

# La Voz de Esperanza

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noche de paz y justicia

# La VOZ de Esperanza

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# Faith

## in gente-based actions

by Joleen García

Faith takes many different forms for each of us. For many people it is the driving force that maintains the spirit. I have great faith in the movimiento, the force that drives positive change, that reconnects us to our ancestral unity, and that will create a new world and a new San Antonio from the roots to the sun. Many of us are paving the way, doing the necessary work to make a new world possible. For each of you, I share this story that was recently spoken by a friend.

### El Cuento\*

A mother looked over her sick child with the doctor who served the family. The boy was ill with a dangerously high fever, and the doctor requested that the mother collect ice in order to cool down her son's body. The mother set a bucket out on the porch, and she began to pray. She thanked God for the many times help was needed and help arrived. She prayed faithfully for God to send the ice needed to save her son.

The mother then went to the kitchen to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. The doctor was surprised upon seeing the woman in the kitchen. Why was she was making a sandwich instead of collecting ice?

The faithful woman said, "When my son wakes up, he's going to be hungry and he will want a peanut butter and jelly sandwich."

God called the North wind to meet the South wind over the home of the faithful. It began to hail and ice soon filled the bucket on her porch. The mother was thankful.



**VOZ VISION STATEMENT:** *La Voz de Esperanza* speaks for many individual, progressive voices who are gente-based, multi-visioned and *milagro-bound*. We are diverse survivors of materialism, racism, misogyny, homophobia, classism, violence, earth-damage, specisism and cultural and political oppression. We are recapturing the powers of alliance, activism and healthy conflict in order to achieve interdependent economic/spiritual healing and *fuerza*. *La Voz* is a resource for peace, justice, and human rights, providing a forum for criticism, information, education, humor and other creative works. *La Voz* provokes bold actions in response to local and global problems, with the knowledge that the many risks we take for the earth, our body, and the dignity of all people will result in profound change for the seven generations to come.

\*\*

Over the past few years, I have had the great privilege of working with many people who have been an inspiration to me. I have witnessed the breaking down of barriers and the creation of strong



community. I have faith in the work each one of you is doing and I know we each are playing a role in reaching our goal.

community. I have faith in the work each one of you is doing and I know we each are playing a role in reaching our goal.

This story challenges us to have faith in our own work, even in times of great trouble. It also asks us to prepare the way for justice, focusing on nourishing relationships and creating community as we move towards justice.

Let's take the recent elections as an example. The Texas 2002 statewide election was dirty and smelly, with many *politicos vendidos* who are wolves in sheep's clothing. I hope that we take the *basura* out, compost the organic materials and use the rich soil to plant some seeds (how about sunflowers?).

Locally, we have organized around many issues: fighting to save our water from greed and pollution, exposing deep corruption in city politics, exposing clean air violations and contamination sites like Kelly AFB, struggling to preserve our historical legacies, as in the Remember La Gloria campaign, and battling in

the courts against the defunding of the Esperanza. Community-based actions like these are all good composting materials, once you allow the greasy slime to ooze out.

These actions have brought people together in a very personal way. Through struggle, we continue to learn, and plant the seeds of community. We regenerate and invest in the future by planting these seeds. We are standing up to be heard as in the gathering of over 107,000 people against the PGA village. And... we will continue to act and be heard.

In May of 2003 city council elections will once again be held. Who is going to step up and nurture these seeds with their candidacy? Who will make sure candidates are



accountable to community? And when the dust settles after the elections, who will continue to advocate for community? It takes great strength to continue the struggle on behalf of gente. For many of us it takes the strength of faith. Join us in 2003 in however you can to continue planting the seeds of community and keep the faith. *La lucha continua.*

Joleen García volunteers in the Save Our Aquifer campaign, the Green Party, and Centro Esperanza.

\* The story mentioned above was told by Reverend Osagyefo Uhuru Sekou.

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# BIG BROTHER

## Disguised as Homeland Security

By Antonio C. Cabral

Labor leaders call it the most anti-worker transformation of the U.S. government in many years. Some Democrats labeled it Bush's new bureaucratic empire while the ACLU warns that it is a threat to the American tradition of open government. They are describing Bush's new Department of Homeland Security (DHS) that the right wing fringe now running Washington pushed through Congress last month with the help of some Democrats.

The DHS will combine 22 federal agencies into one giant department including the Coast Guard, the Customs Service, Immigration and Naturalization Service, Border Patrol, Secret Service, the Transportation Authority Administration and others.

The DHS marks the most sweeping change to the federal system since 1947 but today it's being used to protect corporate interests and hurt workers. Bush argued that the DHS is necessary "to make certain that those who respond to terrorist attacks are well trained."

However, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates that it will take up to 10 years for the DHS to be operational. "We face an immediate threat of more terrorist attacks," complained Representative Jim Moran (D-VA) during the House's debate. "The American people can't wait 10 years for us to protect their safety."

Representative Stephanie Tubbs Jones (D-OH) summarized the fallacy of Bush's claim that the DHS will mean greater safety for the public. "It does not provide the funds needed to prepare and equip local police, firemen and paramedics to respond to terrorist attacks. When people in my district face such attacks, they will not pick up the phone to call the DHS, they will call 911 and it will be the local police, firemen and paramedics who will respond!"

The new law contains a provision that strips 170,000 DHS employees of rights covered under Title V of federal law that protects government workers from whistle blowing retaliation and other abuses. It suspends collective bargaining rights and

other federal worker protections won over the past 75 years. "How can protecting us from terrorism justify taking away employment rights from federal workers?" Asked U.S. Representative Albert Wynn (D-MD).

Any DHS employee can be fired arbitrarily, for example, if his or her political beliefs differ from the Administration's. In other words, Bush is bringing home his international campaign of fear, bullying and regime change by telling U.S. federal workers "it's my way or the highway, you are with me or against me."

According to the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), that stands to lose over 30,000 union members, President Bush signed an Executive Order recently stripping over 1000 Department of Justice employees of their union rights and civil service protections. Bush's justification: National Security.

In addition to hurting DHS employees, the new law also will hurt workers of private construction companies because the Republicans inserted a clause exempting new projects from the Davis-Bacon Act. This law has required since 1950 that all companies receiving federally assisted construction contracts pay

their workers decent wages.

Representative Corrine Brown (D-FLA) called this a "A glaring example of President Bush's anti-worker policies."

AFGE President Bobby L. Harnage Sr., speaking at a rally, said, "Bush talks about needing 'flexibility' to hire and fire. What he really wants is to decide who gets federal jobs and who gets fired, all actions that have nothing to do with security but a lot do with cronyism and political pay backs."

Yet, neither Harnage nor the AFL-CIO leadership took any action to mobilize grass-root opposition. In most other countries, union members and their broader communities would have been militantly protesting in the streets and storming the offices of politicians. Instead, Harnage and AFL-CIO President John Sweeney simply issued meaningless

statements while they watched the same Democrats that they supported in previous elections vote to approve this anti-worker law.

Bush and Republican legislators also shamelessly inserted several clauses to protect large corporations that will benefit from contracts issued under the homeland security effort. For example, Representative Henry Waxman (D-CA) pointed out that pharmaceutical corporations contracted to make immunization vaccines to protect people from biochemical attacks cannot be sued even if they are negligent in making the vaccine and people die from it or are injured for life.

Several parents throughout the U.S. have filed suit against vaccine makers because their children developed autism after being vaccinated with thimerosal, a mercury-based preservative that has been used in infant vaccines.

According to lawyers of the Dallas-based law firm Waters & Kraus that is suing the giant Eli Lilly pharmaceutical company, several documents they obtained show that Eli Lilly knew the danger of its thimerosal vaccine, now implicated in a number of cases involving neurological damage to infants.

Republicans argued that the DHS law needed to protect vaccine makers from thimerosal law suits despite the fact that smallpox nor anthrax vaccines, the primary defenses against possible biological warfare, do not contain thimerosal. Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson shamelessly told CNN that the provision protecting vaccine makers from mercury vaccine lawsuits was "necessary to protect them from greedy lawyers." Hutchinson and other Republicans failed to mention that Eli Lilly donated over \$1 million dollars to Republican candidates during the last election.

Also inserted into the DHS legislation was the Cyber Security Enhancement Act (CSEA). San Antonio's Lamar Smith originally sponsored the CSEA that allows police to conduct Internet or telephone eavesdropping without a court order. ACLU's attorney Timothy Edgar called this and other DHS provisions dangerous attempts to exempt it from several laws designed to keep government open and accountable to the public.

Conservative New York Times columnist William Safire, a former Nixon Administration official, expressed his dismay over this threat to constitutional rights. "Every time you use your credit card, buy a medical prescription, use the Internet or E-mail, etc. (your personal data) will go into what the Defense Department describes as a virtual, centralized grand database." Even the recently passed U.S.A. Patriot Act, as frightening as it was, contained some limitation of the use of government

spying on private individuals.

Regardless of how Congress, the White House and most of the media camouflage these threats to the public's constitutional rights to privacy, violations of workers' protections and the unleashing of unrestrained corporate abuses, the DHS law clearly shows how the alleged threat of terrorism will be used to continue the imposition of an unaccountable government.

"Every time you use your credit card, buy a medical prescription, use the Internet or E-mail, etc. (your personal data) will go into what the Defense Department describes as a virtual, centralized grand database."

