

# Miranda Banuelos



Compadre Academy student Miranda Banuelos thrives on creative inspiration and meaningful relationships. It is no surprise that she leaned in on those strategies and her inner strength to literally move herself from a negative to a positive living situation.

Miranda knew that living with her mom and stepdad was not good. There was abuse in the household, her stepdad spent time in jail, and Miranda was the sole caregiver for her younger sisters when she lived there. But she stayed. She cared for her sisters. She loves her family.

Miranda's school environment was not good either. When in school she experienced drama, fights, and a lack of a supportive system. When in online school, it was difficult for Miranda to balance school with watching her sisters during the day while her mother went to work. Life was chaotic. Miranda stayed.

During these challenging times her friend Sharmayne encouraged Miranda to join her at Compadre Academy. Although Miranda wanted to, she stayed the course—enduring three years in negative home and school circumstances.

Until something changed—Miranda did something for herself. She accepted an invitation from another friend, Tracy, to move in with her family and to finish school at Compadre Academy away from family problems.

Prioritizing herself first is HARD. She loves her sisters. Miranda recalls from early childhood memories and throughout her life watching family members get tattoos. She says they described their lives and their hardships through their tattoos on their arms,

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legs, calves and chest. She watched them tattoo each other, making simple drawings come to life on their bodies, telling their personal stories of trauma, of romance and of familial love. She identifies with the artistry of this and acknowledges it as a steppingstone process that details what people are going through in life. Miranda is an inspired thinker who understands the complexity of her family and her personal journey.

Miranda is choosing to craft a happy chaos to replace any other chaos in her life. She is making her own story now. Can you picture her singing and dancing to Megan Trainer's All About that Bass? Or shaking off a challenging day with a gremlin voice? She does.

She is also staying connected with her younger siblings. She is supporting the family she is living with by nannying the younger kids. She is constantly looking for ways to be kind and help people. She is always volunteering at school. She is one of the first faces new students meet when they come to Compadre Academy because she is a student ambassador who welcomes newcomers and gives them a tour.

Miranda is most inspired by who Grandpa who recently passed due to COVID. In her words, she shared "he was greater than any dad, my father figure. He taught me and told me things you should tell your daughter, the importance of school, to strive to do better." Miranda's grandfather strongly encouraged her to apply to college. And, with the help of Anne Jauregui (HOW DUH GEE), her School Counselor, Miranda is doing just that. When Miranda graduates she will be the second person in her family to go on to college.

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Miranda is crafting her future. One look at the bag Miranda sewed from old jeans, the headdress she took two and a half months to make for Halloween or the purple legwarmers she crocheted, and it is clear she is meant to continue her creative journey.

Miranda plans to take her talent to Mesa Community College and then continue on to Northern Arizona University (NAU). She is interested in exploring architecture, drafting, and planning for affordable housing & eco friendly homes. She is also interested in many forms of artistry.

It is clear Miranda is stretching into adulthood. When talking about her mother, Miranda said she “tried her hardest to keep my family together as best as she can with the little money she could make. She has taught me to never settle and your sisters are your bestest friends that you can get from birth. She was my superhero when I was a little kid but now I am my own superhero.”

When asked to reflect on what she is most proud of, Miranda shared, “I raised my younger sisters while I raised myself. My youngest sister was a handful—she looks to me so much. I am thriving now and can visit them and go to church. I am thankful to see them every weekend. I want to be the role model they follow. My sister is going to graduate two years behind me, if my ball is rolling, she will get hers going, then our youngest sister will get going.” Miranda is a motivated role model for her younger siblings, her friends, and her school community.

Miranda is grateful for her friends who encouraged her to move out of her home and to try a new school. She says, “I wish I would have done it sooner, but it was very

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hard to learn you can do things for yourself, that even when you care deeply about your siblings, you are not responsible for them, even when you love them.”

Miranda would like to thank Tracy her roommate who has been “making her grow up” since middle school, and Tracy’s family who opened possibilities by opening their home to her.

When asked what advice she would give to a person who is struggling or enduring a hardship Miranda responded “Nothing can be done unless you do it. Do the tough stuff first, the longer you wait the harder it gets. If you fail you can fix it.”

Miranda Banuelos, on behalf of the City of Tempe, and in honor of your outstanding courage and perseverance, I am proud to present you with this 2021 Youthfest Courage Award.