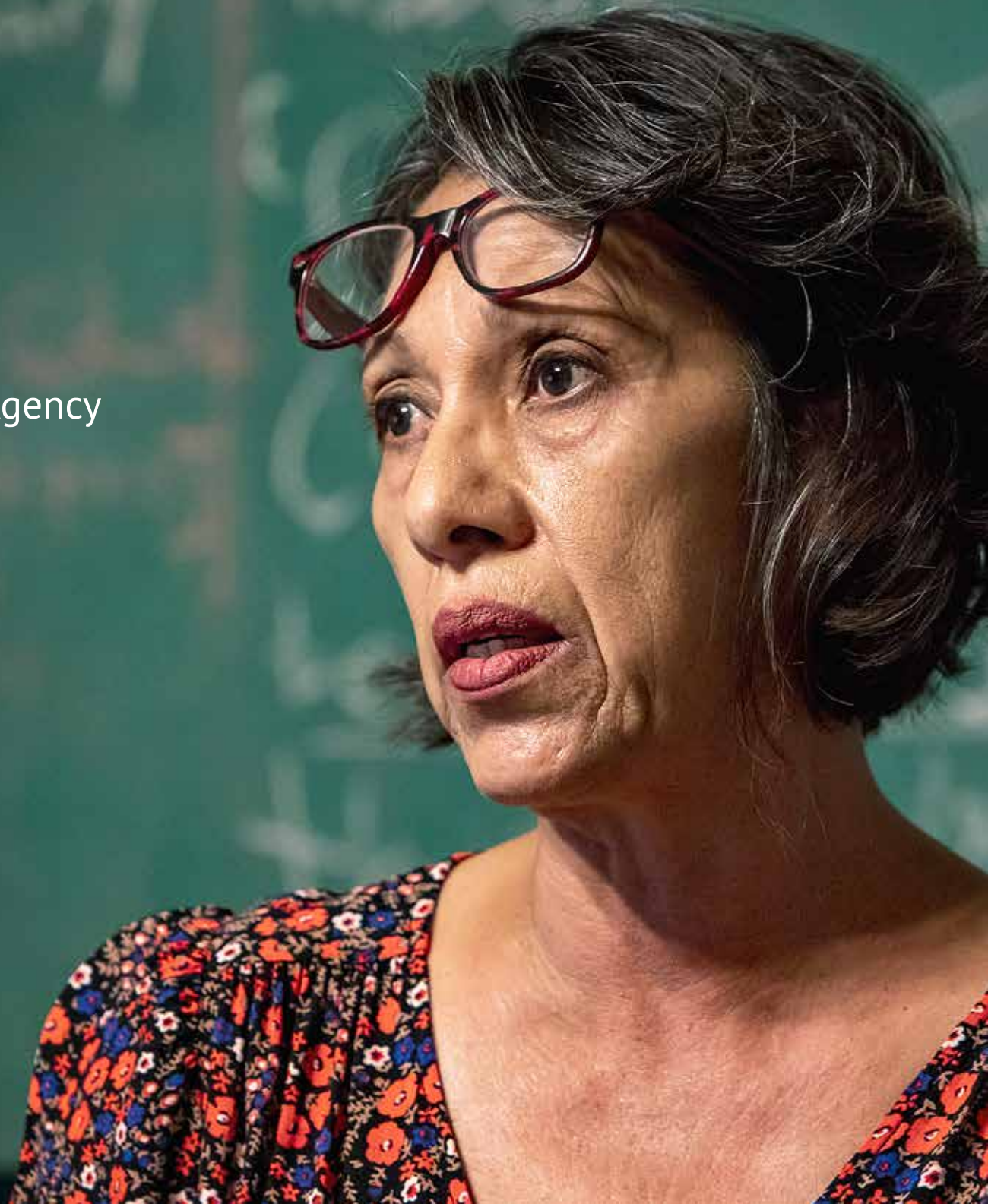


Activist **Rose Augustine**
confronted city government and
Tucson Water **officials** after
they downplayed the problem.



Now in her 80's, Rose says
**she's too old
to continue her activism.**
She hopes new leaders
will emerge.

