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HOUSTON'S GAY & LESBIAN MONTHLY MAGAZINE



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Latina Lesbian L



Leaders



Celebrating Hispanic History Month and Gay and Lesbian History Month

by Lis Mendes

Photographs by Theresa DiMenno

Este mes se celebra la Historia de Homosexuales y Lesbianas al mismo tiempo que se celebra la Historia de los Hispanos. ¡Qué maravilloso que tengamos en primera plana las historias personales de cuatro lesbianas latinas! Aunque sabemos que hay muchos líderes hispanos en la comunidad homosexual de Houston, esperamos que nuestra selección de estas mujeres notables lleve reconocimiento a todos.

This month we celebrate not only Gay and Lesbian History Month, but Hispanic History Month as well. How wonderful that we have profiles of four Latina lesbians as our cover story! We know that there are many Hispanic leaders in the Houston gay community, and we hope that our choice of these four outstanding women brings deserved recognition to all.

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Lola Castillo: "We didn't want to get arrested too quickly, before we made our point."

Lola Castillo was a teenager when she started what was to be a 20-year career as a social activist.

The Federal Courts had just handed down a new pairing plan aimed at integrating Houston public schools, and various Chicano organizations were protesting the plan because it was unfair. Chicanos were being classified as white and then bussed to black schools, while whites were being left in their home schools. Various groups were boycotting HISD in protest.

I was in the ninth grade at Jackson Jr. High, and I was the first student to walk out. It was 9:30 in the morning and the whole school was locked up with chains on the doors, and the only open door was being blocked by a couple of teachers and the principal.

I managed to get to the door, and they tried to stop me and threaten me, saying I could never come back to HISD. I walked out anyway. By lunchtime, a couple of hundred other students walked out, too. And that was the beginning of my activism.

I became a student leader and joined MAYO (the Mexican-American Youth Organization) and went around to different schools encouraging young Chicano students to boycott HISD in protest of the pairing plan. Huelga schools were put together so that students could continue their education during the boycott.

Finally, we were victorious in our lawsuit against the Federal Courts, and we overturned the pairing plan. Chicanos were finally recognized as a separate minority group, with their own language and their own culture.

Lola continued her work with MAYO after the HISD boycott ended and worked for farm-worker rights and other race-oriented issues.

One year, Melchor Ortega was going around the country talking about how Cesar Chavez was really a front man for the Communist party. Of course, we were all pissed off because that was not true. We decided that we wanted to crash his speech, but we didn't want to get arrested too quickly before we made our point, so we went to buy tickets to the rally. That way they couldn't throw us out right away.

Because Lola was fair skinned with light brown hair and green eyes, she was elected by MAYO to go to the American Opinion bookstore to try to buy the tickets. Once there she conned the clerk into giving her a fistful of free tickets for her friends who couldn't afford them.

I told him, "Oh, I have so many friends that would love to come to this event." He said, "Really? Well how many tickets do you need?" And I said, "Let's see, there's Jennifer and Billy and Buffy



Jackie Doval: "Hopefully, my nephew will know that he has a dyke aunt who's a jock."

and. . . " I just started making up all these white-people names when really it was Tencha and Poncho and Chuey. And he said, "I'll give you these tickets, but only if you promise to bring all your friends. I want to see you there." I told him, "I promise you'll see me there." Of course, he didn't know he was gonna see me there protesting and disrupting the speech.

So we went, with our tickets, and when Melchor Ortega got up to speak and started telling his lies, we stood up, booing him and saying he was wrong and he was a front for the conservatives.

It turned into a major disruption and they called the police. The police came with paddy wagons and pulled us all out of the meeting. But then when we told them what Melchor Ortega was saying, they said, "Hey, we like Cesar Chavez, too." And they let us go. It was amazing, 'cause they were white officers, but they knew what was going on with farm workers.

After Lola came out as a lesbian in the early '80s, she left the Chicano movement.

It was really scary for me in the beginning. I was afraid of a backlash. I was afraid the people I had worked with in MAYO would, in fact, not understand and would shun me. Later, I finally came to terms with that and decided that people would have to accept me for what I am. But it took a long time to get comfortable being out.

Lola now works with the Family Violence Program of the Houston Area Women's Center where lesbian services will soon be offered.

One of the most exciting things we have coming up is a new program for the lesbian community that addresses lesbian battering. We've had many clients coming into our shelter pretending to be straight and then disclosing to their counselor that they are lesbian and are being battered by their lover.

After seeing the Chicano movement fail, for the most part, to address gay and lesbian concerns, Lola works to make sure the gay and lesbian community doesn't ignore race issues.

I think there's room in our society for lots of discussion. It's real healthy when people from different perspectives come together and talk about those differences. It fosters an environment where we can all get along.

Separation comes from ignorance. When people accept stereotypes about other groups, they fear any kind of interaction with other people, other groups. I think we can all contribute. There are always going to be conservative elements in the country that are going to talk shit about us, and try to minimize the contributions gays and lesbians



Laura Villagrán: "As a Latina, it's important for me to break any stereotypes there might be."

are making, try to discredit us. We can't let them.

