

In 1962, she found herself on stage at the Newport Folk Festival in Rhode Island. "It was the first folk festival I went to—it was like another world. Everybody got \$50 per performing day, whether it was me or the Lovin' Spoonful or Bob Dylan. We all got our expenses paid. My roommate was Fannie Lou Hamer," Hamer, who organized the first black voter registration drive in Mississippi, dedicated her life to the struggle for voter registration programs through such organizations as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). She played an important role in events that culminated in President Lyndon Johnson's signing of the Civil Rights Act.

"She changed my life," says Rosalie. "I'd been out partying after the festival and I came in about 4 a.m. and the door was locked. I was outside hollering, 'Why is this door locked? Open up!' She came to the door with a beautiful smile like a sunrise and said, 'Well, I see you're from Idaho and you don't know anything. Come in here and I'll tell you some stuff.' She sat me down and told me about her good friend Medger Evers . . . and how she had the living hell beat out of her in jail. Finally she said, 'So you see, where I come from you got to lock the door.' We remained friends until she died."

Many friends along the way have helped Rosalie learn to rise to the challenge of other locked doors. After recording her first album, her marriage broke up. She says, "My husband didn't want me to do anything more." He wanted her at home: cooking, cleaning, raising the children. But Rosalie pursued her dream anyway, even though keeping things together on the road with five children was a real struggle. Malvina Reynolds ("Little Boxes on the Hillside") offered her some key advice: "Malvina taught me, when I would just feel so discouraged, she would put me to work helping somebody who was way worse off than I was."

Looking back over the decades, at how women have struggled for equal rights, Rosalie says, "I think the world has changed a whole lot. . . things have turned around. I think poverty is much more the culprit now. I do believe women were discriminated against, but not exclusively by men. It was a social thing. I also think young women have dropped the ball, like, 'We've got it all.' They don't remember that the world is a very complicated place, and just because you have a good job and a lot of money doesn't mean it's all done. Sometimes I think, 'Do I have to go out and march about this again? Isn't it someone else's turn?' It's as though they think they've ended the struggle. I keep harping on the fact that men weren't always the only problem."

She sings about men and women and children, about the craziness and comforts, the hardships and the wonders of life. "The best thing I've done is stay engaged," she says. "Trying to find out all the information that's available and trying to encourage other people to learn it. I have stayed open. I haven't made up my mind that I know everything. I'm always willing to learn."

Rosalie turns 75 this year, but her plans don't center around a rocking chair on the porch of her Grimes Creek cabin. "I was saying I was retired, staying home more and more, but I can't make a living doing that. I'm working on an idea for an album," she says. "It's about getting old. Getting to be 75 includes learning quite a lot."



rosio gonzalez

Rosio Gonzalez
by Neysa CM Jensen

Growing up poor, female, and Latina gave Rosio Gonzalez a unique insight into oppression. "I knew people often saw us with stereotype eyes. We were all gang bangers and troublemakers. We were watched in stores carefully, sometimes asked how we could afford something we were purchasing. We weren't supported to go to college, because a job was a better solution for our abilities or capabilities."

When Rosio was only two years old, after her mother died, she lived in the Gilroy Valley of California with aunts and uncles on her father's side of the family. Eventually, she and four siblings moved in with their grandmother, who raised them to adulthood. Rosio says, "She ran a tight ship and worked really hard to move us out of that struggling neighborhood."

Rosio understood early on that education was going to be important. Watching her father, who did not finish high school, struggle all his life as a farm worker with no opportunities, she knew education was a way out of poverty. But getting there was another matter. Her traditional Latino culture didn't support her goals. "I was expected to help in the home, unlike my brothers. As the youngest female in the home, I was expected to take on the responsibility to care for our grandmother through old age. I was expected to stay in close proximity to my family, which was a struggle when I left home to attend college."

Her high school counselor told her not to go to college or bother taking the SAT. But Rosio was undaunted. She registered for the test, with no clue what it was except that she needed to take it to go to college. "Of course, I flunked my SATs horribly," she says. "But determined as I was, I enrolled in the community college."

Rosio credits her family and some inspirational teachers with supporting her in her goal to achieve a higher education. "My grandmother was an inspiration, always pushing us to do better. She had a sixth-grade education and she saw the struggles we would

experience if we did not seek education as a way out of poverty—but she never really knew how to support us to achieve this. I had teachers who were mentors in elementary and high school and I know they changed my life. I had the support of my family."

There was also the college counselor who was determined not to let Rosio drop out when things were difficult. "Without these individuals, things may have turned out different for me, who knows. This is why giving back to our youth and community is so important to me. I received so much from others in my journey to where I am." While at college, Rosio became an activist for farm workers' rights and learned that there are ways to make a difference.

Rosio's adult life has been spent working toward a better life for those in need. She started out as a social worker, but today she is the executive director of Catholic Charities of Idaho. In that capacity, she oversees services that include outreach to victims of human trafficking, victims of domestic violence, at-risk youth, immigrants, low-income families, and English language learners. She also advocates for improved health care, child care, education, living wages, and other issues particularly affecting low-income families.

Rosio's friend, Adriane, shares an example of Rosio's commitment to helping others: "During a recent crisis at a local mobile home park, the owner of the park was taking advantage of impoverished families by allowing families to live in the park while it was severely out of compliance with city safety regulations. Rosio responded, along with other community leaders, to help inform families of this serious issue and to coordinate services for families when they had to relocate." Because Rosio is bilingual, she was able to make connections that others were unable to manage. She spent evenings and weekends at the trailer park helping families.

Rosio says, "I was saddened by some of the responses in the community from people who lacked the empathy or understanding of what it is like to uproot your family within a week and move. At the same time, I was touched by the humanity of those who reached out to help these families find shelter and resources to make the transition easier. I was impressed by a law firm that decided to represent these families pro bono. I was mostly touched by the families who showed the courage and strength to endure this huge injustice and maintained the faith to keep their families together and start anew with the little resources they had."

Rosio believes that faith and her world call her to use her "talents and gifts in a way that helps the common good of all." She succeeds at what she does because, as she says, "I have a deep capacity to care for others. I am empathetic. I have time, talent and treasure that I share with others as an act of connectivity. I value education. I am collaborative and supportive. My strength as a woman comes from our grandmother who was the matriarch of our family and taught us to be strong women in a culture that was not always accepting of this paradigm. She mentored me, without knowing that a woman could be strong, capable and assertive. I am not making history, but certainly appreciate the opportunity to be part of helping change history."