

# THE PLUME

A DOCUMENTARY BY FRANC CONTRERAS



# LOGLINE

A Mexican American journalist returns home after more than 35 years to investigate the secret dumping of deadly chemicals by weapons makers into his desert community's aquifer. The contamination has provoked the cancer deaths of his friends, neighbors and his own mother.



**The Story is set  
in Southern Arizona's vast  
Sonoran Desert**



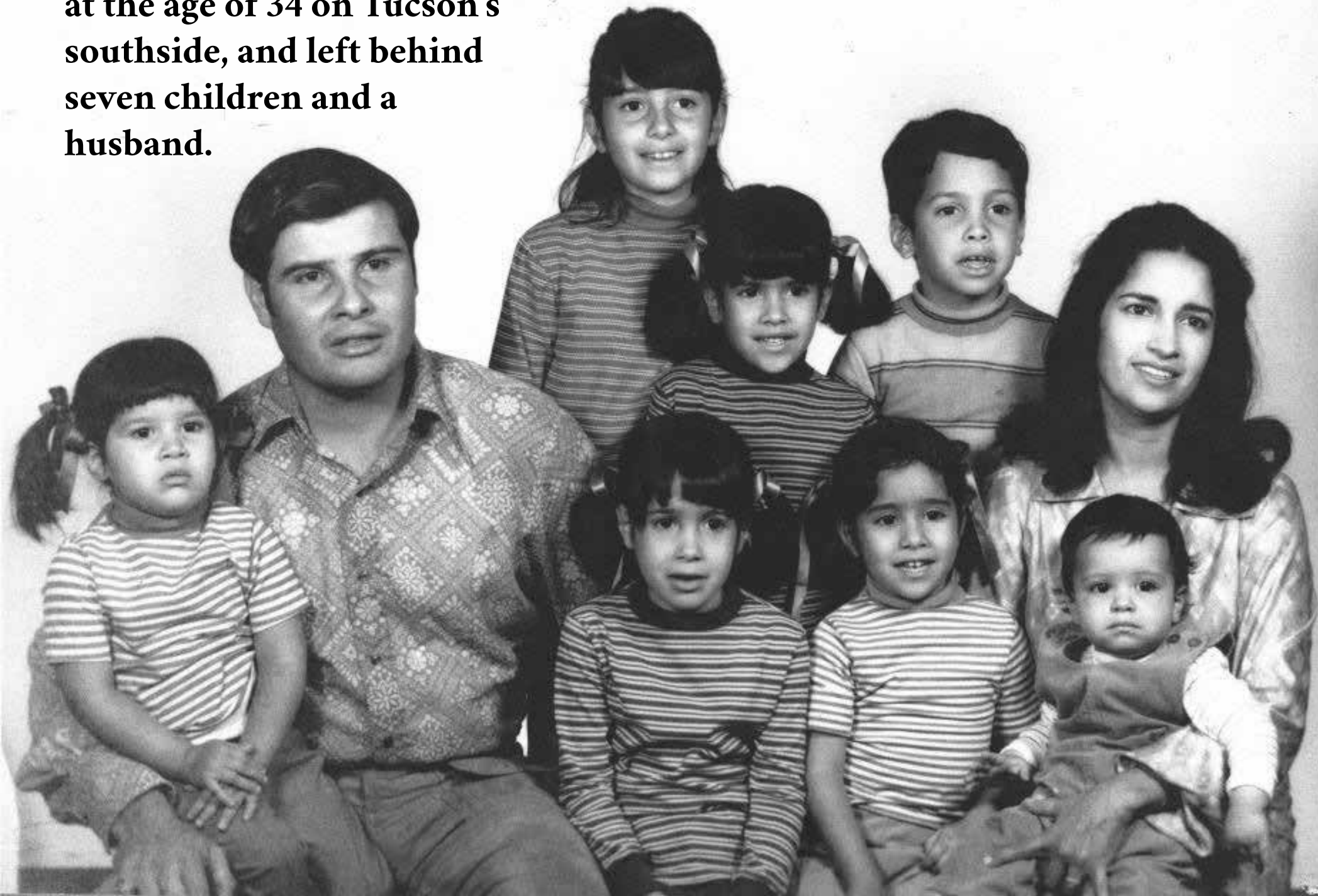


**Franc Contreras returns from Mexico City to his Southside Tucson neighborhood in this classic Volkswagen Beetle.**

He seeks to finally understand how a deadly chemical got into the local water supply and whether it is responsible for his mother Ana's cancer death.

