

# TODOS SOMOS ESPERANZA



## WE ARE ALL ESPERANZA

By Kayla Miranda

The definition of hope is to cherish a desire with anticipation. Hope is not based on fact or science, but on a feeling of trust that good will always conquer evil, that justice will prevail and that we too can be the heroes of our own stories. In the tale of Pandora, hope was a single blessing left to the human race to ease their suffering from the despair unwittingly unleashed by Pandora. Hope inspires. Hope gives way to courage. Which births strength. Hope is not the absence of despair, much like courage is not the absence of fear, but both are finding the strength to act in spite of it.

Becoming an organizer was not a conscious choice I made. I didn't dream of leading my community head first into battle, I had no aspirations of glory. I was just a mom, a friend, a neighbor, a fellow human trying to make the lives of those around me better. The question that I had to ask myself is, if not me then who? Who could tell my story better than myself? In that decision, I was put on a path that I could have never imagined. There are highs and lows, ups and downs. For the most part, it's everything in between. While we are still so far from the ultimate goal, we have come a long way in just a few years.

As it goes in every story, there are always the moments when you find yourself falling into despair. When despite your best efforts, there are oppositional forces rallying against you. Sometimes this comes in the form of tyranny, other times in the hateful words slung at you by misinformed bigots. In times of despair, it is only hope that keeps us alive. It is when the light of hope is flickering out that we must feed it with gratitude. Reignite the flames to drive out the dark and muster our courage to fight again.

Truth is a funny word. When we think of truth, we define it as what is real, what is absolute. What is fact. But some-

thing that I have learned in my 40 years on this planet, truth is a matter of perspective. My truth today, may not be my truth tomorrow. As we are living, breathing organisms that adapt, expand, grow and learn. The more information available, the many ways our truth can change. So what does that mean for us? For me, it means being open to the idea that I don't have all the answers. That I must take stalk of myself

often, ask myself if my current beliefs and ideals are my truth, or if I need to be open to evolve. It is a philosophy that I believe everyone should take. How would the world be if we all really took a hard and honest look in the mirror often?

Truth and hope are the reasons I went to our state capitol. A week later, it is what took me to the Florida state capitol. For the past several years, I have been fighting. I've been at war. Not in the physical sense. But in the realm of thought. In the world of politics and public opinion. It is not an easy place to be. We live in a very strange world. Things like honor, integrity, humility, respect, and charity are twisted. Greed, vanity and pride rule the masses. Sometimes I think that maybe I was simply born in the wrong time, that I truly belong in another century. But then I realize I would have been labeled a witch, heretic or some other ridiculous thing because let's face it, I'm way too independent and loud mouthed to ever have survived. When I

take it a step further, what I really see is that I am standing in my truth just as my opponents are standing in theirs. If you remember, truth is a matter of perspective. And perspective is based on knowledge and experience. So I must hope that when given the knowledge and perspective of others, people would be open to "walking a mile" in someone's shoes. That does not mean that you don't have a mind of your own. When you take a few minutes to see how something feels, put that preverbal feather on your personal scales of justice, does it feel right? Does it resonate? When you stand in a position of



Lisa Vogt( Escuelita),Crystal Valdez (Escuelita), Kayla Miranda (Esperanza/Homes For All South/Right to the City) and Gabby Garcia (Homes for All South/Right to the city) outside the committee meeting room

power, whether it be a community leader or an elected official, you have a duty and obligation to think of the group, not just yourself. Is this decision for the good of all, or just your own? If you are not capable of thinking in those terms, you have no right to stand in a position of power.

On April 3, my son's birthday, I spent the day at our capitol building, waiting to testify on HB 2035-relating to local governments authority to regulate evictions. I am opposed to this bill. This bill is what is called preemption. Preemption is a legal doctrine that allows a higher level of government to limit or even eliminate the power of a lower level of government to regulate a specific issue. That would mean that all of the work we have done locally in the past 5 years would be eliminated. All of the debates, all of the public input sessions. Even our votes would be voided by the state government. Texas is very large. Along the coast, they deal with hurricanes. Northern Texas deals with tornadoes. West Texas has its desert climate. Large cities deal with some issues that small towns could never dream of. It is impossible to regulate everything from a state level when the majority of representatives are from smaller, rural areas and have no idea what large cities face. Last summer, I spent several weeks on the SAPMC Committee, as vice chair. (San Antonio Property Maintenance Code) The purpose is to adapt the International Codes to be useful for our local issues, as what we face in San Antonio is not what Houston faces, just as what Dallas deals with is different from Abilene. There are reasons this isn't done solely on a State level. Evictions should be the same.

While San Antonio had one of the largest local funds available in the state to help with rental assistance, many of the small cities and counties did not have this option during the pandemic. San Antonio brought everyone together, renters and landlords, community and business. No one got 100% of what they wanted but we all agreed. We voted. We passed policy. This bill not only threatens that balance, but also makes it impossible for us to have a say in the future. But that's the point isn't it? To silence the collective power of the people. Not the small landlords that big business constantly try to latch on to, spreading misinformation and fear to drive

them, but the large ones who only know greed. Unfortunately for renters, too many individuals assume that owning property makes your word more valuable and relevant than if you don't. Like somehow when you sign that deed, you become an expert in housing and an honorable person all in one. The evidence is in the same bills popping up in many other states, backed by the same investors we have in Texas.