Remember the riots in Moody Park after Joe Campos Torres was murdered by Houston Police officers? Lesbians were there. Lesbians were in the march for Ida Delany. We're everywhere. We're more visible, we're more vocal. And we're not going away.

Now in the fifth year of production, the *Gay and Lesbian Yellow Pages* has a circulation of 85,000, 350 points of distribution, and almost 400 pages of business listings.

Laura Villagrán started the *Yellow Pages* after she left a similar publication.

I was working for the Spanish Yellow Pages and one day I had no job. With all that experience, especially in sales, I decided to give it a shot. Kathy Hubbard bought the first ad, and it was go from there.

The first book, in 1991, was only 48 pages, but the response was amazing. The community used it, and the advertisers saw an immediate response. The next edition doubled in size, and we've doubled each year since then.

The success of the Houston GLYP was overwhelming. And it was clear to me that the key to continued economic, social, and political growth lies in uniting our gay dollars.

Now cities all over the country are coming out with their own gay Yellow Pages. Phoenix, Baltimore, and Washington all have their first edition this year. We have the third Denver edition coming up. We started that in response to Amendment 2 in Colorado, and it's growing. We'll have a staff of three there this year, so I won't have to go back and forth as much.

Lots of the other publications are called Community Resource Guides or some other non-gay name. No one actually comes out and says Gay and Lesbian Yellow Pages, except for us in Houston and Denver. That's the next step. It would be very powerful for them to come out of the closet completely.

But as successful as GLYP has been, it has come at some personal cost to Laura.

For the first couple of years, I was completely ostracized. Being a woman in this business and playing with the big boys in this community has been very hard. But as a Latina, it's important for me to break any stereotypes there might be—the image of the Latina butch, diseldyke. I hope that we can help change the image of Latinas in the business world and in the gay community.

I want people to know about my commitment to the economic growth of our community. That leads to incredible freedom for us.



Linda Morales: "They killed him, and I always had it in the back of my mind that that could happen to me."

Not only with things like AIDS research or social development, but as individuals. Uniting the gay dollar can lead to amazing power.

But as much as I work on economic growth for our community, I'm most proud of my work with the Assistance Fund and of my reprioritizing everything in my life, taking the focus away from money. Money isn't the only thing in the world. Now my number-one priority is helping other people instead of chasing the big bucks. That came about as a result of my mother's cancer. I realized what was important, and money didn't have anything to do with it.

Still, I have lots of plans for GLYP. We want to franchise and be in 20 markets, maybe go public. And I see TV as a part of our future. I've seen the Gay and Lesbian Yellow Pages become a vital component of gay economic growth, increasing the visibility of gay and lesbian businesses and gay-friendly businesses. There are so many markets that don't have this publication or one like it, and it's crucial to the gay community that they do.

Linda Morales came to Houston after graduating from college. Originally from Uvalde, Texas, Linda thought Houston would be where she would start her career in TV programming. Instead, she became a nationally known gay and lesbian activist.

As the lead plaintiff in *Morales vs. The State of Texas*, a suit filed in an effort to overturn 21.06—a state law banning sodomy that was often used to prosecute gays—Linda became a prime target for conservatives and anti-gays.

Aware of the expense and exposure suing the state would entail, Linda eagerly took on the challenge.

It was too important an issue for me to sit by idle and not challenge it. I couldn't understand why people were opposed to allowing lesbians and gays having, in essence, equality. It was too important an issue for me not to take a stand on it. Attempts to change the law in the legislature had failed, and the only way left to challenge 21.06 was in the court system. So I did.

Linda told her mother about her plans.

It was a pretty morning back in Uvalde, Texas, and I said, "I know you know about my lifestyle, but I have to tell you that I'm gonna file a lawsuit against the state of Texas. It's something that I really believe needs to be done, and I want to let you know in case someone tries to do something to the family. This is a small town, with a small-town mentality, and you never know what's gonna happen."

Latina Lesbian Leaders

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My mother said, "Why do you have to tell the whole world you're gay?" And I told her, "Not the whole world, just the state of Texas." All she could say was, "Ay, Linda."

My big fear was about my family, our safety. I remembered that as a small child, people would talk about this one joto who lived in Uvalde, who was a flaming queen and the rumor was that they killed him. So I always had that in the back of my mind, that that could happen to me.

One thing Linda wasn't prepared for was the apathy in the gay community.

A lot of people didn't even know that there's a law on the books that makes us (gays and lesbians) illegal, that doesn't allow us to love someone of the same sex. That was a real big obstacle. In order to challenge a law like 21.06, it's gonna take a lot of financial resources. The lack of community support we got was real sad for me. People can go to the bars and spend their money, and then here was this important issue that didn't get the same kind of energy or attention from the community.

Linda's efforts to overturn 21.06 earned her a spot in the recent book, *Uncommon Heroes*, a chronicle of gay and lesbian leaders across the country.