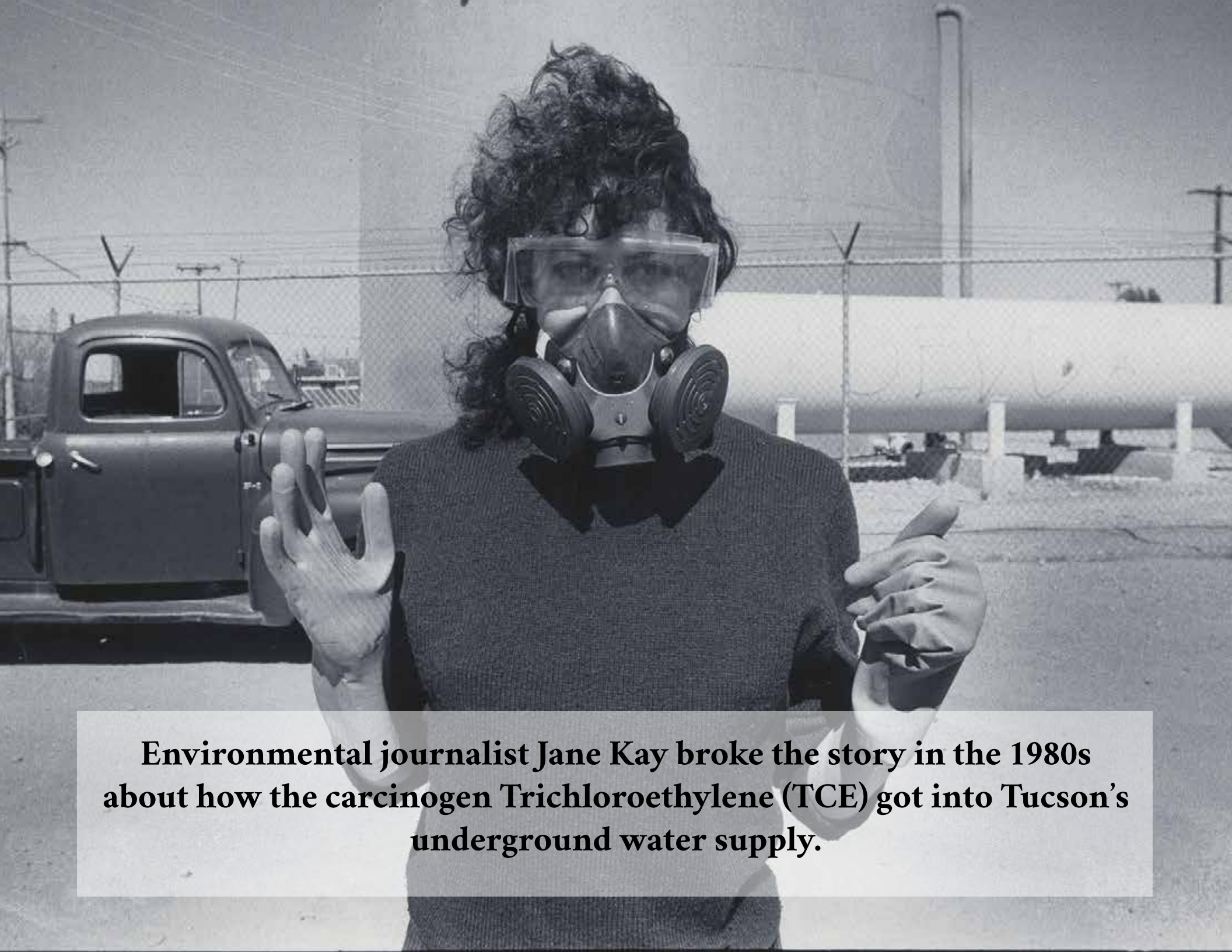


**Ana Cecilia Contreras died at the age of 34 on Tucson's southside, and left behind seven children and a husband.**



**Residents believe the water contamination has caused an abnormally high cancer death rate in their affected neighborhood. Many families were devastated.**





**Environmental journalist Jane Kay broke the story in the 1980s about how the carcinogen Trichloroethylene (TCE) got into Tucson's underground water supply.**

