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# Tonie Angel

## Educator Remembered for Warmth of Personality

As principal, she was told 'parents would be furious' if she left

By Lloyd Jojola Journal Staff Writer

Her career as an educator may have lasted decades, but "no educational rhetoric" ever came from Tonie Angel.

"She had down-to-earth solutions on education," said Jean Key, a former secretary at Hodgin Elementary School in Albuquerque, who worked alongside Angel years ago. "She just got things done."

Tonie L. Angel was the first principal at Hodgin and, before that, an Albuquerque and Las Vegas, N.M., teacher and San Miguel County schools superintendent.

"She started (teaching) at 18 and never quit until she retired," Ronald Angel said about his mother.

Angel was 96 when she died July 30 in Austin, Texas, where she had moved two years ago to be near her son. A memorial service will be held for the Albuquerque native at 9:30 a.m. Saturday at St. Charles Borromeo Church, 1818 Coal SE. A private interment will follow.

Angel retired as principal of Hodgin Elementary in 1977, when she was 65.

"She knew every kid in the school by name," remembered Dottie Trent, a former educational assistant at the school. "She was just a fantastic person. "Any problems, she could handle."

Angel was born in the Armijo neighborhood. Her father died when she was very young, and her mother raised six children alone.

She graduated from Albuquerque High School and then attended the University of New Mexico, said her son, Ronald Angel.

"You could start teaching after a couple of years, after a certain number of hours, and she got those hours and began teaching," he said.

Her career choice was defined by the times.

"It was a matter of there were no other choices for women in her situation," he said. "In those days, there was nursing and teaching. From her perspective, and that of her sisters, that was it."

Angel and three of her sisters became teachers.

Angel earned a bachelor's degree from UNM and a master's degree from New Mexico Highlands University.

She was an elementarylevel teacher at schools in and around Albuquerque before moving to Las Vegas in San Miguel County to teach. In the 1950s, she was elected superintendent in the county, “where she introduced many educational reforms that improved the quality of rural schools,” according to a family obituary.

Angel, who was married to the late Joe Angel, a former state District Court judge, returned to Albuquerque and taught at Whittier Elementary School before being seated as Hodgkin Elementary principal.

“She was really a people person, which is why she had success as a principal,” Ronald Angel said. “In those days, principals stayed at an elementary school four or five years — it wasn’t all that long. ... But they left her there the whole time simply because, as a supervisor said, ‘If I move you, the parents would be furious.’”

Among other initiatives people remember, Angel was concerned about getting Hispanic students to speak English fluently — she was bilingual herself. And Angel thought many special education programs could be handled in the classroom, Trent said.

“She was really fair,” Trent said. “If the teachers had problems, they could go to her and she could help them.”

Key said, “She was very warm. The students loved her. ... The staff just loved her.”

Angel’s children, Ronald and his late sister Rita Angel, both became professors — Ronald at the University of Texas, Rita at UNM — and their mother served as a big influence.

“She said bare minimum for my sister and myself was a bachelor’s degree,” Ronald Angel said. “She was a great believer in education.”

Angel was preceded in death by her daughter Rita Angel, a UNM professor of music; her husband Joe Angel; four sisters, Rosa Chavez, Bennie Soto, Beulah Gonzalez and Dora Clarke; and a brother, Fred Lucero.

Her survivors include her son Ronald Angel and daughter-in-law Jacqueline of Austin, Texas; and grandson, Matthew Angel, a graduate student at MIT in Boston.



ANGEL: Known as an education reformer