

Walk the line? No, Thank You!

By Kayla Miranda

When I write, usually the words fall into place. Sure, I spend a lot of time editing and rephrasing, but generally the changes are simply cosmetic. I'm not trying to toot my own horn or anything. I just spend a lot of time in my head before I sit down to do the writing itself. I know what I'm feeling and the message I want to get across. Last week when I started to write a statement about what I now know as the birth of my advocacy career, I knew exactly what needed to be said. Since there is a 2 minute limit, it was very condensed and to the point. I turned in my statement excited. I mean, it's not everyday that your work turns into a proposed bill in the state legislature. That day, I spent the good part of the afternoon listening to various bills go through the Urban Affairs Committee of the Texas House. I actually enjoyed it and learned a lot. Then I heard them call "my bill". No it's not actually my bill, but it's based on my experience that not only led me to my current calling, but led a community

to action. In less than 5 minutes, committee representatives had moved on to the next bill. No public comments. No statement. No progress. I was left not only confused and unsatisfied, but angry. What just happened?

For those of you that don't have the time or capacity to sit through government proceedings, let me just say, there is a whole different language spoken there. One of the biggest reasons people don't trust politicians is because what they say off the record is not necessarily what they're going to say on the record. Conversely, I'm the type of person that tells you like I see it. Not in a disrespectful way, just straight up. Sometimes I can get carried away, I can be blunt and come off as rude. But that is never my intention. I am aware of this and do my best to be polite.. Having said all this, government meetings take politeness to a whole new level. Even the smallest thing is turned into a great achievement. Hey, I did my job today. Gold star. Hey, I completed 10 percent of my projected goal, yay me. I've never heard so much patting on the back and congratulating in my life. It reminds me of how we treat babies and toddlers when they do something right. We clap and make a parade so they know it was good. But when it comes time to talk about a difficult subject, how hard representatives are willing to push tends to depend on the climate of the room. Therein lies the problem. Too many people are unwilling to tell it like it is. They refuse to go on record. Everyone wants to



The Texas State Capitol located in Austin Texas, where Texas HB 2906, relating to the disposition of rental payments received by public housing authorities from tenants, was initiated.

appear to be neutral. Or do a play on words hinting at something instead of coming out with it. In the words of Voltaire, "To learn who rules over you, simply find out who you are not allowed to criticize." So who rules the ones making the rules and why is the truth a problem?

As I'm typing this out, so many emotions run through my mind. I ask myself, why am I so triggered? I remember growing up being told children are meant to be seen and not heard. I remember in High School when the teachers tried to bend my will and spirit to what they considered to be right. I remember when I was married, my husband overriding my decisions and calling me dramatic when I tried to express how I felt. I remember how the Housing Authority personnel used to treat me. All of those things had one thing in common: I was robbed of my voice. I was made to feel unimportant. Small. Wrong. Stupid. Not good enough. Like what I thought and felt didn't matter. I had nothing to contribute. No say. I only have one thing to say to that now:

NOT TODAY. I have a voice. I have a mind of my own. I am capable. I am strong. I am bold. I am courageous. I am intelligent. I'm bigger and badder than Rocky Balboa and I DARE them to step in the intellectual ring with me. I will not apologize for the experiences in my life. Or as Jon Stewart said, "I will not censor myself to comfort your ignorance."

I would like to share the statement that was supposed to be read. This is a small part of my story. It's not all the details, of course there is so much more. But it gives an idea.

"My name is Kayla Miranda. I am a public housing resident at the Alazan/Apache Courts in San Antonio. I am in favor of HB 2906 because I have personal experience with eviction for non-payment of rent when I have, in fact, paid my rent. In 2018 a new property manager at the Alazans began issuing numerous false lease violations and assessing outrageous fees to several residents. Fines as high as \$3500 for unauthorized pets and high fees for routine maintenance in a place where the average weekly income is \$150 or less. In 2019, a total of \$1200 was added to my account. Most of the fees were for a registered service dog. I had turned in all required documents not once, but 3 times. I went through the steps outlined in our lease to dispute the charges and was told I would not be charged. Several months later I was served an eviction notice for non payment of rent and evicted in JP

Notas Y Más

May 2021

Community meetings and art events are currently on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Check websites, FB or call 210-228-0201 for virtual meetings and arts programming for each month. www.esperanzacenter.org



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CineFestival 2021, the nation's oldest Latino film festival sponsored by the **Guadalupe**

Cultural Arts Center returns **July 8-11, 2021**. The 42nd edition focuses on Chicano, Latinx & Native American cinema, with an emphasis on Texas films. Depending on public health guidelines the festival may be held in virtual format, or as a mix of virtual and live. For updates check info@guadalupeculturalarts.org or call **210.271.3151**.



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court. My rent payments had been applied to these fines. I'm the single mother of 4 children. One of my sons is autistic and has epilepsy. My other son was placed with me by CPS after his parents went to prison. I was doing all I could and had nowhere else to go. You can imagine the stress, pain and fear I was in, as well as the confusion. Why was this happening to me when I did everything I was supposed to? My then 14 year old daughter attempted suicide. She is a bright, kind and loving child who used to attend Saturday school voluntarily to get extra tutoring. Currently at 16, she volunteers with food distribution in the community, takes all AP courses and wants to be a Veterinarian. All while holding a part time job at McDonald's. So much potential and life, yet she was almost lost because she said she felt like a burden. She never should have felt that way, but office personnel banging on your door is hard to hide. NONE of this should ever had happened. Luckily I found help with my neighborhood association and Esperanza Peace & Justice Center who connected me with legal aid. I was able to appeal and keep my apartment. 6 months later my case was dismissed. During my ordeal, I engaged in community advocacy and found several other families were in the same situation but unfortunately didn't receive help in time or simply left when they received notices to vacate because they had no hope of paying these fees.

Public housing is made up of the poorest of the poor, including many elderly & disabled individuals and several single mothers, all of which have the most to lose. When rent is paid, no loopholes should allow the funds to be funneled elsewhere. No family should lose their home over a technicality. No person should lose their life to hopelessness. Thank you for your time."

The Historic Westside Residents Association and Esperanza saved my life. They stood by me when no one else would. My neighbors and fellow residents would have been lost without them. I can never express the gratitude or respect I hold for the amazing individuals who fought by my side and are by my side still. Of course my situation has improved since then. I hope and pray that it will continue to improve in the years to come. I work hard. Hundreds of people have put time, effort, sweat, blood and tears into the community here on the Westside. The difference between us and them is they're playing politics and we are fighting for our lives. Don't downplay our plight. We matter just as much as the suits you're talking to. And no one tells our story better than us.

BIO: Kayla Miranda, a housing justice advocate organizing in the Westside of San Antonio, resides at the Alazán/Apache Courts.



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