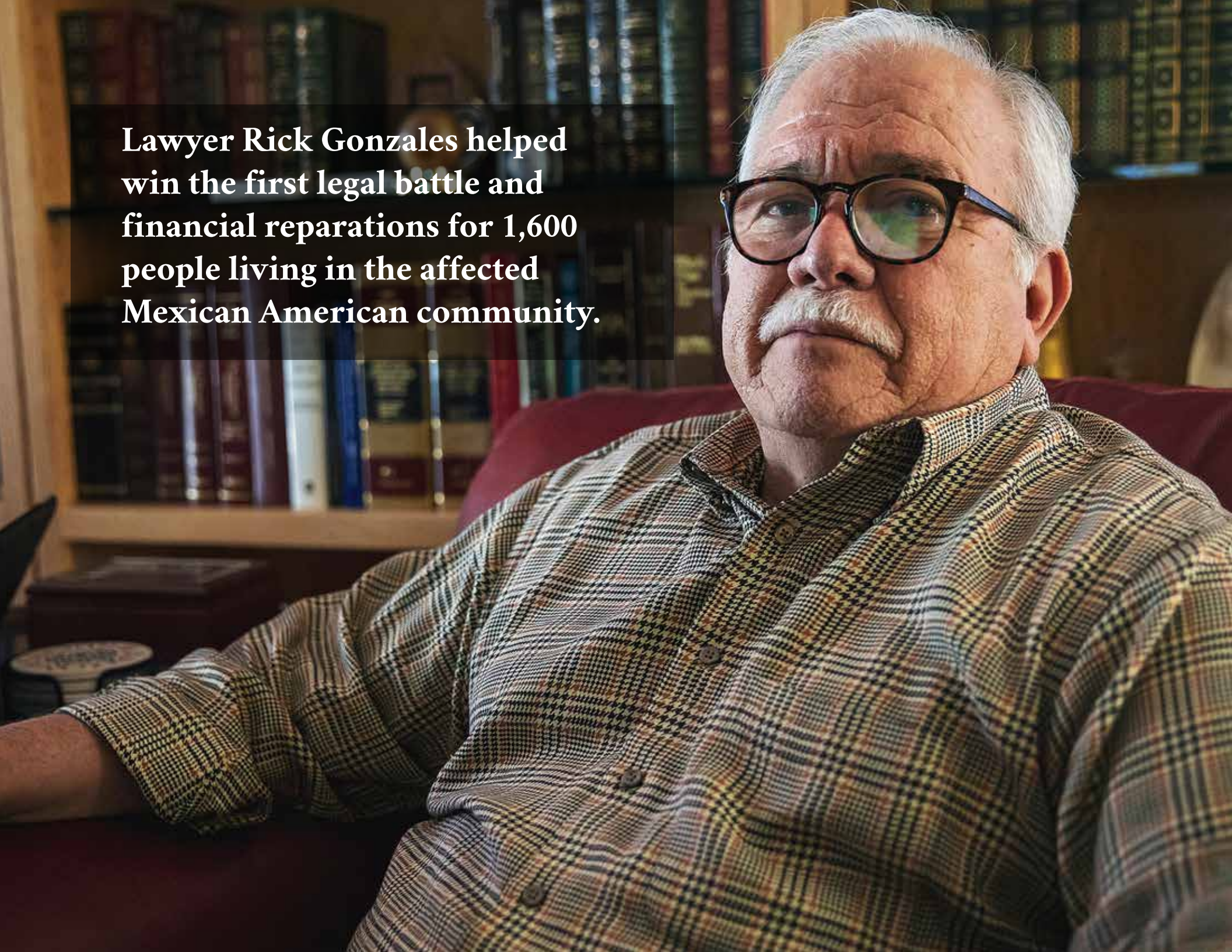
A portrait of a woman with voluminous, curly, reddish-brown hair. She is wearing a dark red, ribbed, button-down top and a black choker necklace with small, dark, round beads. The background is a plain, light grey. The lighting is soft, highlighting her features.