I signed up before 8:30am, the bill was pushed to the very end, a tactic often used in public meetings when large numbers sign up to speak. Most people are not able to wait around the whole day and end up leaving, but my group chose to stay, even though we all had other plans that we had to rearrange, for me, my son's birthday. Finally at 4:45pm, I got my 3 minutes. As did my companions. It's strange, no small landlords came to speak, only the Texas Apartment Association whose office is directly across the street. Point of interest, many owners of rental properties don't actually live in the districts and voting precincts their rental property is located in, many times not even the same state, but TAA lobbies for them locally, essentially giving them 2 votes, one in the area they live, another wherever they have rental property, it's actually one of their arguments for the bill, claiming landlords shouldn't have a patchwork of legal procedures, so they do understand they are allowing people from other voting precincts to dictate ours as well. The bill did not leave the committee that day. A small win. Short lived, as its companion Senate bill passed through senate and now sits with the same committee.

The following week I had a very similar experience. It was like Deja

Vu, the bill in the Florida house committee was also pushed to the very end. Again, I waited around with my group to speak but this time things went very differently. Their committee was twice the size, two rows of representatives. The chair of the committee was extremely rude, often smirking, laughing and belittling his co-committee members. I can't think of a time I've seen an adult roll their eyes so many times in a matter of hours. Many of the members were on their phones, or talking to staff members or stepping out often. There was a general lack of respect or taking their jobs seriously. Someone should remind them they're being video recorded. Once the bill was



A coalition of Housing Justice groups from all over Florida

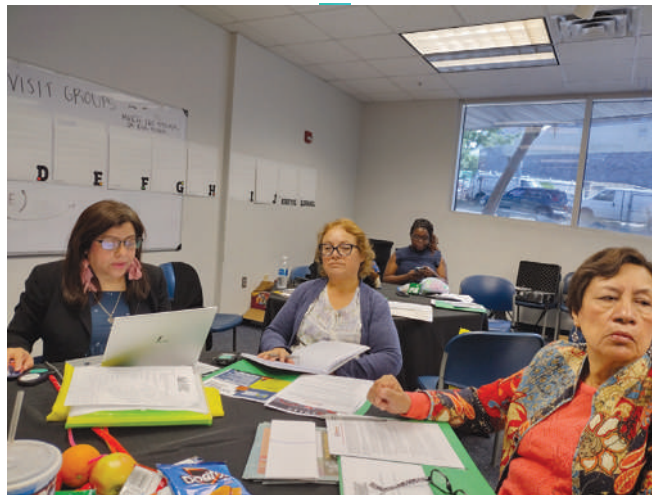


finally called, I had assumed it would be reset, as the building was closing, but instead I was shocked. They extended the meeting by 10 minutes 3 times, rushing individuals citing only 1 minute to speak, mind you they had just spent hours debating the safety of semi trucks on public roads, but did not have time to listen to the large group that had driven and flown in from hundreds of miles away. There were groups from several major cities in Florida, 2 charter buses had driven up each side of the Florida coast picking up people along the way. I didn't get a solid count but it was massive. Not including those of us who flew in from other states. Not everyone signed up to speak, but by the time the chair called the meeting and denied any more comments, only 3 of our speakers had the chance to speak and more than 40 were denied outright. It was announced that if we wished to speak to the members, we could contact their offices and a vote was called. That is when a healthy dose of peaceful civil disobedience came into play. We chanted this is what democracy looks like a few times before several sergeants started clearing the room. One of the members from Miami is an elderly African American woman who needed a walker. She was pushed and shoved out of the room forcefully while members of her group tried to reach her in order to hand her the walker. We all stood in the hallway listening to the ongoing meeting while the chair said, "Your socialist activity does you no good" or something similar, he must have failed U.S. History because how does he think the country was formed to begin with? While another committee member said, "Well I think it's only fair to allow the landlords to speak." Yet another says, "I own 2 rental properties myself, we are mostly just small landlords". I was absolutely disgusted. This committee was so biased it's unreal. They denied the public the opportunity to speak, which is against F.S.286.0114, Section 286.0114(2): "Members of the

public shall be given a reasonable opportunity to be heard on a proposition before a board or commission." enacted in 2013.



Waiting inside to speak



The three women are from *Prosperemos Juntos* (the Methodist/Esperanza Grant for housing on the westside)



The Business & Industry Committee

I didn't think it could get any worse. So of course, it did. While each end of the long hallway filled with police for us, one of very few women on this committee, let alone a woman of color, was so completely disrespected. It wasn't the first time that day, I can only assume it's a regular occurrence in this "good ol boys" club. She attempted to speak and was shut down immediately. But this time, she demanded as is her right as an elected official and member of that committee to be heard. And she was amazing. We all cheered her on from the hallway, loud enough that the committee heard too. The smile on her face was brilliant. They passed the bill on to the house. But as we loaded onto the elevators I could see Hope still lives in Florida.

It was pure bliss for me to return to my beloved westside. While I really enjoy traveling to other cities and states to expand my knowledge base and work with our sisters and brothers in our quest for justice, nothing beats home. I will continue to fight for my family, my community, my city and what I believe to be right. There is so much work to be done, led by truth, instilled with hope, I believe that we can succeed.

You may ask yourself now, how can you get involved? There are several ways, but here are a few organizations that can point you in the right direction. Esperanza Peace and Justice Center, San Antonio. Coalition for Tenant Justice Inc, San Antonio. Prospermos Juntos, San Antonio. Texas Housers, Texas (several local offices). Homes for All South (southern region). S.M.A.S.H. Miami. Miami Workers Center. Florida Housing Justice League. Right to the City (National).

BIO: *Kayla Miranda, a housing justice advocate organizing in the Westside of San Antonio, resides at the Alazan/Apache Courts with her family.*