~William Safire

Conservative extremists in both parties are charging ahead with other destructive actions against constitutional protections claiming that the November 5th elections gave them a mandate to do it. Dick Armey, the new House Majority leader and one of Texas extremists now in control in Washington, sarcastically told DHS opponents during the November 13 House debate, "Weren't you listening? The American people told you last week what they want!"

The weakness of the AFL-CIO became clear in the last elections and in their submission to this new law. The AFL-CIO Washington leadership is worried more about their return on investments made by their Investment Trust

Corporation and about cutting deals with the Bush Administration.

For example, The Washington Spectator reported that Douglas McCarron, president of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, supports Bush's agenda hoping that the Administration will ignore charges against McCarron of manipulating stock sales at the labor movement's life insurance company at the expense of Union members.

Faced with these threats from the Bush team and the obvious collusion of the two major political parties, millions of Americans are searching for a meaningful alternative. They are realizing that the U.S. civil society must develop new creative ways to organize itself to stop this wave of domestic abuses by the White House, Congress and the corrupt political system from City Hall to Washington. One way to stop it is to follow the example of people throughout the world who are actively resisting the globalization of corporate controlled governments and the imposition of repressive laws like the DHS. Such organized resistance must develop at the grassroots and with honest spokespersons from their own neighborhoods and not those imposed by corrupt political machines, selfish corporations, religious institutions or any other group that has an economic, social or political interest in continuing the status quo.



Antonio C. Cabral is a San Antonio freelance writer. His essays are published in the U.S. and Mexico.

# Chicano/a Pass-Over\*

by Alicia Gaspar de Alba, UCLA

Editor's note: The fifteenth annual Inter-American Bookfair & Literary Festival sponsored by the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center was held November 5-23, 2002. One of the scholars' panels, Chicano Literature in a Latino Century, focused on a discussion of the effect changes in demographics and readership are having on our literature. Panelists included Juan Rodríguez (TLU), Alicia Gaspar de Alba (UCLA), Gwendolyn Díaz (St.MU), Louis Mendoza (UTSA) and E.A. Tony Mares (UNM).

In this issue of Voz, Alicia Gaspar de Alba shares some of the commentary she prepared for the panel.

I'd like to take a more critical approach to the topic and analyze the assumptions of the title of this panel. Certainly, the panel description seems innocuous enough; as Chicano/a and Latino/a scholars, we are supposed to discuss the "effect changes in demographics and readership are having on our literature." Already, however, I am perplexed. Whose literature is "our" literature? Is the apostrophized reference to Chicano/a literature? To Latino/a literature? Or, to mainstream American literature? Are we, as experts in the fields of Chicano/a and Latino/a literature, supposed to dialogue about how those demographic changes, in other words that exponential increase of Latino/as in the United States, are changing not only those who read "our" literature, but those who write it, as well? Or, are we supposed to discuss how Chicano/a literature has to change as a result of increased Latinization?

We've all seen the results of the latest U.S. Census, we know that Latino/as—or rather, all those who are now being lumped together under the label Latino the way we were all once labeled Hispanics—are becoming the largest "minority" in the United States. I hate the word "minority" because like the word "subculture" it implies that we are minor, less than, below. But if we can tolerate that word for a minute, what does it mean to be in the existential moment of becoming the largest national minority? Does it mean that we've finally achieved a critical mass that gives more power to the old Chicano adage: *aquí estamos y no nos vamos?* Does it mean we're becoming less minor, less insignificant, less marginalized, less subject to the majority? Or, does it mean that we've arrived as a legitimate presence in the consciousness of that majority (and, of course, by legitimate, we mean marketable)?

Demographic shifts don't necessarily signify that things are getting better for Latino/as. Witness what happened in California when it became abundantly clear that Los Angeles was the largest Mexican city outside of México. Proposition 187 passed by an overwhelming majority in 1994, ending public health care and public education for undocumented—but tax-paying—immigrants, and turning schools, clinics, and

hospitals into border watchdogs that not only kept out the unwanted, but also rooted out and reported on anyone suspected of being undocumented. This racist proposition (which won the vote of at least 20% of California's "Hispanic" voters, by the way) was promptly followed by the end of Affirmative Action (Proposition 209) and the end of Bilingual Education (Proposition 227)—two of the most important and hard-won battles of the Civil Rights movements. Other states followed suit to control the flow, curtail the access to public resources, and contain the opportunities of this perniciously growing Latino minority.



Paradoxically, at the same time that all this legislation is being passed, voted for, and implemented, the culture industry witnesses a virtual explosion of things Latino, and the popular marketplace becomes a virtual showplace of Latinidad. Que Ricky Martin, Selena, Marc Anthony, J-Lo, and Shakira; que "American Me," "Mi Familia," "Resurrection Blvd.," "American Family," "Y Tu Mamá, También," "Real Women Have Curves," "El Crimen del Padre Amaro,"

"Frida," and (of course) "Selena"; que la Sandra, la Ana, la Denise, el Rudy, el Luis, la Julia, la Cristina—not to mention the other Cristina, Walter Mercado, or Don Francisco—la Isabel, el Ruben, el Victor. The multicultural agenda of the late 1980s and early 1990s helped the mainstream culture industry to recognize that Latino/as are, in fact, a huge market of consumers who can actually afford to buy books, records, and movies by and about people like themselves.

The publishing industry, which is what concerns us at a book fair, has represented this demographic change by mainstreaming some Chicana/o and Latina/o authors. How has mainstreaming impacted "our" literature, I would ask? Have the books and authors selected to flow in that mainstream represented Latinidad in all of its diversity? Or, do they fulfill audience expectations of what Latino/as are? Do they promote the dominant culture's ideology of Latino/as?

Part of that ideology includes seeing Latino/as as border

crossers—exotic or magical, criminal or sultry, going to college or driving-by with a gun—the main mainstream narrative about Latino/as is that we're foreigners and immigrants. In fact, this lumping together of everyone under the Latino label only underscores our collective immigrant status. We are outsiders. We "belong" somewhere else, but have all come here to "be the best that we can be." And a good indicator of our accomplishment, our own piece of the American Dream (if we can't also get a piece of the rock) is the evident flourishing of Latino/a books and films and music and television programs. Our percentage of politicians or tenured professors in universities isn't quite up to par, and despite the growing number of brown faces in American classrooms, our schools don't quite reflect their student populations in their teachers or administrators. But, hey, we can find our books at Barnes & Noble and at airports across the country. We can buy our movies and our music at Wal-Mart or Best Buy. All the major publishers have started Latino imprints now (some of which even publish books in Spanish, I guess because someone in New York figured out that not speaking English doesn't mean people are illiterate) and university presses from coast to coast have implemented Chicano/a and Latino/a series that publish more Chicano/a and Latino/a scholarship in one year than in the entire decade of the 1980s. All of this just goes to show that Latino/as really can make it in the United States, and I guess this is what the title of the panel means by a "Latino century."

What I, as a Chicana writer from the border who did not cross the border and whose literature does not fulfill mainstream audience expectations of what a Chicana is, and who, therefore, is not flowing in the mainstream of this Latino century, want to know is: what happened to the Chicano century? How did Chicana/os, who are not immigrants but natives to the landbase of Texas y Nuevo México y California y Arizona, Nevada, Colorado, Utah, etc.—how did the descendants of those 100,000 Mexicans who stayed on their own land after the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo tore away half their country and put it in Uncle Sam's big pocket—how did we get passed over by the angel of Latinidad?

In the Jewish tradition, Passover means survival, and survival—the mystery of survival, if you will—the fascinating and remarkable story of our survival, "those of us who were never meant to survive," as Native American poet Joy Harjo says, is certainly our most radical act. But for Chicano/as to be passed over by Latino/as in a "Latino century" is to be subsumed by Latinidad, and to deny our historical roots to this landbase. That is the crucial difference between Latino/as and Chicano/as. We are not immigrants. We are not part of the Diasporic tradition in the sense that we left our land; our land left us, just as we did not cross the border, the border crossed us. Thus, we are exiles in our own land, we come from the same place that we are told over and over again we do not belong, and our Chicano/a literature (not just what has become popular in the neo-Latino boom) speaks to that existential and contradictory reality of being

both native and foreigner at the same time.

If Chicano/a literature suddenly becomes Latino/a literature in this so-called Latino century, my fear is that our memory as natives to this landbase will not survive. Already, too many of us believe that we're "from" somewhere else, too many of us have forgotten the story of the theft, the story of our indigenous connection to this occupied territory. Too many of us think of our migration in terms of immigration rather than recuperation. We forget that "Volver, Volver" is our national anthem, and substitute it for "La Vida Loca" or worse, "Somewhere Over the Rainbow." And, as the Mexican dicho that is the motto of my entire working life says: *el pueblo que pierde su memoria pierde su destino*. The people that forgets its memory forfeits its future.



Alicia Gaspar de Alba, associate professor at UCLA, is an accomplished author whose books include *Sor Juana's Second Dream*, *Chicano Art Inside/Outside the Master's House*, and soon to be published, *Desert Blood*.

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# Orale Gente, "No More Eric Lee's" the power is in our pockets

By Arturo Vega

includes photos of the Peace Market 2002

I started writing this article before Eric Lee's Bake Shop and Café closed last summer but "things" kept popping up. So with the holidays upon us, I resolved to write this piece not so much for my disdain for the local malls or the Wal-Marts and Targets but to remind myself and others of the economic power that we really do have.