I got a call from New York, and they said that they were doing a book on people that they felt needed to be recognized. There were two people from Houston, myself and Juan Palomo.

Linda and Juan's inclusion in the book was met with a pronounced lack of interest by the larger gay community in Houston.

That was disappointing for me. I say that, not because of me, but because of Juan. I really admire him because he was in mainstream media, and he got blasted when he came out. After all the struggles he had with the Houston Post and my carrying the lawsuit for everyone—not just Hispanics, but for everyone—and we didn't even get a hint of recognition. That's sad.

I was reading something about gay history the other day and it was all Anglos. Nothing against the Anglos or blacks that deserve to be recognized, but where the hell were we? Didn't the writer know any Hispanic names? There are plenty of Hispanics that have impacted the gay community. Like Juan Palomo or Joe Perez, who founded LLEGO. Where were they?

I guess it's up to us to toot our own horn, because if we don't, our history doesn't get written up. We as gay and lesbian Hispanics have made a big, big contribution to the community, but we don't get the recognition we deserve.

I think the larger gay community needs to understand that gay and lesbian Hispanics want to be included. We want to be at the table making decisions and want to be a recognized part of the community.

We don't have a different agenda just because we're Hispanic. We're part of the gay community. But we have a different culture and we're holding on to it. It's too important for us to let go.

Jackie Doval, born in Puerto Rico, divides her energies between her growing chiropractic clinic, the Lesbian Health Initiative (LHI), Houston Black Tie, Team Houston, People in Medicine, and the Greater Houston Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce.

With a master's degree in exercise physiology, Jackie entered a Doctoral program at Texas A&M, but left before completing her dissertation. From there she went to the Texas Chiropractic College. She joined a clinic after graduating, but was fired when the administration found out about her sexuality.

They caught me with my pants down. I had no savings, no

backup. I had been paying off my student loans and didn't see this coming.

When I got fired, I thought, "I don't want to go to work for someone else again." So I borrowed some money from my lover, Robin Robinett, and opened my own clinic. Kathy Hubbard gave me space in her offices. I started off with an examination room and an office. That was it.

Now I have a suite of offices in the Twelve Oaks Tower and we're still growing.

Jackie is currently putting together the first ever Lesbian Health Fair, called LESBIANS '96: TO YOUR HEALTH/LESBIANAS '96: A TU SALUD to be held January 27, 1996 at the Multi-Service Center on West Gray. The all-day event will include health screenings, workshops, and entertainment.

The Health Fair is being held in response to last year's lesbian health survey collected by the Lesbian Health Initiative.

Although the survey had a limited number of Hispanic and African-American respondents, Jackie is hoping the Health Fair will attract lesbians from all races and backgrounds.

When I go out, I'm just amazed at seeing all these beautiful women from different cultural backgrounds. They pack the bars, but where are they now? Where did they come from? I'm hoping that they will actually come out to the Fair and participate. We're reaching out to people all across the community.

Lesbian health is a big focus for me. Through LHI, I've developed great friendships, in particular with Virginia Miller, who really works hard with me in the Lesbian Health Initiative, along with Pat Gandy. Both of them are survivors of breast cancer. That touches me. AIDS touches me deeply. It seems like every year I lose another friend to AIDS.

Along with the Lesbian Health Initiative, Jackie developed the Kessler Program in her clinic, a vehicle for providing free chiropractic services to low-income clients or people with AIDS. Jackie started the program after losing a client to AIDS.

He was the first client I lost to AIDS, and I saw how committed he was to chiropractic care and knew that chiropractic care can play a major role in the treatment of a person with AIDS, so I started the Kessler Program. Right now, I'm trying to get it funded so that I can expand it and serve more people.

Along with providing quality health, Jackie acknowledges she has other responsibilities to the gay and lesbian community.

I have a responsibility to be out. To do the most that I can, to help out within the community. To make things go forward. Strength comes in numbers. You can't just have the handful of people that are gonna be out and do all the work. We need more people out. Maybe by seeing us be out and proud, they will find the security and safety to come out.

I was scared about coming out, like most people are. My greatest fear was losing my family when I came out; actually, they outed me. And it was a tough nine-year battle, but they finally came around. It was a rough nine years, but it was worth it. Now they're moving to Houston to be with me.

My only sister still has some difficulty with my being lesbian. She has a son, my nephew that I love dearly, but has kept him away from me for almost a year now. But I know it takes time. I waited for my parents to come around, and I'm willing to keep fighting and waiting for my sister to do the same thing. Hopefully, my nephew will know that he has a dyke aunt who's a jock.

The jock aspect Jackie refers to is, in part, a childhood dream.

There were things I wanted to do as a child, and being an athlete was one of them. My mother discouraged that; she said I would get muscles like a man. But now I'm able to enjoy being athletic. I went to the Gay Games for the first time in '94 and competed as a cyclist. My next goal is to compete in body building in Amsterdam in '98.