**Jane conducted an independent health study of affected residents. Decades later she guides Franc's investigation.**

**Former teacher Melinda Bernal was the first community activist who drew attention to the high cancer death rate in Tucson.**



**Lawyer Rick Gonzales helped win the first legal battle and financial reparations for 1,600 people living in the affected Mexican American community.**



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 about the lawsuits.**

**Franc meets other local activists who lost family members from cancer deaths.**



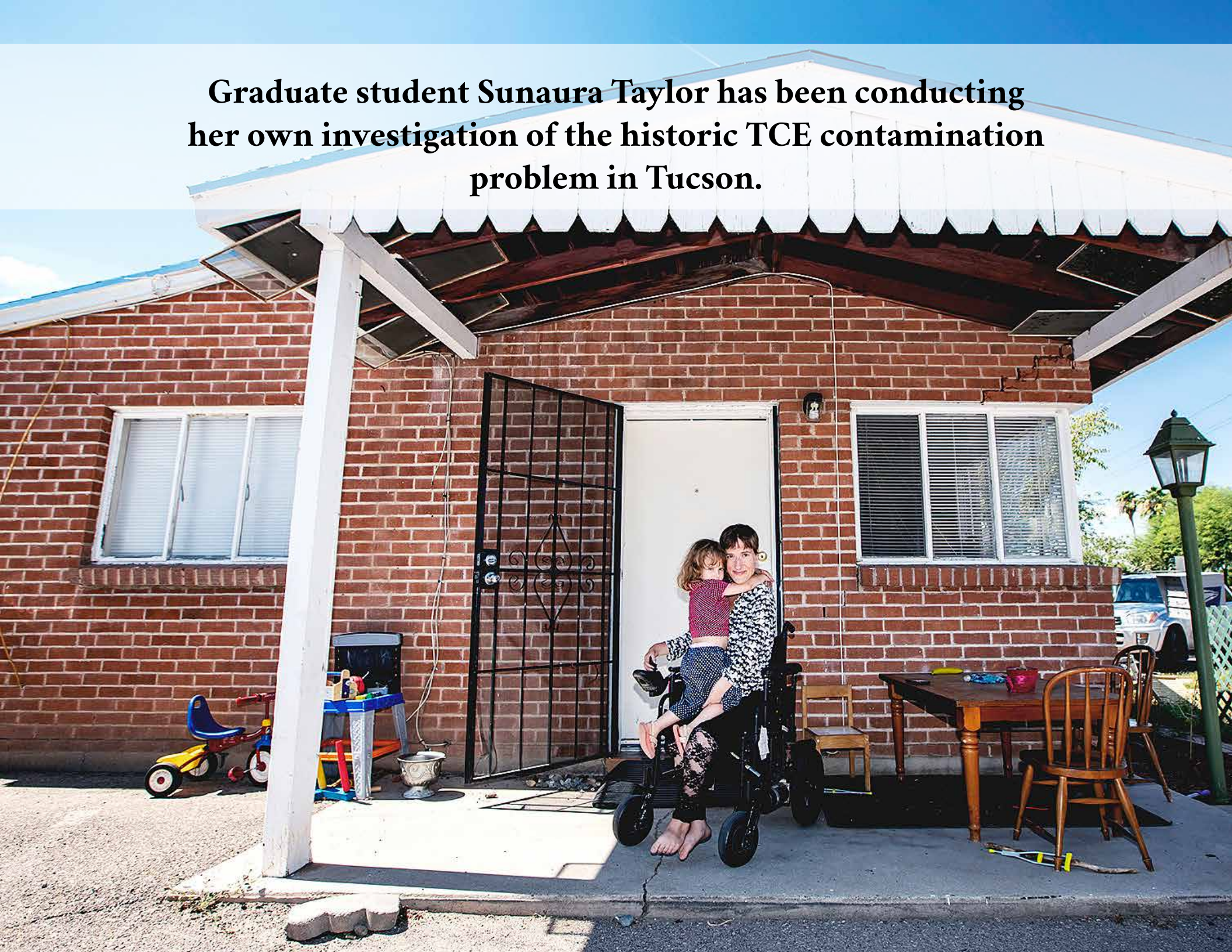


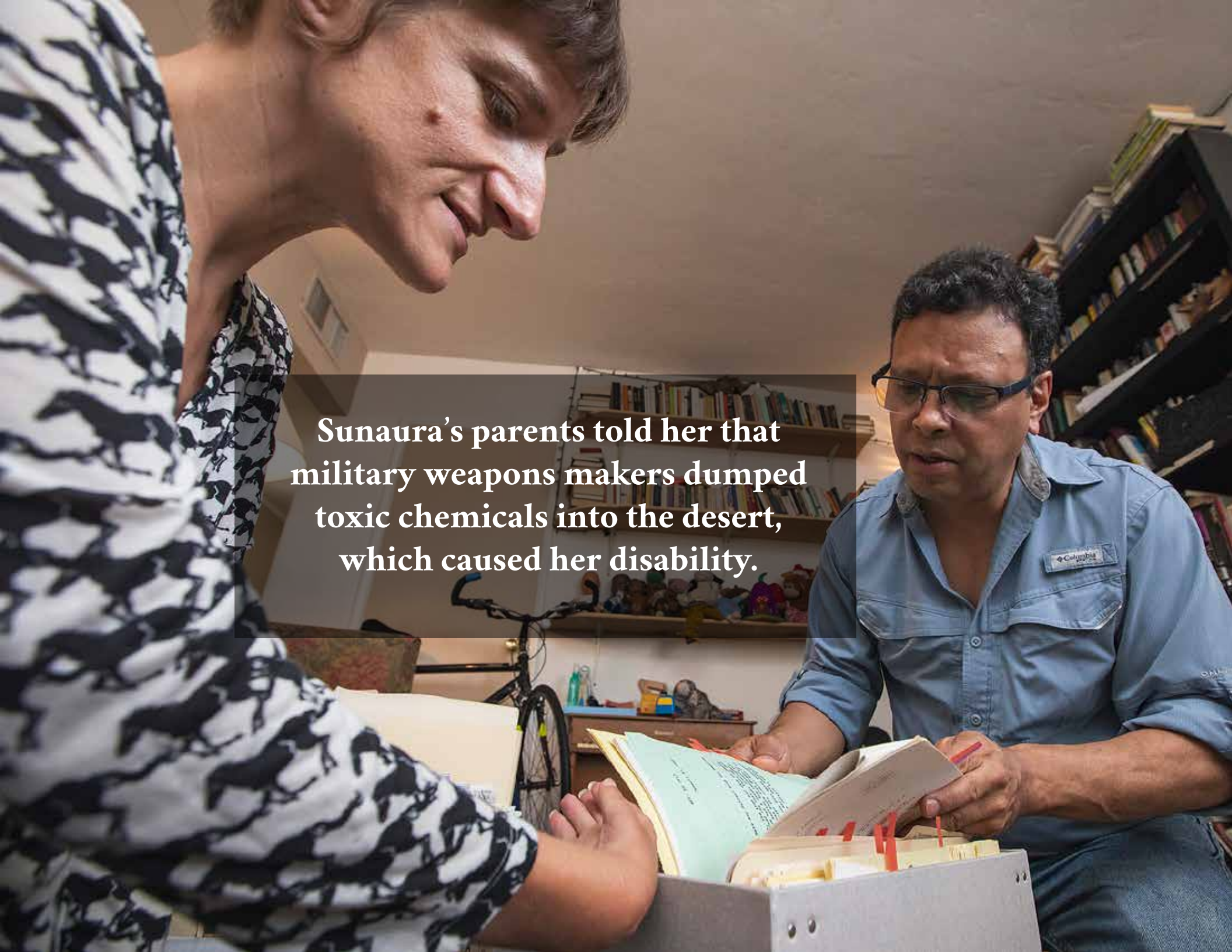
**Rose Augustine  
confronted city  
government and Tucson  
Water company officials  
who downplayed  
the problem.**