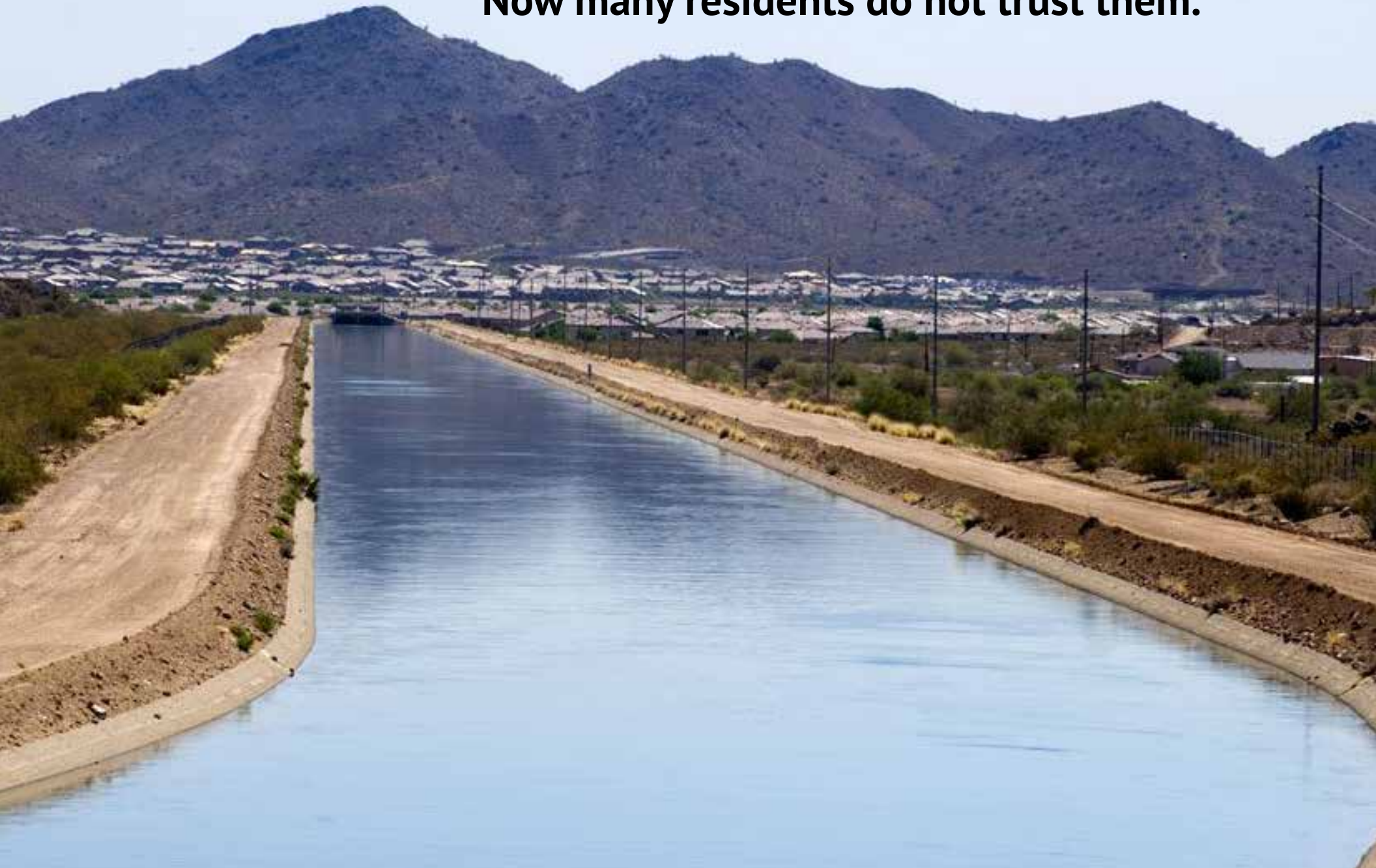
Linda Robles leads
a group of protestors
demanding that the
Environmental Protection Agency
test water supplies
for harmful chemicals
in all local public schools.



Some consider her methods undiplomatic. Still, Linda has become the latest leader of the environmental justice movement on Tucson's Southside.



**City government and water officials
repeatedly try to diminish the impact of the pollution.
Now many residents do not trust them.**