"Bakery Sells Last Scone," was the *San Antonio Express-News*

title for reporting the closing of Eric Lee's Bakery. Eric Lee's Bakery was homegrown and its owner/chef Eric Lee Dromgoole sold everything from turkey avocado and cream cheese sandwiches to muffins and scones. It was located on Martin Street on the near Westside, where his parents and grandparents were raised. Eric Lee's was a place for all kinds of people—business-types had lunch there; would-be poets had poetry slams; the kids from the rec center hung out there; and even people from Alamo Heights and terrible hills flocked for the brunch specials. The closing of Eric Lee's is a tragedy! Moreover, Eric Lee's was part of the community of shops and businesses that we as a community must nurture and patronize.

Our *antepasados* had it right and they were so much smarter than we are today. My *abuelos*, for example, were not educated people but they were *gente inteligente*. I only aspire to be as intelligent as they were. My *abuelo* worked the copper *refinas* in El Paso, while my *abuelita* managed a household of six children. They crossed the border, like many families, during the revolution years in Mexico. They settled in San Elizario, Texas, and eventually, cast their fates in El Paso, "the city."

But their wisdom was one of knowing their power. I remember my *abuelita* making the rounds *de compras* on Saturdays. We would go up and down Alameda Street, stopping at various small businesses and shops. We kids

would complain that everything she needed could be found at the modern and new, Furr's or the Piggly Wiggly Supermarkets (El Paso's versions of HEB and Handy Andy).

We didn't understand it; we considered it inconvenient.

Even when she sent us out on *mandados*, she would tell us to go the corner *tiendita* and ask *la Señora* so and so for *una libra* of whatever it was (*hojas, chile* or *carne molida*). It was never run up to the supermarket or jump in the car and drive to the mall. The same with my *abuelito*. When your car needed work and he couldn't repair it, he knew the *vecino* or the *compadre*, who had a *primo*, who had a *compadre*, who could get us a good deal, if we were patient. But it was the sixties and the seventies and we were all in a hurry, much like today. We wanted

our cars fixed yesterday; we wanted our food fast and we especially didn't want to wait around for our orders or food to be prepared on the spot. Too often, I wish I could relive those days.



When we were kids, even our parents knew the important things that we too often seem to forget today. They knew the community doctors, like Dr. Ruiz, who made home calls, the small business barber, Mr. Portillo, whose kids went with us to

high school, and the owners of the *tiendita* that sold *aguas, helados, sopas* and *tomates*. They personally knew the microenterprisers (that's what we call them today), who made *masa* for *tamales*, the *zapaterías, los mecánicos, y las panaderías*. And we were loyal customers. We would go miles out of our way to patronize a *zapatería* because they knew the owner and he or she belonged to the neighborhood or the parish. They implicitly knew that if they bought goods and services from people in the community then they in turn would take those same dollars and spend them in the same community by patronizing others' goods and services. My parents bought more homemade tamales from *vecinos* than there were *vecinos*, because they knew that next time it might be them selling tamales. More importantly, they knew that for the community to survive that they had to take responsibility for it. It wasn't a passive consumerism; it was economic activism and that was the way it was. They knew that every dollar spent in the community was a dollar that would change hands three or four times over within the community and, again, next time it might be us selling some service or product. Here are the facts, small businesses:

Represent more than 99% of all employers;  
Employ 51% of private-sector workers, 51% of workers on public assistance, and 38% of workers in high-tech jobs;  
Represent nearly all of the self-employed, which are 7% of the workforce;



Provide two-thirds to three-quarters of the net new jobs;

In addition,

Women are full or part owners of 9 million businesses and the primary owners of 5.4 million;  
In 1997 there were 1.2 million Hispanic-owned firms compared to 820,000 African America-owned firms and

913,000 Asian and Pacific-Islander owned firms and 197,300 firms owned by Native and Alaska Native Americas;



Like Eric Lee's, two-thirds survive at least two years; And that 80 percent of all new jobs in America are created by small businesses.<sup>i</sup>

Wendell Berry, *In the Presence of Fear*, reminds us that a local economy rests upon two principles:

neighborhood and subsistence. He writes "In a viable neighborhood, neighbors ask themselves what they can do or provide for one another, and they find answers that they and their place can afford. This and nothing else, is the practice of neighborhood. This practice must be, in part, charitable, but it must also be economic, and the economic part must be equitable; there is a significant charity in just prices." (30)

Berry adds that "A viable neighborhood is a community; and a viable community is made up of neighbors who cherish and protect what they have in common. This is the principle of subsistence. A viable community protects its own production capacities. It does not import products that it can produce for itself. And it does not export local products until local needs have been met. A community, if it is to be viable, cannot think of producing solely for export, and it cannot permit importers to use cheaper labor and goods from other places to destroy the local capacity to produce goods that are needed locally. In charity, moreover, it must refuse to import goods that are produced at the cost of human or ecological degradation elsewhere."

In describing the circumstances that caused Eric Lee's to close, the *Express-News* wrote that while it had successes "...there was not enough steady support from those who lived in the neighborhood (to keep it open)." Maybe. And, maybe there wasn't enough steady support from those who live in and outside the neighborhood, too.

Every time an Eric Lee's closes, we need to ask ourselves, what are we doing to help our community's small businesses and

*Orale... continued on page 22*

# ¡Boycott Forever 21!

My name is Lucy Chavac. I am a garment worker and a member of the Garment Worker Center in Los Angeles, California. I sewed for five years in a Los Angeles garment factory that produced Forever 21 clothing, which is a clothing line for young women. In that factory, I did not get the minimum wage or overtime pay that was owed to me and when I spoke up and asked for a penny raise on what I was paid per piece, I was fired. Since then, I have joined up with other workers who sewed Forever 21 clothing to fight this abuse and win back the wages owed to us. In November 2001, we filed a lawsuit against Forever 21 and launched a national boycott of the popular clothing company. Although Forever 21 profited from our labor and in fact, predicts \$500 million in sales for 2002, they deny any responsibility to us the workers who sewed their clothes! We know that they have over 120 stores throughout the country and decided we had to take our message nationwide. In October, of this year, we began a National Speaking Tour and visited New York, Miami, San Antonio, Austin, San Francisco, and Washington D.C. among other places.

I decided to go on this tour to help promote the Forever 21 campaign; so more people would know what Forever 21 is really about. Through the support of the Garment Worker Center and Sweatshop Watch, our national speaking tour has been very successful and we've had the opportunity to meet and learn from wonderful people.



My participation in the national speaking tour was to go to San Antonio and Austin, Texas. There I met many organizations such as the Southwest Worker's Union, Fuerza Unida, the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras, Esperanza Center, and KOOP Radio. We also met with students and student groups at the University of Texas at Austin and Trinity University. For example, we met with a student group working on fair trade coffee issues. We also spent an entire day giving presentations at San Antonio high schools about the Forever 21 campaign, where many students were surprised to hear about what happens to garment workers in the U.S. Many did not know that sweatshops exist here in the U.S.

From my experiences on this speaking tour, I learned that together we can overcome barriers. I also learned some very helpful organizing strategies. For example, the idea of a sewing cooperative such as the one we saw at Fuerza Unida really motivated me and I'll be sharing that idea with my compañeros at the Center. At Fuerza Unida, I was also impressed by the confidence and strength of the women there. That experience reminded me that as women, we cannot allow ourselves to be mistreated in any part of our lives. I think it would be a good idea for our own Center to begin addressing women's issues by giving workshops specifically for the women. It is important that we take away the blinders we have worn for years. We must become aware of our rights and become united.



I also want to say that, after meeting with organizations in Texas that have been working for many years, I see how important it is that we, the workers, never stop supporting each other. We must appreciate that we have learned about our rights and continue to support other workers, even after our own cases are won.

Finally, I want to thank all of the organizations in San Antonio and Austin that shared their time with us and helped to coordinate speaking events and mall actions for us. We hope we can continue to count on your support. You really helped us in our fight to achieve our dream of just wages for garment workers.



**¡¡¡Unidos  
Venceremos!!!**

**United We Will  
Win!!!**

**Support the Workers!  
Call and Write Forever 21!**  
Tell them its time to take responsibility!

Do Won Chang, President  
2001 S. Alameda St.  
Los Angeles, CA 90058  
213-747-2121

**Take Action!**  
Forever 21 National Week of Action  
**December 2- 8, 2002**  
Organize leafleting or picketing  
at a local Forever 21 store,  
letter writing, call-ins, etc.  
[www.garmentworkercenter.org](http://www.garmentworkercenter.org)  
888-449-6115



## Domi

*"I believe that the people should not allow themselves to be overwhelmed by the sadness. You must paint, dance, do something creative so that you can stay healthy. You must take risks. My work is political. With my painting I speak to everyone. I speak to the Power, rejecting it and I speak to the people, la gente, without Power. I tell them we are brothers and sisters. We must pick up our heads and find out what is good in this life. I feel a special satisfaction inside when I know that my work is being shared in indigenous communities because here in Mexico the indigenous communities are the ones who suffer the most and I am an indigenous woman." - Domitila Dominguez*

Domitila Dominguez was born May 12, 1948 in the Mazateca community of San Pedro Ixcatlán, Oaxaca. At a very young age, she watched her aunts create and weave huipiles. During the afternoon, she would take care of the plants, sit at the doorway and weave small pieces of cloth with threads of many colors. In the 1970s she participated in a collective of leftists in Mexico City and painted many murals in the streets. In 1985 she and others, including her family, formed Colectivo Callejero.

