

Lindsey Frye

3/1/09

Santa Cruz, Bolivia

The women are the heartbeat of our neighborhood in Plan 3 mil. They are the schoolboard, the neighborhood watch, the nurses, the teachers, and the mentors. Many work during the day and still maintain their households single-handedly. They sell food in the markets, carting vegetables all over the city. They wash clothing by hand for hours on end, They wake up at 3am in order to make empanadas to sell outside of schools before class begins. The wage of a woman is roughly one fourth of that of a man. They dedicate their lives to keep their households and the neighborhood running. Because of a great migration to Spain and other countries, many women have become in charge of children that have been left behind as well. And yet with so many challenges, these women are some of the most joyful people I know.

There are many people who fit this description, but woman who stands out to me is Marisol. She is about 30 years old, her household is made up of her husband and her father, 5 children, plus she's raising her 2 year-old blind niece (her brother's been in Spain since before the girl was born). I met her in a nutrition group for mothers and their babies. Since then she's participated in several courses (some given in collaboration with MCC) oriented towards creating small businesses. She has been selling painted handbags for about a year now, and I help her calculate her costs and profits. What strikes me most about her is her courage. She searches for the truth in a situation and speaks to it, breaking through politics or cultural norms which entangle the majority.

Once she told me that she heard her neighbor beating his pregnant wife and she said her head shot up over their fence and without thinking she yelled, "if you really want to fight someone, let me find someone your own size." Her husband got mad at her and said that the man could've gone after her and she shouldn't interfere. She assured him it didn't matter, that at least she had stopped him.

Of all the women I know, she is the one of the only ones who attempts to negotiate with her husband about how much money he spends on alcohol, asking him how many years ago he supposes they could've finished their house if he had spent that money on construction materials. I admire her so

much and I wonder whether she is conscious of what a gift she really is to those around her, what she does for all of us to give us hope that we too might be so sincere. Recently in reading John Paul Lederach's book, *The Moral Imagination*, I found an excerpt that explains so much about the women to which I'm referring. Lederach's term for this is "voicewalker," and I will close with an excerpt that defines it.

"I have known a lot of voicewalkers in my life. They rarely stand out immediately. You come to recognize them after awhile more than from first impressions. Lives don't speak in one-time conversations. They speak over time. You may notice them first for the things they don't confuse. They don't confuse their job or activities with who they are as people. They don't confuse getting credit with success, or recognition with self-worth. They don't confuse criticism for an enemy. They don't confuse truth with social or political power. They don't confuse their work with saving the world. They don't confuse guilt with motivation.

Then you may notice something that is not so easy to put a finger on: It is not so much what they do as who they are that makes a difference. They listen in a way that their own agenda does not seem to be in the way. They respond more from love than fear. They laugh at themselves. They cry with others' pain, but never take over their journey. They know when to say no and have the courage to do it. They work hard but are rarely too busy. Their life speaks." (Ledarach, *The Moral Imagination* p.167)