

en Puerto Rico desde hace mucho tiempo).

# The Primary Victory of Sila Calderon

A Personal Reflection by  
Andrew L. Praschak

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(Andrew Praschak is an attorney with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Caribbean field office and a long time resident of Puerto Rico)

Sometimes all you need is a little luck, a little break and a lot of chutzpah to make a difference. The good luck must have come from the goodness of all things fair and just, the chutzpah I get from my mom, and the little break came from Sila Calderon.

After Sunday, things will never be quite the same in Puerto Rico.

It all started when I was awakened at 6:30 one morning about a week before the recent San Juan mayoral primary by a phone call from one of my heroes, local gay activist Dr. Rosalina Ramos.

"Mira Andrés" she said to me with her distinctive raspy voice. "Did you see what Sila Calderon said in the San Juan City Magazine?" she asked excitedly.

"Oh no", I thought to myself, "another politician has made some ignorant, hurtful, homophobic remark about gays, limp wrists or how we don't have what it takes to be policemen, or something mean like that." For some reason, otherwise nice people can be so cruel when they talk about Gays.

You have to live on Mars not to know that this has been a rough, painful month for Gay People in Puerto Rico.

"Andrés listen to this." She quoted from the Sila article, "I'm against all kinds of discrimination", Calderon said in response to a question about the recent controversy over homosexuals in the police force. "The dignity of people", she said, "should be respected regardless of race, gender, religion or sexual preference."

By this point, the hairs on the back of my neck stood up and I could feel the adrenaline start to flow through my body as if I were preparing to run a 50 yard dash.

Dr. Ramos continued to quote from Sila's interview, "People have to be judged for what they are, what they've made of their lives, not because of their skin or their name or their sexual preference", she said.

"Oh my God, that's great", I yelled into the telephone. "We have to do something to help her win this primary."

As if there was no time for her to express her agreement with me Dr. Ramos

asked if I knew anyone on Sila's staff with whom we could meet. "To tell you the truth, I only know about three Populares in all of Puerto Rico", I admitted jokingly, to make the point that my contacts with the Pava party are few and far between.

Dr. Ramos said she knew Sila's husband and would give him a call at his office. We agreed that above all, we had to be very careful about what we did because we did not want to do anything to hurt Sila's chances now that she had become one of the first politicians in Puerto Rico's history to stand up intelligently for our civil rights.

As it turned out, Sila's husband, Adolfo Kurtz, as well as her campaign manager, Irving Faccio, welcomed our support but made it clear they would appreciate it if we could keep a "low profile" at least until after the primary.

"I know you understand, Licenciado, what a mean spirited reporter could do with this story in the last days of the campaign," Faccio said to me, with a hint of sadness in his voice.

"Yeah, I know", I admitted.

And with those words I felt my heart sink to my stomach. I realized we were being asked to stay in the closet to help Sila, at least until after the primary. The last thing I wanted to do was stay in the closet. It didn't make any sense. My whole life now is about not living in the closet anymore.

"But you guys are adults. You do what you believe in your hearts is the right thing to do," Faccio told me. "We know that whatever you do will be well intentioned."

By Friday, with one campaign day left before the primary, Sila was leading in all the polls and we had set our extensive network into motion to turn out the vote for sila. We knew we had to issue a press release, "Gays Support Sila". In our hearts we knew it would help more than it would hurt if we let everyone know that "Gays Support Sila". After all, we reasoned, we knew there were tens of thousands of gay voters in San Juan.

From that point on there was no turning back. All I remember is a 24 hour blur of press releases, faxes, phone calls, e-mails, flyers, radio interviews, television interviews, please vote, please call, please help, please be at the caravan and please be at Sila's campaign headquarters on Sunday.

In all the rush and excitement, Dr. Ramos even accused me of being the Spider Captain because I coaxed her into doing all the risky live interviews and public statements. It seemed more relevant coming from her.

Saturday morning, el Nuevo Dia ran the "Gays Support Sila" press release in the "Entre Lineas" section of the newspaper. "Even the Gay community has thrown it's

support to Sila", they wrote, or something like that. By Saturday afternoon, both of Sila's primary opponents publicly agreed with Sila's Position on Gay rights under pressure from the media.

There were high five's all around our make shift office in Dr. Ramos's house. Not only did this announcement by the other candidates help our cause, but it meant that our public support would not hurt Sila's campaign on the last day. And that all important block of gay votes would go to Sila. We were convinced she deserved it.