When the Zapatistas rose up in arms January 1, 1994, she understood from the beginning that their struggle for liberation/autonomy/ justice was also her struggle, as an indigenous woman and as someone who at an early age was displaced from her family's ejido, removed from her lands. Domi's work has been greatly influenced by zapatismo, a movement that transcends the borders of Mexico. In 1995, she served as one of the advisors to the Zapatistas during the San Andrés Peace Accords. Domitila believes that her paintings, which have been

reproduced in books, calendars, and posters, is one of the ways she supports the demands/needs of indigenous communities.

In the February Voz, you will find a story from el sub Marcos and el Viejo Antonio to commemorate the Ninth Anniversary of the Zapatista Uprising, of January 1st, 1994. In this issue, turn the page and find a traditional Mayan story penned by Pat Mora available with beautiful illustrations by Domi.

**Domitila Dominguez  
Exhibit Opening  
Saturday, January 25, 2003  
Esperanza Peace & Justice Center  
922 San Pedro**

If you would like to volunteer to help mount the exhibit, paint walls, or distribute invitations call us at 228-0201. See backpage for ad.

## The Race of Toad and Deer

The moon rose slowly over the jungle. Sapo and his friends were singing at their favorite pond. They sang so loudly that they did not hear the large creature moving toward them. "Silencio. Stop all this racket," growled Venado, the largest deer in the jungle. "I want quiet when I drink." The toads were angry and frightened. But Sapo just went on singing. "I said quiet!" snarled Venado. "I am the ruler of this jungle. I am the biggest and the fastest." "Not faster than I am," squeaked Sapo, stretching as tall and sounding as brave as he could. Venado laughed. "Uncle Toad, dear Tío Sapo, I'll race you tomorrow, and we'll see who wins."

As the sun rose over the green jungle, parrots squawked the news. "Race today! Carrera hoy! Race today!" "Who's racing?" asked the spider monkeys swinging through the trees. "Who's racing?" In the shade, Jaguar yawned. "Toad and Deer will race today." "Yes, Sapo and Venado will race today!" chattered the spider monkeys.

The parrots and monkeys hid in the trees and watched Venado look at himself in a lake. He lifted his proud head. "I am the fastest runner in the jungle," said the deer to himself. "My legs are swifter than the wind. I always win." At the other end of the lake, Sapo wished his fiends a good morning. Bowing slightly, he said, "Buenos días, mis amigos." "Buenos días, Sapo," answered his friends. "We know you can win the race. You can!" They hopped up and down in excitement. "I can win only if you help me," said Sapo. "Mis amigos, will you help me win the race today?" "We are your amigos, Sapo," croaked an old toad very slowly. "Of course we will help you win. You are a smart one, and you always have a plan. What must we do?" "Come close and I'll tell you," whispered Sapo.

Late that afternoon, as the sun was setting, the parrots called out, "Race time! Carrera! Carrera!" All the animals of the jungle came. Toucans and butterflies rushed through the trees. Spider monkeys swung from limb to limb. Armadillos, javelinas, anteaters, iguanas and bush dogs moved through the steamy jungle, all eager to watch the race.



**"La historia de las preguntas"**  
a través de Ik'al (deidad de la luz) y de Votán (señor de la oscuridad) nos habla de la relación de los contrarios que en su continuo interrogarse produce movimiento. Esta narración nos hace ver a don Emiliano Zapata como la encarnación de la luz y la sombra de la revolución.



**"La historia de la espada, el árbol, la piedra y el agua"**  
La historia de la lucha de resistencia maya, desde la guerra de conquista de los españoles hasta la invasión del ejército federal de 1944 hasta la fecha. Con el recurso de la fábula, el viejo Antonio equipara a su pueblo con el agua para explicar a Marcos la manera en que los

**"The story of questions"**  
Through the story of Ik'al (God of light) and Votán (God of darkness) the storyteller talks of contraries which in their continuous opposition to each other produce movement. This narration lets us see don Emiliano Zapata as the incarnation of light and darkness of the revolution.

### All featured Colectivo Callejero and Domi texts, and more, are on sale now at the Esperanza.

**"La historia de la espada, el árbol, la piedra y el agua"**  
indios han resistido y acabarán venciendo al soberbio Poder.

**"The story of the sword, tree, rock and water"**  
The story of the Mayan struggle and resistance, from the conquest of the Spaniards to the invasion of the federal army of 1944 to the present. Through fable, old Antonio equips his town with the resources and explains to Subcomandante Marcos the manner in which the Indians have resisted and will vanquish the tremendous power.



**"La historia de los colores"**  
es un relato lleno de fantasía y significados que el viejo Antonio le cuenta a Marcos para decirle que los dioses primeros hicieron caber sobre la Tierra todos los colores.



**"La historia del león y el espejo"**  
nos presenta al viejo Antonio cuando aun era el joven Antonio. Al poder - representado aquí por el león- sólo es posible derrotarlo con su propia fuerza, con su sangre. El joven Antonio, por consejo de los viejos del pueblo, hace uso de un espejo y clavos de herraje para vencer a un poder que tenía asolada a la comunidad.

**"The story of the lion and the mirror"**  
presents old Antonio when he was still young Antonio. The power -represented here by the lion- is only possible to defeat with proper force, with its own blood. Young Antonio, from advice of the elders of the town, makes use of a mirror with iron trimmings to vanquish a power that had the community under grips.

**"La historia de los sueños"**  
explica como los dioses, "los primeros, los que formaron el mundo", enseñaron a soñar a los hombres de maíz. El viejo Antonio dice que "cuando los hombres y mujeres verdaderos dicen 'vamos a soñar' dicen y se dicen 'vamos a luchar.'" Una bella manera de justificar la utopía.

**"The story of dreams"**



is the tale of how "the first Gods that formed the world", showed the people of the corn how to dream. Old Antonio says "when true men and women say 'we are going to dream' they actually say and tell themselves 'we are going to fight.'" A beautiful way to justify Utopia.

Soon tapirs, big-eyed crocodiles, pheasants and wild turkeys lined the dirt path. They shouted, "Buenas tardes, buenas tardes," to the jaguars stretched out in shady branches to watch from above. In the leaves and roots all along the path, Sapo's friends were hiding, ready to help their friend. "Ready, Tío Sapo?" asked Venado, kicking a bit of dirt, puffing his chest and looking down at Sapo. "Ready, Uncle Deer!" shouted Sapo, wiping the dirt from his eyes and stretching as tall as he could. Old Toucan yelled, "Go!"

Down the path raced Sapo and Venado. After a few leaps, Venado turned and called back, "Adelante, Tío Sapo, forward!" But to Venado's surprise, from ahead along the path, he heard a toad voice shout, "Adelante, Tío Venado, forward!" venado was confused. He raced faster toward the voice. Sapo, far behind, hopped steadily, steadily down the path. He heard voices shouting, "Go, Sapo, go!" Venado called back again, "Adelante, Tío Sapo." But again he heard a voice ahead of him call, "Adelante, Tío Venado!"

Sapo hopped steadily, steadily down the path, but Venado raced faster and faster. His legs began to hurt, but he kept leaping farther and farther. He was becoming tired, very tired. One last time Venado gasped, "Adelante, Tío Sapo." Again he heard a toad's voice ahead of him call, "Adelante, Tío Venado!"

Finally, Venado saw the finish line. But his strong legs were shaking. His tongue was hanging out. He was panting so hard from racing faster and leaping farther that he could barely move. Sapo just hopped steadily, steadily along the path as voices shouted, "Go, Sapo, go!" Yes, Sapo hopped right by tired, proud Venado gasping for breath. When he neared the finish line, Sapo called back, "Adelante, Tío Venado!" "Sapo won! Sapo won!" shouted the jungle animals. Sapo bowed slightly to all his friends. He said, "WE won the race, mis amigos! Together, we won the big race!"

Toucan called Venado to place the crown on Sapo's small head. Venado shuffled forward very slowly, in no hurry. Suddenly, he heard many toad voices shouting, calling him. "Adelante, Tío Venado, forward. Forward!"



# and the City

by Ignacio Ibarra,  
Centro de Trabajadores Agrícolas Fronterizos

"The first international bus route in the nation that will connect El Paso and Juarez is one step away from becoming a reality...The City has begun the process of purchasing land for an international transit

The lumpen (lumpenproletariat) is an example what happens when a poor person consigns himself or herself to a life without dignity. The lumpen represents the level a person gets to when he or she is willing to better themselves individually without any morals or interest in the community. The lumpen includes criminals, drunks, prostitutes, drug addicts, etc.

### Who uses them?

The state is the weapon the government uses to make the masses obey its laws. Examples of this are the police, the army, the courts, etc. The lumpen is recruited when movements are created whose interest benefit the poor or groups who find themselves dispossessed by the government. So as to not dirty itself the state searches for people who make up the lumpen and have them dismantle popular social movements.

For example, when a union is on strike, the boss or rancher finds the lumpen, commonly known as scabs, to subvert the strike. When the Sandinistas had won the democratic elections in Nicaragua, the government of the United States used the lumpen to create the Contras to overthrow their movement. When the Zapatistas of Chiapas took arms, the Mexican government with help from the United States created para-military groups to terrorize the communities in resistance. In this way the government utilizes the lumpen to stop popular movements that are not convenient for those in power.

