

reflections by Genevieve Rodríguez

What were you doing on Saturday, March 8th? Let me tell you what nearly 1,000 marchers were up to on that day. Marchers gathered at Travis Park as early as 7 am studying which poster they would proudly raise over their heads. As peacekeepers lined them up at 9 am, local poet Ria Thompson shared her spoken word. Just before the march began, a blessing was offered by Alexis Reyes of the Turtle Clan of Payaya, Auburn Sky Gonzáles and Maria Fernanda of the Black Horse Clan of the Payaya, and elder. Emma Ortega, an Apache, who called upon the mother spirit from all directions with a song.

By 10:30 am, elders and women with children led the march onto Jefferson Street in downtown San Antonio - not on the sidewalks! A sidewalk march is what Sheryl Scully, Michael Bernard and Mayor Hardberger said is adequate for people who cannot afford the fee to march on the streets (which depends on what police think it should cost - anywhere between \$3,000 to \$70,000 or more). All but two council members voted to make some city approved marches free, while others pay steep fees.

The International Woman's Day March planning committee and the Free Speech Coalition took on the ordinance by suing the city. With an injunction granted by the Judge, this year's IWD March was in the streets and free as it should be. The struggle for FREE speech will continue in a trial set for October, 2008.

It was a beautiful sight to see la gente flowing down Houston Street. The colorfully painted banners spread among the marchers gave voice to mothers organizing to stop school closures; to women marching against sexual violence; to Lady of the Lake students marching for reproductive choice and others. The marchers streamed gracefully along with a few SAPD officers.

The Plaza de Zacate (Milam Park) filled up with mostly women and children listening to what mujeres had to say. Community activist, Fabiola Torralba, greeted marchers with a speech by Emma Tenayuca. Judy Lerma - a union nurse - spoke on issues facing health care workers. Nadine Saliba spoke on the effects of the US war and the deceptive media portrayal. Yvonne Gutiérrez challenged us to take on the right wing that's chipping away at our reproductive freedoms, while Nettie Hinton spoke on the gentrification of the east-side and other struggles facing women of color. Regina José Galindo, a Guatemalan performance artist who addresses abuse of women. shared a poem, and Anel I. Flores recited poetry on sexual abuse and generational hypocrisies within the social justice movement. Eloisa G. Tamez and her daughter, Margot Tamez, spoke on the fight they are leading against the border wall on their land near Brownsville, Texas.

The IWD rally closed with local musicians Azul and Dava Hernández who were captivating and motivational. The day ended beautifully; a day that a group of nearly 60 women had begun organizing in early December, 2008.

Initially, about seven women representing the Esperanza Center, Martinez Street Women's Center, the P.E.A.C.E. Initiative, Fuerza Unida, and community individuals met at Fuerza Unida with the intent of mobilizing more women than ever in the history of the IWD March in San Antonio. The question facing organizers was "who else needs to be in this room?"

They started from that point contacting women who had helped organize the march in the past and women who had never been a part of the march. The meetings grew to include groups like the Auris Project, Our Lady of the Lake University, Stonewall Democrats,



Crystal & Robert Castillo at March. Photo: Sebastian Castillo

The Blazin' Banditas, The Rape Crisis Center, Planned Parenthood, San Antonio Lesbians Improving Relations (SALIR), Texas Media Empowerment Project, and more. There were a total of 20

sponsors/organizations involved.

The issue of how we grow as a march and remain true to the issues affecting the community without losing perspective on the reasons women started this march eighteen years ago, remained central to discussions. Organizers took steps that showed it is possible to grow and not be sponsored by a Bank of America.

Why did the majority of media not want to cover this event? Why did they not want to cover the fact that 1 in 5 women will be sexually assaulted by the time they are 18 years old? Perhaps, it is because people running these outlets are the ones enabling the violence affecting us as women. Or, perhaps, it is not as important as the cover of today's Express News story, ... **A 10 Cent Tax on the Tall Boy**. It makes me grateful that we have a media outlet in La Voz that covers these issues extensively. Determination did land committee members, Antonia Castañeda and Denise McVea on Great Day SA, twice. The March was also The SA Current's "Pick of the Day" for March 8th, and in 210SA, as well.

March organizers took outreach very seriously. Over a hundred restaurants, shops, stores, cantinas, bodegas, record shops, coffeehouses, bars, and more were covered with IWD March flyers. Another strategic part of the organizing was outreach at elementary, middle, and high schools as well as universities. Over 1,000 students participated in talking about issues like sexual assault, sexualization of women in media, discrimination, and immigration. Organizers visited schools up until two days before the march and plan to continue these visits this coming year.

The conversations also included a woman left out of the history books very intentionally, Emma Tenayuca. The 2008 IWD March commemorated the 70th anniversary of the pecan shellers strike when organizers, Emma Tenayuca and Manuela Solis Sager, led 12,000 workers, mostly women, on a strike that eventually led to legislative labor reforms and the birth of the ACLU of Texas. March organizers want to continue to bring up the struggles of women left out of history. They also plan to start earlier than December to organize the 2009 IWD March.

This march represents what is vital in this community: the struggle of women to be heard. Will you choose to be a part of the thousands who will read this article next year remembering details as we mention them because you were there, or will you be someone who can't remember what they did that morning instead of marching?

Bio: Genevieve Rodríguez, a Cubana and honorary Chicana, is a local activist/artist/musician and Buena Gente of the Esperanza Center.