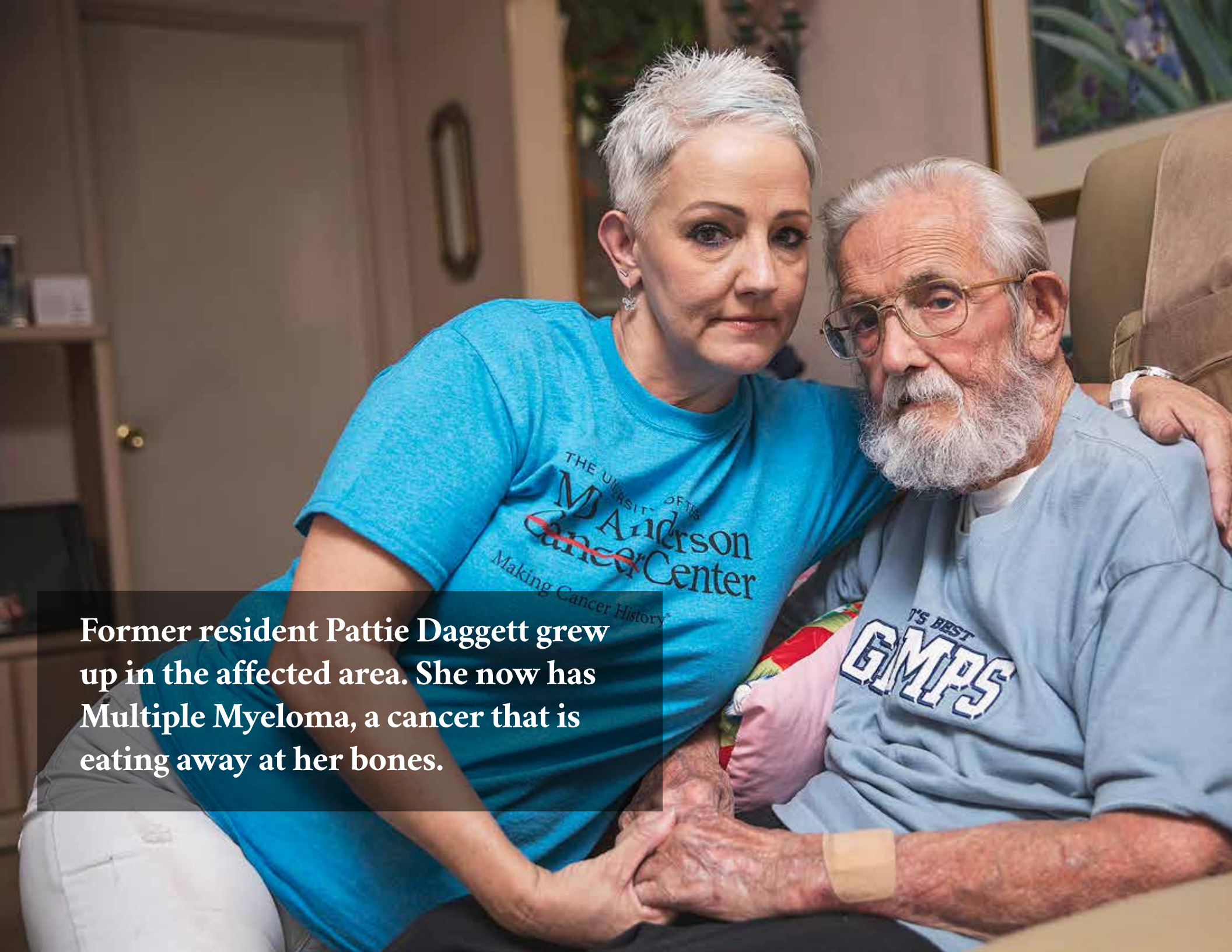
**Now in her 80s,  
Rose hopes to train  
a new generation of  
environmental activists.**

**Graduate student Sunaura Taylor has been conducting her own investigation of the historic TCE contamination problem in Tucson.**



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.

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



**Former resident Pattie Daggett grew up in the affected area. She now has Multiple Myeloma, a cancer that is eating away at her bones.**