We were there at Sila's campaign headquarters on Sunday to cheer, dance and witness the announcement of her overwhelming 92% victory. We waived our gay flags — that beautiful rainbow flag that has the red, the blue and the green, not to mention the purple and yellow in it's design. It fits well in all campaigns.

And when the curious asked us what our flag represented we told them proudly it was the gay flag. In response, people gave us the thumbs up sign, or told us that it was a beautiful flag, or made a point of shaking our hands and thanking us for being there.

One gentleman even asked if we were the "Entre Lineas" people. "Yes", I said, "We are the Entre Lineas people." And he said he was impressed with what we had done over the weekend. He shook my hand and looked me right in the eye as if to tell me in his own macho way, without words, "You're all right man. I respect you."

Then Sila invited the entire crowd to follow her down to the Popular Party Headquarters to celebrate her victory. I didn't go. This was not my party. I really believe that statehood is the best solution for Puerto Rico. But this last week was not about political status for me. It was more about pride, dignity, acceptance and knowing that I could make a difference for a very courageous person who had made a difference for me. It was about showing all those people who are afraid that there is no reason to be afraid.

Maybe Dr. Ramos will continue with Sila's campaign now that the primary is over. That's up to her. She knows I will support whatever decision she makes.

I have to go back to my own party now, The New Progressive Party, and work to convince our candidates that if they stand up for our civil rights — like Sila did — maybe they can get that big block of gay votes that is out there looking for a place to go in every town in Puerto Rico.

Thank you Sila. Some day I hope I get to shake your hand. Because of you, things will never be the same for us.

## En Español

La Victoria primarista de Sila Calderon  
por Andrew L. Praschak

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A veces, todo lo que se necesita es un poco de suerte, una pequeña oportunidad y mucho atrevimiento para hacer la diferencia. La buena suerte debe haber venido de la bondad de todas las cosas limpias y justa. El atrevimiento lo coji de mi mama y la pequeña oportunidad vino de Sila Calderon.

Después del domingo, las cosas nunca seran del todo las mismas en Puerto Rico.

Todo empezo cuando me despertó a las 6:30 de la mañana, hace como una semana antes de la primaria por la alcaldía de San Juan, una llamada telefonica de una de mis heroínas, la activista homosexual local, Dra. Rosalina Ramos.

"Mira, Andres", me dijo con su particular voz aspera. "Viste lo que dijo Sila Calderon en el San Juan City Magazine?" me pregunto animada.

"O, o", Pense, "otro politico ha hecho algun comentario ignorante, danino u homofobico sobre los homosexuales, que somos fragiles o que no tenemos lo necesario para ser policias o algo asi de mezzquino". Por alguna razon, las personas amables pueden ser, por otro lado, tan crueles cuando hablan de los homosexuales.

No se tiene que vivir en Marte para darse cuenta que este mes ha sido aspero y duro para las personas homosexuales en Puerto Rico.

"Andres, oye esto", cito del articulo de Sila. "Estoy en contra de todo tipo de discrimin", decia Calderon en respuesta a una pregunta sobre la reciente polemica de los homosexuales en la fuerza policiaca. "La dignidad de la gente", dijo, "debe ser respetada no importa su raza, su sexo, su religion o su preferencia sexual", dijo.

En este momento, los pelos que estan detras de mi cuello se pararon y pude sentir que la adrenalina empezo a fluir por todo mi cuerpo como si me estuviera preparando para una carrera de 50 metros lisos.

La Dra. Ramos continuo citando de la entrevista de Sila, "se debe juzgar a la gente por lo que son, por lo que han hecho con sus vidas, no por su raza o su nombre o su preferencia sexual", dijo.

"¡Dios Mío, eso es fantastico!" grite por telefono. "Tenemos que hacer algo para ayudarla a ganar esta primaria".

Como si no tuviera tiempo al estar de acuerdo conmigo, la Dra. Ramos me pregunto que si conocia a alguien del personal de Sila con quien pudiera reunirse con nosotros. "para serte franco, conozco solamente como 3 populares en todo Puerto Rico", admiti en broma para hacer claro que mis contactos con el partido de la Pava son minimos y muy poco frecuentes.

La Dra. Ramos dijo que conocia al marido de Sila y que lo llamaria a la oficina. Estuvimos de acuerdo sobre todo con eso, teniamos que tener mucho cuidado sobre que haciamos porque no queriamos danarle las oportunidades a Sila ahora que se ha convertido en la primera lider politico en la

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