### How is the Border Agricultural Workers Center Being Attacked?

Today the lumpen are attacking the Border Agricultural Workers Center in El Paso. These drunks, and petty thieves harass both farm workers and the Center's staff. This Lumpen attracts police who many times take farm workers away leaving the criminal element behind.

### Who Sends Them?

The lumpen looks for ways to displace the Center and its leadership. But, the lumpen is only a tool being used in benefit of the city's interests, and the interests of the groups that keep them in power. A recent article from the Diario de Juarez (10-3-02) explains:

terminal at the base of the international bridge on Stanton street..."

We should remember that the Border Agricultural Workers Center is located between two international bridges. So the city is looking for a way to displace the workers and at the same time discredit Sin Fronteras because it is the only group that would oppose their displacement, and the so called development of the City of El Paso. Once they achieve this objective they will continue by removing other residents of "Segundo Barrio" who have lived in that area for many years.

A clear example of how the City of El Paso and the Association for Downtown business and development use their power is how they managed to prohibit farm labor contractors from recruiting workers along El Paso Street, where workers have gathered for many years. The city does not want people to be out on the streets at those hours because they say it scares away consumers that come to shop at the businesses downtown. In this same way it sends the homeless, whether they have psychological problems or addictions, to the outskirts of downtown, away from the commercial centers of the city.

### Think

If the City truly cares about farm workers, why not focus on the miserable wages that workers are paid? Why do they not focus on the working and living conditions that exist in the fields? If it is true that they want every worker to sleep inside, especially during the cold season, then why not build a dormitory for the workers? If they insist that the center provide free meals to farm workers, why do they not help in reopening the center's kitchen?

This December a contract made between the Center and the City will end. This contract, signed almost 10 years ago, will give the property over to Sin Fronteras and the migrant farm workers. When the City hands over the title to the building it will lose control of the Center and will not be able to sell the building. So now the City is concentrating its efforts to take the property away, break its contract with Sin Fronteras, and sell the property to the highest bidder.

### The Truth

The lumpen is a very dangerous element. They have nothing to lose. It is important that we know who they are,

Lumpen continued on page 23

# Our sacred responsibility . . . to remember and to act

by Antonio Eliaz López

\*

Miss JoAnn always flirted and teased me when I was a young boy. She gave me a perm when I was ten years old. Afterwards she kissed both my eyelids. Miss JoAnn was really a man that liked to dress up like a woman. She was Lena Horn beautiful.

I remember hosing down the bloody porch steps with my mother when Miss Joann was murdered in front of our house. My mother said her neck was cut wide open. Hookers hung out in front of our house that faced the Silly Pony Bar, Chente's and Chavarias. My mother made friends with some of them. Miss JoAnn came to eat dinner with my family many times.

When I would see her at Jimmy's food store, both of us buying our fifty cents or dollars worth of bacon, bologna or cheese she would touch my face and wink at me, touch my hair, "Tell your mama I said 'hey', go straight home, baby." I remember her thin, jet black, tall body. I remember how Miss JoAnn and my mother would laugh and joke filling our little house like a party was going on.

\*\*

One hot summer day, when I was nine years old, I was hanging clothes with my mother and we found a dead naked man at the edge of the empty lot that was our back yard. My mother put a pair of my father's boxers on him and covered him with a blanket and called the police.

A few days later a man came and returned my fathers boxers and blanket. He thanked us for finding the dead man. He said he was the dead man's "friend."

A new bar had opened on Bryan Street, The "69" Club. I remember seeing men dressed in black leather pants with big mustaches, pictures and writing on their arms and necks and muscles. Men on motorcycles and hombres de Mexico would go in there, too. My sister and I would see them while we sat at Dairy Queen listening to music and eating ice cream with our friends. I remember two men at the bus stop one morning on my way to school pointing, laughing at that big 69 sign.

The back door to the "69" Club faced the empty lot that was our back yard.

\*\*\*

Miss Randy Coors just stopped visiting us one day. After I came home from school my mother and I would sit watching the Merv Griffin Show waiting for her to knock at the door. We began to wonder when she would show up again. She just stopped coming over to watch TV with us. I didn't see her at the park or outside the Silly Pony or anywhere. She just disappeared.

After what seemed like a lot of time her sister knocked at our door late one night. She had driven all the way from Tennessee. My

mother, sister and I piled into her little car and drove to a fancy funeral home on Commerce Street, downtown. My mother said that Randy Coors had been shot in the eyes. "Her eyes were just big purple holes", my mother told us.

My mother prepared a big meal the day they buried Miss Randy Coors. Mrs. Fitzhugh, an old white viejita from the big plantation style house on Fitzhugh Street brought lots of different colored rosas from her jardin. She and I put them in jars and all the vases my mother had and placed them all around the dining and living rooms. Mrs. Frierson, who never left her house because she could barely walk put on a big hat that day, and pushed her laundry cart filled with red Ne-hi sodas, fried chicken wrapped in tin foil, red coconut quequitos and walked herself to our house. All the people from the funeral came over to our house and we had a big party with lots of foods, sherbert punch, smoking and drinking. Some of the men went to the Silly Pony. The women and children and Miss Randy's friends stayed at our house and we ate all afternoon and evening and they laughed and joked and cried and told some stories.

\*\*\*\*

It was last year's brutal murder of 16-year-old Fred C. Martinez that caused me to remember. The horrible murder of our Navajo, Nadleeh hermanito haunted me. Forced me to remember. Forced me to dig deep in search of the roots of hate and violence. Forced me to revisit my life, speak to others about his murder and examine statistics. Forced others to remember also.

I don't know how to end this written memory. I have written many endings yet, more spirits arrive each month telling their story. The number of brutal murders of Two Spirits continues to rise. On October 3, 2002, 17-year-old Eddie Araujo was beaten nearly unconscious, strangled with a rope until he appeared dead, then buried in a shallow grave. At the age of fourteen Eddie Araujo found the courage to finally live as the Latina he always knew himself to be. In the end it was his courage to live out his sacred contract with life that cost him his life.

The time has always been now to speak out and take action. It is our sacred responsibility to look out for the safety of our brothers and sisters wherever we are and at any cost. The number of brutal murders of Two Spirits continues to rise.

We must always remember Fred C. Martinez, Miss JoAnn, Miss Randy Coors, Eddie Araujo and the dead nameless man that lies in the back yard. The time has always been now to take action in our familias, nuestros barrios y nuestra nación.



Antonio Lopez, a longtime supporter of the Esperanza, focuses on indigenous and lesbian and gay issues. He is currently living in El Paso, Texas.

# Seven Guardians of Indigenous Nutrition


from Column of the Americas

by Patrisia Gonzales with artwork by Deborah Vásquez

**W**hen the old ones made the people long ago they wondered, What will they eat? They sent Quetzalcoatl to look for food. One day, he saw a red ant carrying something on its back. It was a kernel of corn. He asked ant where he got that food. Ant responded, "Over there in sustenance mountain." He turned himself into a black ant and followed red ant into food mountain. That's how Ant helped Quetzalcoatl find corn.

From there, Quetzalcoatl brought corn, and also beans and squash. Native cultures call them the three sisters. They are often planted together. Among Mexican indigenous nutrition, there are also the siete guerreros, the seven warriors. These nutritional guardians are maguey, cactus, chile, beans, squash, corn and amaranth.

Amid the holiday season, indigenous peoples today celebrate the harvest feasts and life cycles of the earth and sun. Many celebrations are based on the agricultural cycle, giving thanks for what the earth has given us. In indigenous nutrition, we connect to our grandmother earth by what we eat. We are what we eat. (So stay away from genetically modified corn!)


 Maiz. The corn tortilla is golden like the sun. We eat a little bit of the sun everyday with tortillas de maíz. Tortillas are round like the sun and a woman's skirts. As the woman (or man) pats the tortilla back and forth, the energy of her hands is given to the food. Don Aurelio, a Nahuatl curandero, says this is one way that female energy is passed throughout the family and community. (My grandmother, who of course made the hottest, fattest tamales, ground her own corn until the arrival of the blender. Being a modern woman who loved gadgets, she quickly surrendered her metate grinding stone, which is now mine.)

One ceremony still practiced today commemorates the sacred act of eating-when the tortilla is placed on the sacred fire. I have learned much about indigenous nutrition from teachers such as Isabel Quevedo, who teaches about the siete guerreros at

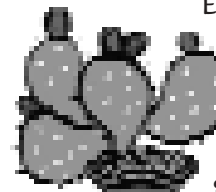
Mexico's Nahuatl University. We learn in the place where many teachings are passed - in the kitchen, while eating. Unlike western tradition, our kitchens are sacred geography.


El tamal is a petate, Quevedo says. In indigenous thought, the petate or straw mat is where we're born and where we die.

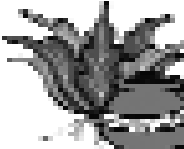
In our ways, nothing is thrown out. "Tira nada," says my chef friend Antonio. Corn silk tea cleanses kidneys and the husks have several uses as tiny mats and containers. Corn tortillas are a great source of calcium.


 Squash. In ancestral books, the squash seeds symbolize women's fertility. Like a squash, we're born with all our seeds. Fall squash, in particular, is a great source of Vitamin A for the skin and immunity. Squash blossom dishes are a delicacy you can only enjoy in Mexico or if you have your own garden.

