

Celia de la Riva Rubio

ACTIVIST FEMINIST DURING THE 70's

When I was a teacher/counselor for many years in California, I never hesitated to speak to any student, male or female about their sexual problems - or any problems that they may have had. Luckily, the word got around that if you needed someone to speak to, a young Black teacher and I were ones you could trust. We tried to give the students good counseling and advise. We helped in anyway we could, and spent many long hours after school with them. The last ten years of my teaching career a law was enacted, which I believe still exists. As they say in "Gringolandia", I walked on thin ice many a time. The law stated, that if a teacher or any school official was told by a student that she had been molested or was pregnant she was to report the incident to authorities. I didn't give a good rat-fuck about the law. I felt that this was an unjust law, and that these student's futures were more important. They came to us for help and trusted us not to tell on them. Most young ladies were mature enough to realize that they couldn't possibly take care of a child yet, and that they didn't necessarily want to marry their boyfriend. The young women would tell us when and if they had had abortions. We counseled them to see a doctor before, during and after their pregnancy, so that

if they did have the child, both mother and child had a better chance at being in better health.

I also helped some young men who suspected that they had contacted venereal diseases by taking them to the local County hospitals for treatment, after school. Sometimes they would embarrassingly tell me that they had a physical problem, and then I would ask them what their symptoms were. It sounded to me like V.D. They were so young and frightened they were ashamed to even speak to a doctor or to the male school counselors about their problems. Years later, each student that I had helped, returned while I was still teaching and thanked me profusely for having helped them. Not one of them was sorry for the steps they had to take to get out of a problem they had committed while still so young. As a matter of fact, it seemed to help them grow up and become more responsible about their future actions.

When I had to take a student to the V.D. clinic we were sent to the venereal disease section, with drug addicts, whores and pimps. The clerks and doctors thought that I was the young person's mother. I would go into the doctor's office with them if they wanted me to. I'll never forget the time, a young bearded doctor came

out after examining one of my students who was about sixteen years old. We waited three hours to see the doctor. As the young man sat leaning against me, the doctor shouted across the waiting room, "Yeah, you've got it, come weekly to take the treatment with shots, and take these pills daily. And remember no sex for awhile, until you come out clean!" The young man and I walked out of the waiting room into the outer corridor while he cried quietly. I tried to apologize for the crudity of the doctor's behavior by saying that he was probably new, and had not learned how to treat young people more discreetly yet. I asked the secretary if I could use the telephone. She said that the telephone was not for patient use. I grabbed the phone anyway and called the head hospital administrator whom I knew. I told him that evening at our weekly hospital board meeting I wanted twenty minutes or so on the agenda. I took the kid home and told his mother that we were late as our Chicano soccer team had a late practice. I went back to the hospital immediately, I was one of two lay people on the board at that hospital and I was about 45 minutes late. Needless to say, I walked into the room with sparks shooting out of my eyes. I lit into the hospital's director and the member doctors present regarding the V.D. doctor incident. The group already knew that I could explode like a volcano. The hospital's director was also the president of the hospital board. I explained that no wonder Raza was not utilizing the hospital's facilities, when we were treated so poorly. They preferred to go the county hospital in Oakland some 40 miles away, where they were treated by many minority doctors, personnel

and nurses with respect and dignity. The young doctor was reprimanded by being written up, and was sent to another county facility.

That previous incident, among many others, helped me and other Chicano activists to insist that the county hospital bring in a Latino Health Clinic and a Latino Mental Health Clinic into Hayward, California. There were none in Hayward, and Hayward was the hub of the county, with 25% or more of the populace who were Raza. Both of which are still in use today, thank God. I had to fight like hell, and did a lot of statistical research after school holidays and on week ends. At first the public health officials did not allow me to use their hospital studies and projections and statistics they had to report to the state and federal health department in order to receive funding. They said that they were too technical, that I couldn't possibly understand them. I informed them, that I was born and raised in California, and that I had a few degrees. Man, each of the four books of studies must have weighed about ten pounds each. The huge books were copies of studies on hospital health, and building codes made every ten years to governmental agencies in the field of health. I almost went blind reading them and taking notes. I think I even got hemorrhoids sitting for so long a time while studying. Luckily, the head of the County Health system at the time was an old friend of mine who had been a school administrator in the school district that I had taught in and was receptive to our "requests".

I studied for two months, and then I went to the Chicano Legal Aid Office

with my case. I spoke to a young gringa lawyer, who spoke Spanish. Her name was Mandy Hawes. She was impressed by my findings, and said she would work with me, as we had a good case for bringing in Raza Clinics. Thank you Mandy, wherever you are, you were super professional and did a great job when we had to confront the people in the Public Health field. By being active in the Chicano Community, I had plenty of community support from Raza and Anglos. I was called "El Terremoto" by some, which meant earthquake. For the S.F. bay area, that title was a sign of true respect. I wasn't afraid to speak to any group, reporters, or on neither TV nor radio. I didn't give a crap whose toes I had to step on in order to bring in the much-needed clinics. The thing that clouds the joy of helping my community was that I could never let on that I was gay. Some people may have guessed, but the subject was never broached. Perhaps they wanted to spare my feelings, or we were all just too damned busy to discuss who slept with whom.

As they say, "It's the squeaky wheel that gets the grease" and we "greasers"

(which we Chicanos were called derisively behind our backs), got plenty of grease that time. We were granted a Mental Health Clinic, and an out reach Health Clinic of the hospital. Facilities, such as buildings near the Chicano areas, Spanish speaking staff, secretaries, doctors and nurses. I was asked by the Hospitals Chief Health administrator if I knew of "qualified" doctors and nurses. I had heard of a young Chicano graduating from a Medical school in Michigan. He was contacted and hired. One of my students told me that her mother needed a job, as she had been laid off at a local hospital as a nurse's aide. I inquired what her qualifications were. She had been a surgical nurse for years in South America, but knew very little English. Needless to say, the lady was hired as a surgical nurse. The hospital administrator wrote me a note the following year, with a copy of the ladies evaluation. It had an excellent rating, except that she should brush up a little on her English.

* Greaser, a pejorative word used for Mexicans and other Latinos.

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