**Tucson Water
spokesman
Fernando Molina
has the difficult job
of winning back
the community's
trust.**

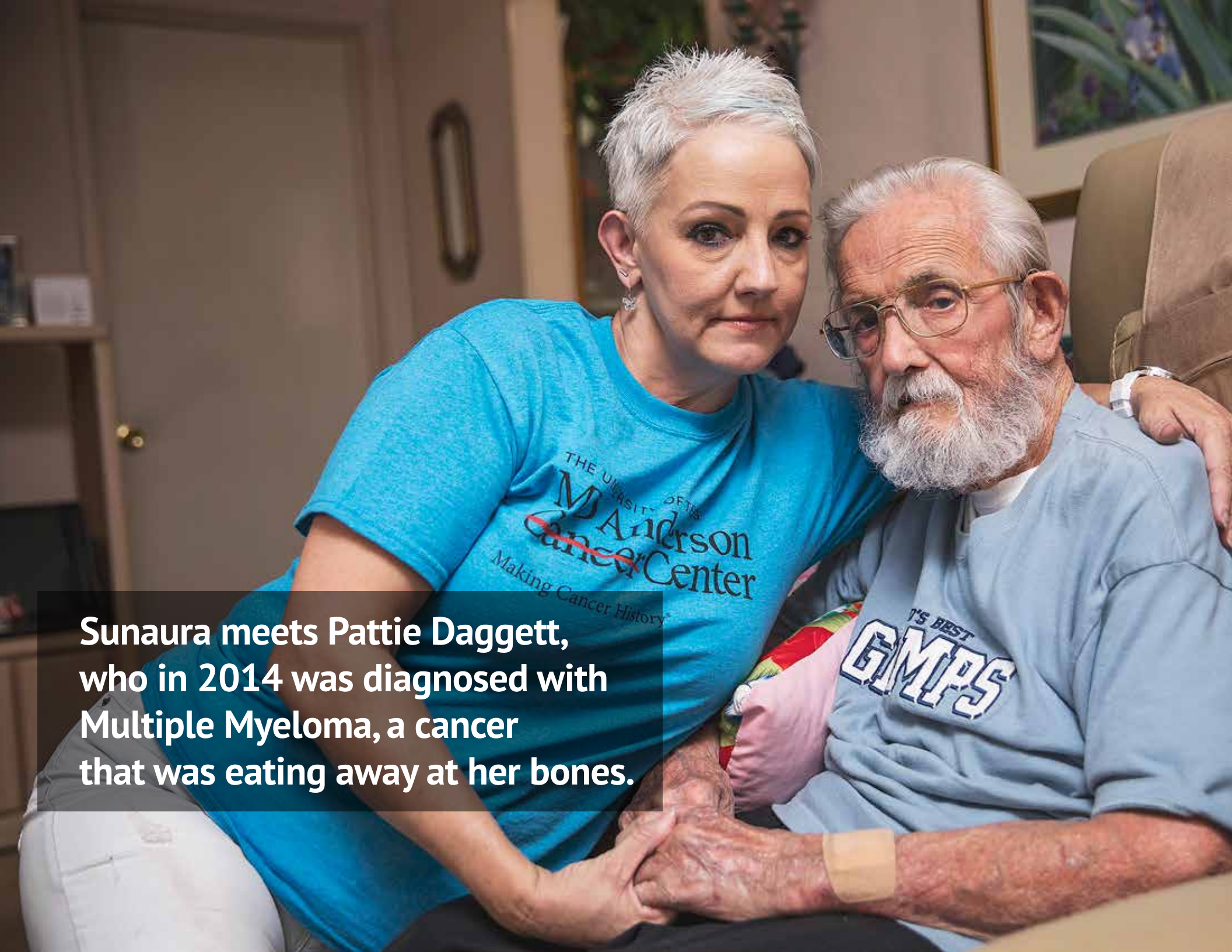




Franc meets cancer survivor **“Super Dave” Gutiérrez**, who grew up on the Southside. He owns a successful barbershop.




He's called "Super Dave" because he survived five bouts of cancer, which prevented him from achieving his dream of becoming a U.S. Marine.



Sunaura meets Pattie Daggett, who in 2014 was diagnosed with Multiple Myeloma, a cancer that was eating away at her bones.



During her childhood, Pattie spent hundreds of hours swimming in her family's backyard pool. She believes exposure to the water caused her cancer.