**Pattie believes constant contact with the contaminated water as a child caused her cancer.**



**“Super Dave” Gutierrez earned that name after surviving five bouts of cancer and continues to battle for his life.**

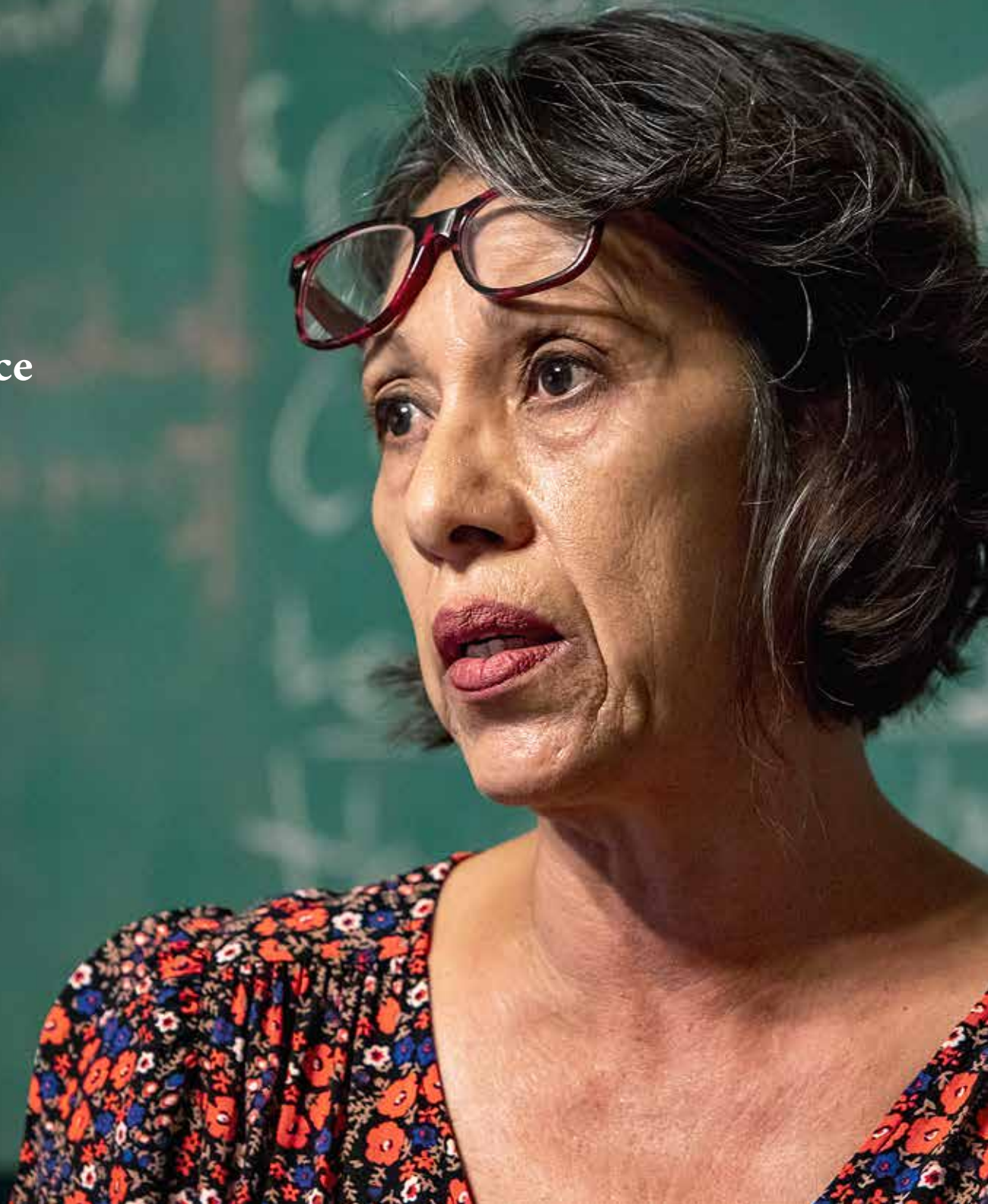


**Super Dave shares his inspirational story with others, explaining that cancer killed his dream of joining the U.S. Marines.**



**Evelina Street is known locally as la Calle de la Muerte because each of the 35 homes here have lost family members to cancer.**

**Linda Robles is the latest activist leader of the environmental justice movement on Tucson's southside.**






**Linda uses her own home to teach community members about the history of TCE and other chemicals in Tucson's water supply.**

**Tucson Water officials have downplayed the impact of the pollution. Spokesman Fernando Molina tries win back the skeptical community's trust.**