El frijol. Eat beans five times a week and you'll lower your risk of cancer.

 El nopal — God's food. Its slimy baba and leaf hold the medicine to naturally balance insulin, fight off viruses and strengthen the heart. When doctors gave grandma only months to live because her heart was tired, we cooked her fresh nopales every day and fed her chilito and jello.

 Chiles have lots of Vitamin C, are great for colds, arthritis, depression, and pain (when combined with other herbs) - and their ability to strengthen circulation is good for the heart. My grandma lived another three years. Food is medicine.

 Grandmother Maguey is said to be the guardian of all the other vegetation. Her medicine helps people with extreme immune disorders.

 Finally, amaranth —the most complete of all grains — is returning to our kitchens. This grain was outlawed in Mexico by Europeans. Quevedo says Europeans thought its deep red flower looked like blood. It was so heavily relied upon in indigenous cultures and used in ceremonies that Europeans forbade its growth. It was grown in secret. Quevedo says no one would starve or need meat if they ate this grain. It's great for atole and avena porridge. I eat it for breakfast and add it to Mexican chocolate.



**Winter Remedios for Digestion and Flu**  
With the holiday seasons, overeating and sweets slows our digestion and makes us more prone to virus. Sugars depress the immune system and feed colds. Here are some recetas for the winter season.

Take one tablespoon herb per one cup of boiling water. Steep 15 minutes. None of these recetas should be taken if you are pregnant.

**Digestion:**  
Estafiate for cleansing the liver and stomach. Anis or comino for digestion, Fennel to move gases. Yerba Buena or peppermint for the small intestine. Malva for softening things. Black walnut hull or leaf provides natural magnesium, another relaxer of the digestive system.

If you have a lot of heat in your stomach - with rashes - try epazote and do not take warming herbs such as anis, fennel or estafiate.

Any can be combined in threes or taken by themselves.

Savila for heat or acid in the body. Cut 2 inches and boil in water two mintues. Drink in ayunas.

Also in ayunas to promote bile flow: a half of a limon in one cup warm water.

Also in ayunas to clean out the liver, one tablespoon olive oil with juice of half a lime.

**For Colds:**  
Estafiate for a cold condition, chills. Boraja for fever.



It strengthens the heart.

Of course, the best ingredient we put in food is "to cook with love."

The last time we were at Nahuatl U., we saw where the old stories came from on our way to breakfast. "There's a lot of Quetzalcoatl here," said Quevedo, as we watched in wonder of this blessing. We saw red ants carrying fat kernels of corn.

Patrisia Gonzales co-writes the Column of the Americas and is a contributing writer and co-editor of Cantos al Sexto Sol: A Collection of Aztlanahauc Writings.

Jalapeño or cayenne in tea with honey for sinus drainage. Drink agua de cilantro.

For chest cold drink oregano and romero tea. Make it so strong it is bitter and add a bit of mile.

Don Monico's receta for congested chest: One garlic clove, one onion, a handful of bougenvilla. Boil and take the herbs and put them in a cheesecloth over your chest. Drink the tea. Put tomatoes over your throat to draw out sore throat.

Cut a half of a papa or an onion and put it on your window seal to absorb bacteria. Change daily.

Cut up a whole garlic and cover with honey and juice of a lime. Take a teaspoon every hour. (Not for people with ulcers.) Demetria Martínez suggests cutting up a whole clove of garlic and putting it inside the bottom of your socks at night. Good for children, she says.

**My natural sleepytime cold remedy:**  
In equal parts put the following herbs in a jar. Make a tea with two to three tablespoons in one cup boiling water. Steep 20 minutes.

Toronjil  
Verbena  
Skullcap  
Elderberry  
Yarrow  
Peppermint  
rosehips  
Add estafiate if you have chills.

~Patrisia Gonzales



# LOSING THE WHOLE WORLD AND FINDING EACH OTHER

Mexicans Struggle for Justice in Alcoa

By Judith Rosenberg

The day after the elections and the Republicans' victorious sweep, I went into work and encountered in the break room a colleague in despair. Eileen is a Yankee, as I am, and I enjoy her combination of book-and-street smarts and her life long interest in politics. Even so, we're not on the same page. To feel so low, she had to have had a lot at stake in the national elections. My activism however distracts me from the elections and even from the administration's insistence on war which, as I write, is not yet in full swing. I do keep an eye on the war and it does look dangerous. But I always remind myself that one purpose of the U.S. war on the Iraqis is to distract us from the administration's war on us. My commitment as an activist is to keep the war that rages at home in the forefront of my vision and work.

Since I came to Texas, I have channeled my activism through Austin Tan Cerca de la Frontera (ATCF) which formed three years ago out of the realization that very nearby, in Mexico, a social and economic system was proliferating based on ruthless economic and social oppression of working people; that U.S. corporations were perpetrators and beneficiaries; and that we don't know nearly enough about it.

ATCF began taking delegations to border cities to find out about this system, the maquiladora system. We went to listen to the people who work inside the maquiladoras. Media and policy makers never do that. The workers' voice is always the last voice heard. Austin Tan Cerca began working with a Mexican group called the Comité Fronterizo de Obrera/os (CFO), which organizes workers to advocate for themselves. The CFO is active in six border cities and centered in Piedras Negras, across from Eagle Pass, three and a half hours from Austin by car, closer to San Antonio. Through the CFO, we hear the workers'

voice.

We found that because of our struggle for a human relationship between our U.S. and Mexican groups, our lives and identities were changing; our own voices were different and so was our metabolism and what we dreamed a night. We have struggled to find how solidarity can work between us and find the forms of a relationship between people separated by many borders of inequality and many histories of exploitation and distrust.



In the summer of 2001, I had time off and I volunteered to work for the CFO in Piedras Negras and nearby Ciudad Acuña for four weeks. They said come to Piedras and we'll figure out how you can contribute. When I got there I sat around the table with their small staff and the volunteers who happened to be there that afternoon. Everyone who works for the CFO, as staff or volunteer, is a current or former maquiladora worker. They decided they would like me to teach English to their children and that I might accompany the organizers as they investigated the factories

that were closing at the time; that was before 9/11 but the recession had already started. Some of these factories were literally stealing off in the night, without paying owed wages or severance, and absconding with raw materials and inventories that legally belong to the workers until others debts are settled.

With Juany López, Margarita Ramírez, and Amparo Reyes, I traveled to Ciudad Acuña to attend weekly Saturday meetings of Alcoa workers—in the Alcoa “company park”; a dusty tree-shaded ground near a lagoon, posted all around with signs that said (in Spanish), “This is your park. Keep it clean.” With no place to sit, people stood in a circle for

hours. When the breeze blew from the direction of the lagoon, you smelled sewage. This actually was the subject of subtle humor. When a puff of wind came by, a few wits would lean back, pull a long face, and leer at their neighbors, suggesting the smell came from them. Then a chuckle would pass around the circle, like another wind rustling, a comedy break and a comment on Alcoa's idea of a park. Alcoa is the biggest producer of aluminum in the world. Their automotive division in Mexico assembles electrical harnesses or distribution systems. Famous in Texas as the state's biggest polluter, burning lignite coal at their Rockdale smelter, Alcoa is also known for their arrogance in every community they touch. Acuña is no exception.

The gist of the discussions at those Saturday meetings was that the workers had myriad and detailed grievances that troubled them, especially since they had no grievance procedure. The previous October, with guidance from the CFO, a few hundred activists had won a 30 percent increase in compensation for Alcoa's 12,000 employees in Acuña. Each worker still had to fend for her or himself though. No unions of any kind exist in Acuña by special arrangement of city government, intending to make the place more attractive to foreign investment and deliver to it inexpensive and defenseless labor. In the past 10 years migration from the south has doubled Acuña's population. Since the maquilas pay no local taxes, the city can't provide infrastructure for the new inhabitants, a rampant case of un-development. In their meetings under the tree, Alcoa workers were struggling for a remedy to their grievances in the form of a workers' committee which local management recognized sporadically on whim. Management's unpredictability constitutes a special kind of disrespect; a particularly devious way of keeping the workers guessing about any commitment they make.

The first grievance I heard about had something to do with a supervisor accusing workers who were doing maintenance of stealing plastic garbage bags that had the Alcoa logo on it. A repeating theme, though, was harassment of women and pressure on pregnant workers. Men were the strongest speakers to this offense, even single men, like Enares who was a popular speaker and had a particular eloquence. He was so present; he seemed to find his words only as he said them. Hector Reyes was a frequent speaker, too. He always announced his name proudly, for the pleasure of it, even though everyone knew who he was. Cheerful and dapper, dressed in pleated slacks, he usually spoke with one hand in his pocket, the other gesturing.

For me, the meetings had a sacred quality. They were a form of collective searching and knowing. The workers had great pride in coming together and being with each other, a company of saints, actors in history, changing the world with their love for one another, and by their patience and determination to see and act.

I attended with the women from Piedras Negras—Juany, Amparo, Margarita—all women I had known for a few years but had never seen them dress up as they did to accompany their compañeras/os in Acuña. In their good shoes, they would tread the dust, packing along their copies of *La Ley Federal de Trabajadores*, a hefty 1,200-page red-covered paperback. I have learned reverence for this book; the workers are using it as a tool to pry loose and gain possession of their inheritance from the Mexican Revolution. Workers and campesinos died for the Revolution in staggering numbers. What they got out of it in return, as I see it, is mostly potential, the hope of realizing the many protections and reforms which are written in to the constitution and the labor law. This is their legacy which Fox, along with Salinas earlier, attack when they chip away, “modernize,” or neo-liberalize Mexico's laws.