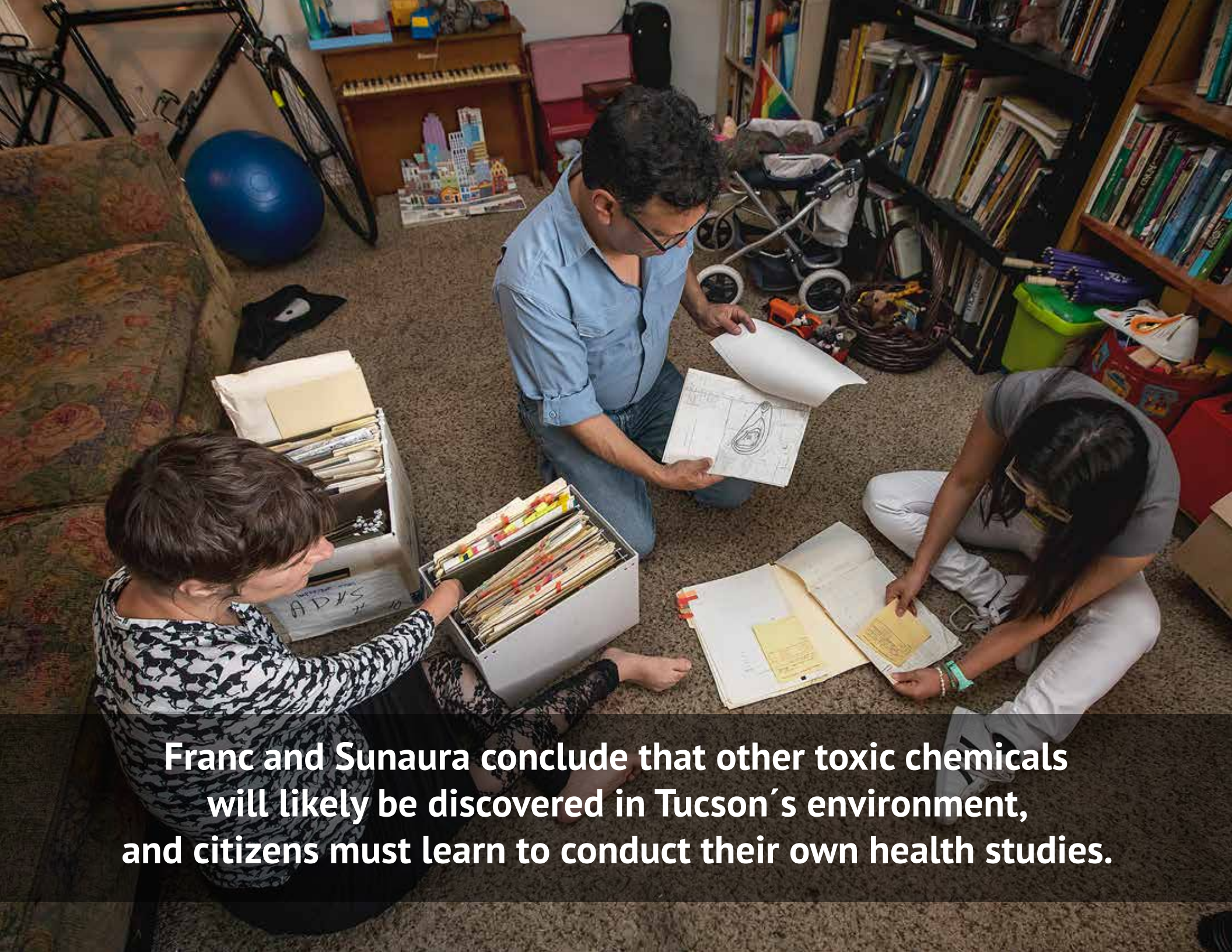


TIAA - KEY INFO
color code: red

Other potentially toxic chemicals including 1,4-dioxane and PFAS were recently **discovered in Tucson's groundwater.**

**The U.S. Air Force admits
more than 1,300 new cancer cases
were recently discovered in the area.**





Franc and Sunaura conclude that other toxic chemicals will likely be discovered in Tucson's environment, and citizens must learn to conduct their own health studies.

Director's Statement

This story provides never-before seen insights into how one Mexican American community and its elected officials have been confronting the problem of water contamination for nearly 40 years.

We examine how official efforts to downplay a water contamination problem in a minority community have triggered a deep lack of trust among affected residents. Color palettes and camera movements will reflect life and culture in Tucson. Original compositions will have a Rhythm and Blues and Barrio Jazz feel.



The Crew

Director/writer Franc Contreras is a veteran broadcast journalist from Tucson, Arizona. For more than 20 years he has produced short documentaries and news reports from Latin America for global news media organizations.

Executive Producers Victor Kane and Edwina Brandon-Kane of Brandon/Kane Productions. They have served as advisors and panelists for film organizations including the American Documentary Film Festival, Busan International Film Festival, International Documentary Association and the New Filmmakers of Los Angeles.

Manuel Tsingaris has been an editor for over 20 years, consistently bringing intuitive storytelling and his own aesthetic style to the films he has helped create. Manuel edited Alive Inside, which received the 2014 Audience Award for Best Documentary at Sundance.

A Director of Photography will be named by January, 2019.



The Crew

Jaime “Jimmy” Hernandez is an award-winning videographer based in Mexico City. His documentary work has appeared on several major channels including Discovery, HBO and Netflix.

Production Coordinator Pamela Salinas Parra is a veteran journalist and television producer based in Mexico City. Her work has been broadcast across the Spanish-speaking world.

Photography by John De Dios

Design by Mireya Guerrero Cercós



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