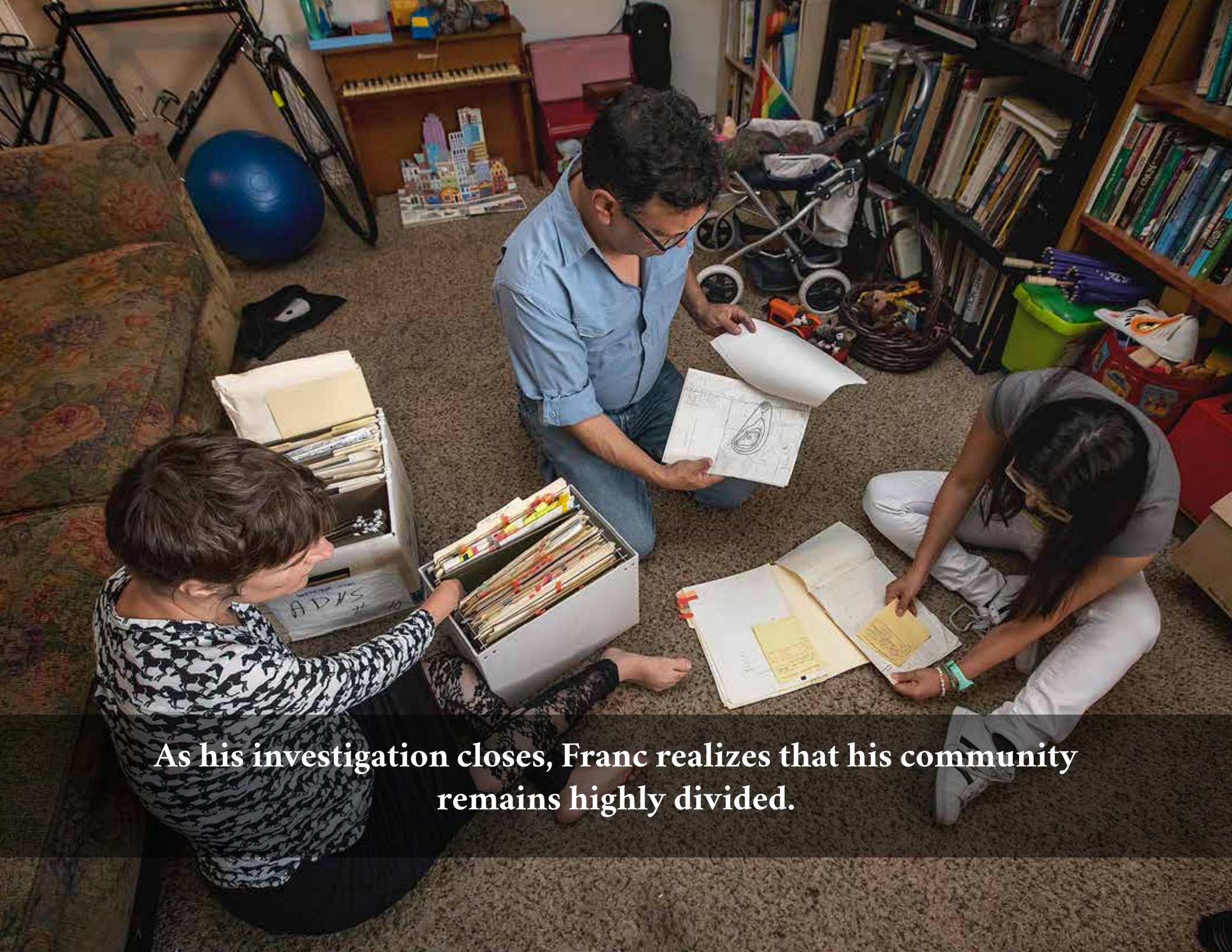
A close-up photograph of a file folder tab. The tab is white and has handwritten text in black ink. The text reads "TIAA - KEY INFO" on the first line and "color code: red" on the second line. The folder is filled with numerous colorful sticky notes in various colors including red, yellow, green, blue, and purple. The background is blurred, showing more of the folder and its contents.

TIAA - KEY INFO  
color code: red

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

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





**As his investigation closes, Franc realizes that his community remains highly divided.**

Franc decides he must take an extraordinary action to reunite his community.





## **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**

**This is the untold story of activists and residents who struggle to live past a devastating and on-going water contamination event that has been harming their lives for decades. The film investigates allegations of official cover-ups and the reasons for residents' deep-seeded mistrust. Color palettes and camera movements will reflect Tucson's deeply rooted Mexican culture.**

## THE CREW

**Writer and Director Franc Contreras is a veteran television correspondent from Tucson, Arizona. His short documentaries and video reports have been seen by tens of millions of viewers around the world.**

**Director of Photography Mark Braun has been a filmmaker for 40 years. He's based in Tucson and says this documentary will be a visual homage to his desert community.**

**Film Editor Manuel Tsingaris has participated in the creation of documentaries for more than 20 years. He brings intuitive storytelling and original aesthetics to the films he helps bring to life.**

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



## THE CREW

**Jimmy Hernandez is an award-winning videographer and editor based in Mexico City. His documentary work has appeared on major cable channels including Discovery, HBO and Netflix.**

**Production Assistant Pamela Salinas Parra is an experienced television producer based in Mexico City. Her work has been broadcast across the Spanish-speaking world.**

**Photography by John de Dios & The Arizona Daily Star**

**Design by Mireya Guerrero Cercós**



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