During the meetings, the organizers would huddle on the sidelines and consult one-on-one with a worker who needed legal advice. The last weekend I was there, the workers hosted a visitor, the president of the biggest labor federation in Brazil. They organized an itinerary for him that included speeches, discussions, and meals, at places more elegant than Parque Fifi, as the workers have dubbed Alcoa's park. They

Article 170 of the Mexican Federal Labor Law

The women workers will have the following rights:

I. During pregnancy, they will not do work that demands considerable force and significant danger for their health in relation to pregnancy, such as lifting, pulling or pushing heavy weights, such as work that produces vibration, or requires them to stand for long periods of time or work, or do work that can alter their physical or mental (nervous) state.

II. They will enjoy a rest of six weeks before and after the birth.

III. The rest period referred to above will be extended as necessary in cases where work is impossible because of the pregnancy or birth.

IV. In the period of lactation, they will take two extra rest periods per day, each of a half hour, to feed their children in a hygienic place set aside by the company.

V. During the period of rest referred to in section II, above, they will receive their whole salary. In extended periods of rest, mentioned in section III, they will have the right to 50% of their salary for a period of no more than 70 days.

VI. To return to the position that they were filling, no more than a year will have elapsed from the date of departure; and .

VII. Both the pre- and post-natal period will count in the calculation of their seniority.

Translation by Judith Rosenberg

planned other stops to show, rather than tell, the labor leader the conditions of their lives and work.

Prominent on the tour was the house of Hector Reyes, one room he shared with his wife Lucía Santiago and their 8-year-old son. The room was dominated by their double bed, and Lucía lay in it. Hector had set up chairs for visitors at the foot of the bed and an electric floor fan to cool us. He served us Jamaica tea and orange soda in paper cups. He had lost his brightness. Lucía, the center of attention, was the most depressed person I have ever seen; but had agreed to see us, and Hector was eager to tell what had happened. Three days earlier, working on the night shift, Lucía had miscarried. The loss had followed months of tension between herself and her supervisor who had recently, in direct violation of the law, assigned her to a heavier work assignment. At a moment that some young couples would hold as private, Hector and Lucía wanted to give testimony and expose the harassment and the pattern of injustice. I asked Lucía for permission to take a photograph.

That was my last trip to the border that summer. Lucía was so despondent, I wondered if she would ever get out of bed again. She did. A few weeks later, a company bus hit another pregnant worker, Leona, who was walking to work, a few minutes late. Leona saved the baby, but sustained an injury to her hip and a permanent disability. No one would take financial responsibility for her injury; no insurance covered her.

For many workers, months of frustration and desperation came to a head. Leona went on a hunger strike in front of one of the Alcoa factories. In a flash, Lucía leapt from prone to upright and joined Leona in the hunger strike. So did Felipa, a worker who had no personal grievance, but who acted on principle. Inside the factory, every worker participated in controlled work stoppages; line-by-line, they stopped working for a period of time to signal their solidarity with the women outside. The protest was beginning to spread to other Alcoa factories. There are 11 of them in Acuña. Management was horrified and frantic. They rallied the mayor and the chain newspaper to their aid and denounced the workers for “destabilizing the source of employment.”

I am going to end the story here, on a note of embattled victory, in a moment of shining solidarity. It is one story out of a long history, which continues. I never saw Lucía and Hector again; I did meet Felipa, a woman with a bright and generous spirit, who helped to host our Austin Tan Cerca delegation in October that year. Following the hunger strike and the work stoppage, the police moved in to help Alcoa fire 186 workers including most of the people that we met at one time or another in Parque Fifi. They don't meet any more; some who were part of the movement are isolated and bitter now. Some, however,

will never lose the sense they gained of losing the whole world and finding each other. They still get high talking about their rights. For them, the mobilization in Acuna did not fail and they carry the lessons and hope.

For me, witnessing their solidarity is transforming; I see an enlivening sense of connection that builds slowly then suddenly bursts out to affirm everyone it touches—



removing doubt, explaining or dismissing questions, healing wounds. Solidarity is why the people are strong and why the power of the domination system, that looks so monolithic, is, in fact, a hoax and, as Noam Chomski said when he recently visited Austin, is really quite fragile.

The focus of the struggle in Alcoa shifted then to Piedras Negras where there is a union, though a grossly ineffective one that represents the company's interests, the Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos (CTM) which has been known to negotiate lower wages and to recommend that workers accept less than legal severance pay! It is also where workers, seeking an independent voice, have managed to win two elections, one in each of Alcoa's Piedras Negras factories. The elections placed pro-worker representatives on the CTM's union committees. In October, Alcoa fired 20 people for organizing, among them 4 of the 5 new union reps. Not only is Alcoa the world's biggest producer of aluminum, it's a Fortune 100 company and its former CEO is Bush's Secretary of the Treasury. They easily control the media and deny their attacks on workers' rights because no one ever hears the other side of the story. They are trying to crush a democratic movement for dignity and autonomy. But look out, Alcoa...

¡La Ley Federale de Trabajadores Vive! ¡Tienen derechos!



Judith Rosenberg is a coordinator of Austin Tan Cerca de la Frontera and is working on a doctoral dissertation at UT Austin on the rhetoric of globalization.

## Alcoa Update: November 22, 2002

# Texas & Mexican groups join together in San Antonio to make Alcoa feel the pressure

### The Provocation: Alcoa Attacks.

On October 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>, 2002, Alcoa fired 20 workers in Piedras Negras, Mexico, where they employ 2,000 people. With this move the US corporation signaled their intent to crush an unprecedented border democratic movement which in March had elected a union committee dedicated to representing workers but functioning within the Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos. The Confederación, or CTM, usually controls elections and more or less appoints committee members who are willing to represent management. Despite the workers' mandate, from the March election to the October firing, corrupt union officials limited the democratic committee to decisions on everyday operations and reserved for themselves the power to negotiate substantive issues. In justifying the firing, Joca San Martín, the human resources manager for Mexican operations, located in San Antonio, stated by telephone that the company based its decision on careful examination of evidence (videotapes and photos) which proved that those fired were involved in organizing. Despite San Martín's citation of "evidence," it is not a crime to organize or campaign for a union committee. It's a guaranteed right. San Martín further alleges that the organizers conducted an illegal work slow down.

### The Background: Power and Corruption Stack the Decks.

The Alcoa executive's allegations are based on a double bind of historic proportions. The CTM is the prevailing union in many parts of Mexico. If it is present, no work action is legal unless the CTM leads it and the CTM never leads an action that represents the workers' interests against the company's. The workers' hands are tied and they can take no action, beyond casting ballots to gain relatively powerless positions; unless, that is, they form an independent union. This is exactly what they propose to do in Piedras Negras. On May 1<sup>st</sup> they began navigating the hazardous state legal system to quit the CTM and register their union. They continue to pursue this avenue. Moreover, the firings appear not to have intimidated them. On October 18<sup>th</sup>, only two weeks after the assault, in the second Alcoa Piedras Negras plant, the independents ran the "Unity" slate against candidates that Alcoa and the CTM sponsored. The upstarts won by solid margins and continue, as of this writing, to function as union representatives but within the CTM structure.

### The Protest: The Workers Respond.

Having understood the October 4<sup>th</sup> firings as a rebuke to the whole principle of worker representation, fired workers joined with the Comité Fronterizo de Obreros/os to send out a bi-national call for solidarity in support of their three demands which are:

- Reinstatement of all fired workers.
- Recognition of the independent union.
- Replacement of Paulino Vargas and José Juan Ortiz, the general and human resources managers of the Alcoa plants.

Allies on this side of the border, composed of national and local groups,

have so far organized a campaign of support in two phases. The first advocated for the workers and their demands by means of communications to Alain Belda, Alcoa's top CEO, located in Pittsburgh. The second took to the streets to make Alcoa feel the pressure in local offices and facilities. On November 22<sup>nd</sup>, a Texas coalition targeted the San Antonio facility at the De Zavala Center, which directs operations of the Mexican subsidiary and houses functions like engineering and accounting as well as executive offices. Leading the San Antonio action were, from Austin, the American Friends Service Committee, Austin Tan Cerca de la Frontera, and two Alcoa shareholders. From San Antonio, Fuerza Unida, the League of United Latin American Citizens, and the Southwest Public Workers Union led the charge. After intricate negotiations with the INS, two workers, Margarita Ramírez and Guillermo Fernández, crossed the border to join the protest.

The objectives of the action were, first, to make Alcoa feel the pressure, second, to state the workers' case to a wide audience, and, third, to provide an opportunity for all the protesting parties to get to know each other. The pressure tactics consisted of picketing, presentations of the workers' case through speeches and information flyers directed to the public and to Alcoa employees, and, finally, a petition that the protesters attempted to deliver to Martín. The human resources manager had locked the entrance to the executive offices. The protesters then entered the reception lobby in an adjoining building where what appeared to be an office manager and a security manager gave them a hostile reception. However the protesters politely persisted in asking to see Martín. Eventually the office manager called Martín on an interoffice phone looking for help in getting rid of the protesters. Martín refused to come out to receive the petition and he refused to listen to it over the phone. By his avoidance tactic he demonstrated the trademark Alcoa arrogance. The protesters then quietly occupied the reception area until a first police officer arrived and told them to leave, which they did, reassembling in the parking lot. Soon eight police cars arrived bring 10-12 officers, all men. They lined up before the single story glass and steel building to protect the transnational giant from a crowd that had dwindled from 40 to 30. In the ensuing confrontation between police and protesters some observers saw history repeating itself.

