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05/24/2017

Uncompromised: The Lupe Anguiano Story sheds light on one of America's great activists



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In a world where women have faced an uphill battle for equality, there have been many progressive, forward-thinking individuals who have helped pave the way toward success. One of those individuals was Lupe Anguiano and her story is told in great detail by Debora Wright in “Uncompromised: The Lupe Anguiano Story”.

From the moment the reader gets through the prologue it is evident Anguiano’s story is a life-changing one. Not just for Anguiano, but also for the thousands of people she was able to help along the way. Hers is also a story that continues to change lives today. As author Debora Wright writes:

“All of these women, and thousands like them, changed their lives and the lives of their children through the vision and efforts of one woman – Lupe Anguiano. The daughter of migrant workers, a former nun who spent fifteen years wearing a habit, she was a brilliant, charismatic activist who dreamed of getting women off welfare and into well-paying jobs. Her vision of turning welfare into work and bringing dignity and self-sufficiency to the lives of thousands of women who flew under the radar is one of the great examples of the American dream fulfilled.”

Wright’s account of Anguiano as told through the subject’s voice and those who worked with her in creating the American dream for so many, is detailed and expansive. From Anguiano’s her youth growing up in Colorado to her decision to become a nun and dedicated a good portion of her formative adult years in that discipline, Wright leaves no stone unturned in documenting what shaped one of America’s unsung heroes.

Anguiano’s heart, as readers learn, was with the poor. She worked with gangs in East Los Angeles and supported family friend Cesar Chavez. In “Uncompromised” Wright describes Anguiano’s activism as causing a rift between her and the establishment. Anguiano, however, said the act of giving, offered her the life-changing opportunity to change lives.

“[Pope John XXIII] was really strong, and in examining the social teaching of the church, made statements that challenged nuns and priests to minister to the people, not asking them to leave religious life, but to get out of their comfort zones and go out and minister to people like Christ did,” Anguiano said. “He told us not to be afraid to be witnesses to what’s right and what’s wrong. This was a major change for the Roman Catholic Church. Well, that just gave me wings!”

Welfare reform was Anguiano’s crowning achievement and its documentation in “Uncompromised” alone makes the book essential reading. Not as much as “rags-to-riches” story as a one of breaking barriers, Wright narrates fluidly how Anguiano was able to found the non-profit National Women’s Employment and Education, Inc. Her initiative to create more jobs for women and help them get off welfare made waves in San Antonio – where she began the movement under the banner “Let’s Get Off Welfare” – and landed Anguiano on “60 Minutes” and garnered praise of the soon-to-be second lady of the United States, Barbara Bush.

Though the program was demonstrably successful, Anguiano was still dealt several obstacles. When she moved on to Colorado to expand her initiative in Denver (the Colorado Women’s Employment and Education Program, CWEE, still

exists today), Anguiano faced a mutiny in San Antonio where opposition to NWEE began to grow. In this section of “Uncompromised” Wright gives Anguiano the floor as she describes her trials through the dissolving of the NWEE and having to collect unemployment checks. In her words, however, Anguiano kept her eye on the prize:

“In spite of everything, I knew deep inside that I had done the right thing. If they wanted what I had built over the past ten years, let them have it, but why did they act as though I did not exist? I was interested in changing national policy and not in running a bunch of small local programs.”

“Uncompromised: The Lupe Anguiano Story” is a detailed account of a remarkable woman that deserves a place on the bookshelves of those interested in following in the footsteps of a remarkable activist led by her faith.

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