



NATIONAL LATINO ALLIANCE
for the Elimination of Domestic Violence

ALIANZA LATINA NACIONAL PARA ERRADICAR LA VIOLENCIA DOMESTICA

VOICES OF SURVIVORS

**From the First National Latina Policy Summit on Domestic Violence
June 22-23, 2001**

Man from California: I represent my children and men who are struggling to find balance in their life, who are violent and who have been abused, but are willing to make changes and heal.

Man from Texas: I bring my wife, first and foremost. She gave me a lot of insight, and courage, and knowledge about this issue. Professionally, I represent the people of El Paso, through their congressman who is extremely interested in ensuring that the health and well being of our people along the U.S.-Mexico border are taken care of. So I try to represent them.

Woman from Washington, D.C.: I wish to bring with me here today, the voice of all those immigrant women who have been rendered voiceless, who have suffered, not only because of domestic violence, but who because of their status, are not able to speak out. I am also here representing the Latino Caucus at the American Public Health Association, and the members who are working hard to make policies and provide services that are going to change that.

Woman from California: I'm representing LULAC and also immigrant Latinas, because I suffered domestic violence and want to thank all of you who have worked to help us...many of us because of a language barrier and lack of knowledge of this culture remain trapped. I would like to give thanks that right now I am doing my Ph.D. in criminal psychology and working in search of helping to understand and trying to help Latinas who suffer domestic violence.

Man from Massachusetts: I am Cuban. I come from a lineage, going back to my great-grandfather, of men who were privileged and abusive to their partners and they were also men that I loved. So my mission is to change that in my family. I have a son who is loving and a good little man. I also represent my wife who gives me more love than I can hold.

Woman from Washington, D.C.: I'm with the Children's Defense Fund. Our mission is to ensure that no child is left behind, but we also recognize that children and families are inextricably linked. On a personal level, I bring my son, whom I want to grow up to respect women and solve problems without violence.

Woman from California: I bring the spirit of my family, especially my grandmother from the 1800s, who taught me how to fight for dignity, and my eight sons...so that violence will be something they see outside of their lives and that they will have the desire to fight for

others. I have the spirit of the struggling and courageous farm worker, of which I was a part in California. With much pride I bring the farm worker woman.

**From the National Symposium on La Violencia Domestica:
An Emerging Dialogue Among Latinos**

November 6, 7, 1997

Woman from California: I'm also a survivor of domestic violence. I survived 23 years ago, and for the past 10 years I've been working with the men, running a Latino batterers' program. And the reason I'm doing that is because when I was living with violence, I had always hoped that there was some help, and particularly some help for my spouse. So I'm here to represent the batterers, who are also in a lot of pain. These are men who have been victims themselves, who are living in a lot of pain.

Man from California: But let me tell you, yo soy un Chicano de East L.A.... (I'm a Chicano from East L.A...) I'm born, raised and continue to live, work, and I'm probably going to die there... I don't take drugs anymore... I come from a background of violence; I know it well. Yo era lo que se dice bato loco. Era pandillero... (I used to be what they call a wise guy. I was a gangster...) But my blessing has been [a woman I met as] a 15 year old chicanita con el nombre de Angelina (called Angelina)... We have been married 45 years, we have five children, eight grandchildren, three great-grandchildren, and another one that we hope to see when we get back. And, in fact, my children have quit having babies, and my grandchildren are having babies, if you get the picture. So that is who I am, in terms of me as a person. In my professional life, I'm a licensed psychotherapist...I work with batterers, with men who like to kick women's ass, okay? And in that area I think I'm very good because of my violent background. A mi no me van a madrear. Que me provocó? (They can't fool me. She provoked me?) Give me a break, man. Do you know what provocar means? She provoked me? It is a classic excuse.

Another woman from Chicago: In order to stop domestic violence, I feel we have to face the problem. I mean, I heard over, and over again, my mom and my grandmother say: pero que va a decir la gente, yo no quiero que se den cuenta de lo que pasa (but what will people say, I don't want them to know what's going on). You know, I'm sick and tired of hearing that. I mean, to tell you the truth, I feel that everyone knew about it, but they didn't do anything...Well, I think we have to stop thinking about other people and think about ourselves, especially our families, and our children. We need to unite as a community, and help those families who are in need. Finally, I would like to leave you with a quote that reads: "We did then what we knew then, now that we know better, we do better." And I truly hope we do better for our children.