The protesters still stood on private property and the biggest police officer strolled over and demanded, "Whose in charge here?" One protester responded, "No one; we're all leaders." Changing tack temporarily he appeared to soften. He said, "OK. OK. Group hug." As no one took him up on that, he started to lecture on what "demonstrators" usually do, that is, appoint someone to be in charge. The protesters started to spell it out for him. One said, "We're a collective." Another said, "We work by consensus." And another: "If you talk to us, we will listen." He then informed them of the law—get off private property—which they did. This is exactly what happens in Chiapas. The military come barging in and say, "Where's Marcos?" The people answer, "Todos somos Marcos."



*Orale... continued from page 9*

micro-entrepreneurs. Like Berry reminds us, it's time to stop the large discount stores from using cheap labor costs and goods to destroy the locals' capacities to produce goods and services and subsist economically.

How many times have we wondered where a product came from? Or what history is behind a product? Or who produced it and how it was produced? How often do we think not only about the environmental or ecological costs but the human costs in producing the goods and services we consume? If we're worried about these issues, like we should be, then spending our dollars locally means that we reinvest in our communities instead of the sweat-shops and exploited labor. It's not easy to choose local products nor be conscientious consumers but, like our *antepasados*, let's



remember that a dollar spent in the community is a dollar spent on the community.

What does this mean for all us? Just a reminder. Many already support small and microenterprises. Let's just not forget to get out there and do our part to help the other Eric Lee's. There's no need for Four-Bucks Coffee when you can stop over at Jessica Cerda's *Café Latino* or Suzie García's *Espuma*; instead of Taco Cabana, think of all the homegrown taqueria's, like BJs and *Taco Haven*; instead of Goodyear, check out as the *Wheel Turns* on South Flores; instead of Home Depot, stop at *Esparza's Hardware Store*; instead of Kinkos, there's Munguías or Mr. Pencil or any dozen others; and, instead of the outlet malls, there's the Peace Market and other local cooperatives. In every category of goods and services, our communities have plenty of tailors, dentists, doctors, midwives, laundrys, grocery stores, *carniceros*,

barbers, plumbers, architects, painters, artists, day care providers, *jardineros*, *mecánicos*, *tienditas*, breweries, coffee shops and *zapaterías*.

As Berry reminds us, we can determine and maintain the "character and culture" of our communities. Before we lament the closing of another Eric Lee's, let's protect and patronize the local producers of community goods and services. The power is in our pockets.

U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census; Small Business Administration's Office of Advocacy, May 2002.

Arturo Vega is a professor at UTSA.

## Community Meetings

**Society of Friends** Sundays at 10 am at Friends Meeting House, 7052 N. Vandiver, call 945-8456.

**ELLAS, Latina Lesbian organization.** Call for meetings and information, 210-473-0217.

**San Antonio Lambda Students (SALSA)** Last Wednesday of each month, 7 pm at the Main Library, 6th floor. Call 732-4300.

**San Antonio NOW** First Monday of each month at the Resource Ctr, 121 W. Woodlawn. Call Maggie Cronan, 673-8600.

**Voice for Animals** First Tuesday of each month at 7 pm, Brook Hollow Library, 530 Heimer, call 737-3138.

**Parents/Friends of Lesbians/Gays (PFLAG)** First Thursday of each month at 7 pm at the Resource Ctr, 121 W. Woodlawn, call 655-2383.

**Amnesty International #127** Fourth Thursday of each month at 7:30 pm at Ashbury United Methodist, call 681-8370.

The **peaceCENTER** Tuesdays from 7 - 9 pm for discussion & exploration of nonviolent peacemaking, 1443 S. St. Mary. Call 224-HOPE or <http://www.salsa.net/peace>

**Xicana Xicano Education Project** Tuesdays at 6 pm at the Bazan Public Library, 2200 W. Commerce St. Call 437-5196.

**DIGNITY S.A.** holds mass every Sunday at 5:15 pm at St. Ann's Convent, call 735-7191.

**Proyecto Hospitalidad Liturgy** Thursdays at 7 pm at 325 Courtland, call 736-3579.

**Habitat for Humanity** holds Volunteer Orientation on first Tuesdays of each month at 1st Presbyterian Church, 404 N. Alamo, at 6 pm.

A Multicultural Worship Service is held Sundays at 11 am at **Spirit of Life Lutheran Church**, call Rev. Kay Johson at 691-5937 in sanctuary of Los Angeles Heights Methodist.

**Circle of the Re-Formed Congregation of the Goddess** Third Thursday of each month, 7 pm at the Esperanza, 922 San Pedro. Call 822-9105.

**Fuerza Unida** Third Tuesday of the month at 710 New Laredo Hwy., 7 pm. Call 927-229.

**Bexar County Green Party** First Sunday of each month at 2 pm at the VIA Transit Center, 1021 San Pedro, across from Esperanza Center.

# Notas Y Más

Brief notes to inform *La Voz* readers about events, issues and happenings in the community. Send announcements for *Notas y Más* to: [lavoz@esperanzacenter.org](mailto:lavoz@esperanzacenter.org) or by snail mail to: 922 San Pedro, San Antonio, TX 78212. The deadline is the 12th of each month.

The Dallas Poets Community concludes its 2002 reading series with its annual *Moveable Feast*. This year's Feast reaches across the state and draws in writers and performers with a wide variety of talent. The reading will be held Wednesday, December 11th at 7:30 pm at the McKinney Avenue contemporary, located at 3120 McKinney Ave in Dallas. Among the writers presented are Pablo Miguel Martínez and Nancy Membrez of San Antonio. For more information contact: Bob McCranie [bob@babmccranie.com](mailto:bob@babmccranie.com) or visit the web [www.DallasPoets.org](http://www.DallasPoets.org)

Join the 1st UU Welcoming congregation as they seek to enhance understanding and acceptance of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender experiences. *The Common Elements of Oppression* is a forum that will be held on January 12th from 9:30 - 10:30 am and will "kick off" a workshop series. Workshops will be held every 2nd Sunday from 1-3 pm at the 1st Unitarian Universalist Church at 7150 IH-10 West. Call 344-4695 for info.

The National Association of Hispanic Journalists is proud to announce its 2002-2003 *Rubén Salazar Scholarship Fund* competition as well as the NAHJ 2003 convention Internship Program competition. Several scholarships for students pursuing careers in English or Spanish-language print, photo, broadcast or online journalism are offered including: The Newhouse Scholarship Program, The new María Elena Salinas Scholarship Program, The Cristina Saralegui Scholarship Program and The NAHJ Newsroom Bound Program. NAHJ also offers opportunities for students to have internships during the association's 2003 convention at the Marriott Marquis in the Times Square area of New York City which will run from

June 26-28, 2003. Scholarship/internship applications deadline is **January 31, 2003**. Check [www.nahj.org/student/2003/Applica.pdf](http://www.nahj.org/student/2003/Applica.pdf) for applications or [www.nahjdigital.org](http://www.nahjdigital.org) for more information.

Writings or graphic works that reflect the Dominican lesbian identity are being solicited for a new anthology that would be well received among the Latin American and Caribbean Spanish-speaking lesbian and feminist communities as well as in the Latina lesbian, feminist and immigrant worlds in the U.S. **The deadline for submission of materials is March 8, 2003**. To send submissions or to receive more information, e-mail Jacqueline Jimenez Polanco or Dulce Reyes Bonilla (co-editors) at [dominicanlesbook@yahoo.com](mailto:dominicanlesbook@yahoo.com)

**Serving can change your life.** Looking for dedicated people to help in cooking and serving healthy meals to people who are experiencing homelessness and the working poor. We serve in Milam Park and downtown S.A., two days a week. Call Linda or Joe at 271-3057.

*Lumpen continued from page 14* and that we defend Sin Fronteras and the Border Agricultural Workers Center from them. Don't let them tell you different, the facts are clear:

-The lumpen is here to try and destroy more than 20 years of struggle for border agricultural workers.

-They are sent so they can displace workers from their center, and discredit Sin Fronteras; the only group that defends the voice of the migrant farm worker community.

The Truth is that the city cares very

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**The new elevator is IN!**

**Do your part to pay it off!**

**Call 228-0201 to make a one time donation, or sign up for a monthly donor plan...**

**Let's all pull together!**

little about farm workers, and only uses them to achieve its political agenda.

For more information, contact the Centro de los Trabajadores Agrícolas Fronterizos at 201 E. 9th Ave, El Paso, TX 79901, 915.532.0921 fax, 915.532.4822.

The Centro is holding a toy drive for migrant farmworkers and their families. Email [sinfront@farmworkers.org](mailto:sinfront@farmworkers.org) to make direct contributions. Locally, come by the Esperanza in San Antonio and drop off donations for Marissa to pick up and they will be delivered to the Centro.

# *¡Feliz año nuevo!*

*La Voz de Esperanza*  
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San Antonio TX 78212

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at the Esperanza Peace & Justice Center

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