

Julia Luna Mount

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Julia Luna Mount might have been an ordinary woman, but she never forgot what Miss Murphy told her 50 years ago.

"Look at your hand, dear," Miss Murphy said when Julia showed up for her typing class. "See how dark it is? Who's going to hire you?"

Julia, a frightened girl of 12, protested and took the class anyway. The only brown child in a sea of white faces, she had taken her first stand in a lifelong series of causes.

At 14, she went on strike at the cannery where she worked at night and became a founding member of a cannery workers union. Mount picketed the Welfare Department when it doled out beans to Mexicanos while others got milk, meat and vegetables.

Later she protested U.S. involvement in Korea and Vietnam. She lobbied for bilingual education and ran for the school board and the state Senate.

Then, her father, step-grandfather and brother died of cancer. Julia and her sister Celia each lost a breast to cancer. Julia believes there is a link between her family's cancers and atmospheric radioactivity resulting from nuclear weapons testing in Nevada. In 1979, she formed the East Los Angeles Alliance for Survival, an anti-nuclear group.

Julia Luna Mount, 61, mother of four, grandmother of 10, now is protesting the end of the world.

Miss Murphy had the nerve. What do you answer this person?

... I had another teacher, my Uncle Chuy. He was a terrific guy, a self-taught guy. He used to talk to me about the struggles of people, about world events.

Chuy would invite me to meetings. "Maybe you'd like to come and learn about what's happening and why people are having so much trouble with their gas, their light, with their closing of this or that."

An organization of the unemployed was formed. The Workers Alliance of America. We were very active. Whenever they turned anybody's gas off, we'd go turn it on.



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Whenever they evicted anybody and threw all the furniture out, we'd put it back in the house. When they shut the water off, we'd open it. When they turned off the lights, we put them back on.

In 1944, Mount, a county typist, helped organize the county employees union. Later she ran for public office.

Gloria Molina got elected (to the Assembly in 1982), but not me in 1967. Women weren't running for office then, especially Mexicanas. You crazy or something? Ha! But I thought, "Even if I'm not elected I will say the things that I think have to be said."

I ran for the school board because I cared, because 50% of our (Latino) young kids were dropping out of high school and junior high where I went—where I had trouble because I would speak Spanish during lunch.

They would give me half an hour of detention. I accumulated 532 hours of detention for speaking Spanish. I never did take them. They kept threatening me, but I knew I was right because during your free time you were supposed to do what you wanted to. Later on, of course, I went to Sacramento to lobby for bilingual education and we got the first grant (for Los Angeles).

Now Mount campaigns against nuclear war.

I want to emphasize the fact that as minorities, as Mexicanos, we lack housing, medical attention, good schools, jobs. We lack for everything that you can think of. For us, it's always been an economic struggle, but right now it's a struggle for survival.

These two big powers (the United States and the Soviet Union) have the capability of destroying themselves I don't know how many times over.

The most important thing is, are we going to be here two years from now and what's it going to be like?

It's an ugly period and it's a sadder period for the children that are coming. Some people don't understand these things, but some of us wonder if there will be any future generations. Sometimes, it's really upsetting enough that I can't sleep at night. . . .

She says she faces special problems organizing in predominantly Latino East Los Angeles.

Nuclear energy is a very difficult subject to get into with people in our area. Mexicanos are less informed for many reasons. The subject is never covered in the Spanish-language media. But, first of all, they're so busy scratching for something to eat and pay the bills, they don't have time to think about anything else.

I've talked to a lot of people and the majority of Mexicanos tell me,

"Oh, that's the white man's problem." Well, I'll grant you that it was the white man that made the problem. He is solely responsible.

But now, it is an international problem, because if the whole world goes up in smoke or into something uglier than that, it's just going to be too bad for all of us.

When Truman said we did a beautiful thing when we dropped those bombs in Japan—Nagasaki, Hiroshima, 1945—I cried all day because I was pregnant.

That maniac. I was going to have my first son and I kept thinking, "What kind of a world are we bringing children into?" I worried the rest of that pregnancy because they had done all these tests. . . .

I can still see that we're going to have to someday go to the polls and do away with something that's killing us. But we're not going to win unless people are educated.

I made it my business to do some studying, to learn and to read. Everything I could get a hold of I'd read and I still do today. . . . And no way, no way am I ever going to be convinced that nuclear energy is safe.

But Mount has not given up and is trying to educate others.

Talking to different groups is my way of looking out for our future generations, to leave them a world as we know it and not leave them completely hopeless.

My son tells me, "It's already programmed that the world's going to end." It bothers me because I keep telling him, "What if we make it?"

He laughs, "No, Ma. We're all going to die." It makes me so sad.

But some of us are thinking ahead. Maybe we can stop annihilation by urging those people in government positions to reflect and see where we're headed.

The whole process of this nuclear menace should become a women's problem. . . . War affects us more than anything else because we're the ones who lose our future husbands, husbands and children.

If women controlled the world, we would not have wars because we are the givers of life.