Jerry Tello, Childhood memories: Jerry Tello, a Board of Directors member, articulated the collective vision of the eight women and men who had met to plan the Symposium: that in the Latino community men, women, elders, and children will work together against domestic violence, recognizing that doing this will require tremendous trust and a leap of faith and healing among participants. Faith, trust, and healing are not "policy issues"; they are a form of knowledge and conviction that each person has gained from life and from the heart. Jerry was chosen to convey this vision by telling participants the story about the lessons his father and his culture have offered him. In a sense, this is the Board of

Directors's collective Conocimiento. It is also a story of marginalization and of struggling for honorable manhood. The following is a summary of his remarks:

I remember as a little boy, going with my dad to the store to buy milk for my little sister. And he would want to pay and the men who were running the store were sitting in the back playing cards and they wouldn't come to collect the money. My dad would say, "Hey, quiero pagar, I want to pay" and they would say, "It's a stupid wetback, make him wait." I would look at my dad and he would begin getting mad. They made him wait a long time and called him ugly names and I would wonder why doesn't he do something—hit them, knock something over, or rip off the milk, but he couldn't because then he would go to jail. Then he wouldn't be able to work and we wouldn't eat. He just got more angry and when I asked him why he didn't do anything, he slapped me on the head and said "Shut up, you don't understand." He then put on his hat and put the rest of the anger under it. Sometimes that anger would slip out from under the hat and I didn't know why.

When my brother got busted for being on the wrong side of the tracks, my dad would get angry and tell us that my brother was not a good example to follow—so my dad would be angry and my brother would get angry too. At the same time society was telling us that Mexican men were wetbacks, gang bangers, drunks and womanizers and as a little boy this is what I thought Macho was—I thought this was what a Latino man was supposed to be and how he was supposed to act. What I didn't understand was that this was society's way of breaking us down, reinforcing false teachings, and hiding our true knowledge. But the old writings of the HueHues (Elders) told us what it meant to be a true hombre and mujer (man and woman). That in order to be an hombre noble (noble man) you must respect women—that the first lesson in crossing the bridge to manhood is respect for "el otro yo" (your other self), woman. If you didn't learn that lesson, then you didn't go on. It is our responsibility to reteach these old lessons and to bring harmony and balance to our relationships.

So, struggling with working in this field, I'm a father, I'm a son, I also represent your fathers and your sons, and your partners. I also represent the men that have abused, that have been the perpetrators. And so, for them, and especially to you [women in the audience], I apologize for those of us that have been irresponsible, for those of us that couldn't keep it under our hat, for those of us that made excuses, and for those of us that were violent to any of you, for any of the women you represent, I take responsibility and apologize.

Because the first aspect of anything is mujer, creation, you; without you, we would not be. And so in looking back, I begin to understand que de veras un macho es un hombre (that really a man is a male who is) honorable, dignified, respectful, sensitive, supportive, accountable, all of those things... And I just want to thank the women here, all of you, that have taught us, that have accepted us, and maybe somehow can forgive us, and to allow us an opportunity to learn and grow, so that maybe your sons, when they grow up, people will not be afraid of them... So I think the task is interconnected, it is about grandparents, it is about children, it is about mujeres and about hombres (about women and men), and I just feel blessed to be in this room, to be able to be present where there are so many strong mujeres with a lot of experience; elders and people with stories, jóvenes (young people), and all of that.

And I think we represent each other, and whether we think we are ready or not, whether we think we are experienced, got degrees or not, ni modo (it doesn't matter), we had to do it, because we are the voice for many, many people that are hurting, and many more that we can actually make a better way for.

The interconnectedness between Latinos and Latinas and our desire to work together was voiced again and again by participants throughout the gathering, and the Board of Directors provided leadership in this respect through their example, as women and men working together on the Board of Directors.