



REFLECTIONS ON MARIA RIFO

NO AGE-ISM IN AVP!

Dotty Joos

Ten years ago I talked to my Chilean friend Maria Rifo about my new experience with AVP. At that time we got together one afternoon a week. She kept my rudimentary Spanish going with conversation and we would sit around her dining room table for two hours while I struggled. Then we would get in my car and spend two more hours making the circuit of her favorite vegetable stands and natural food

stores. (She eschewed supermarket locations with products that exploited the labors of the farmworker.)

A month later, just after her 90th birthday, she said to me, "I want to become a facilitator of that program and bring it into the Spanish-speaking community here." And she did. She facilitated for several years before she found her energy no longer up to three long days.

When she could no longer do AVP, she turned to other less stressful activities in the community, including Marshall Rosenberg's nonviolent communication. Earlier this year she had a Spanish NVC group meeting at her home. Never one to stop learning, last week she said, "I want you to teach me meditation."

Sunday night she went to the hospital. When she arrived her blood pressure was 20. They got it up a bit but her organs were failing. We talked; she was fully conscious, drug-free, without pain or breathing difficulties, but very tired. In early evening she fell into a doze and quietly passed away . . .



FURTHER REFLECTIONS: *Adapted from articles by Katy Hillenmeyer, The Press Democrat (2006); Diane Ainsworth, Berkeleyan (2002); and an ACLU press release (2002) - (quoted on the web site of "Jeff" of Novato, California (2006))*

Born in La Serena, Chile, beloved activist Maria Rifo, the modest matriarch of Santa Rosa's Latino community whose friendship with César Chávez sparked four decades of social justice outreach...died at 98.

After hearing César Chávez speak, she moved to California and for 12 years she worked as his secretary, translating the grower's contracts into Spanish and helping make the union run. Her apartment was filled with photos of Chávez, whose lessons in putting people before profits resonated with her... Rifo's career with the [United Farm Workers] union spanned from 1968 to 1980. "César used to get after her and say, 'You have to put this [contract translations] in the language people use, not in the language of books,'" recalled Dotty Joos of Occidental, a longtime friend. "It woke her up to the fact that you really need to pay attention to the people you're working with and give them what they need, not what you think they need."

Rather than rest on her laurels after a long and difficult life as a farmworker in the Central Valley, she did volunteer work with the Alternatives to Violence Project, helping to start a Spanish-speaking group in Santa Rosa, California. At ninety-five years of age, Maria Rifo, who learned how to mobilize downtrodden people from her mentor, farm-labor organizer César Chávez, "[found] beauty in involvement." An advocate of children and families, Rifo was honored by the American Civil Liberties Union of Sonoma County by presentation of the Jack Green Civil Liberties award, citing her role in fighting alcohol and drug abuse, counseling prison inmates in Folsom, and empowering Latina women through groups including Mujeres Unidas.

Jeff of Novato expressed his appreciation of Maria by sharing from an ACLU press release: "At age 95, Maria Rifo [had] a lot to be proud about. Unlike many who have reached this age, she [got] up early to walk Santa Rosa's streets. She [lived] simply and [did] not have much money but [was] able buy food for those who are down-on-their-luck. ☚