



The Experience of Encuentro 2018

The weekend of November 16-18, 2018 brought much solidarity and peacebuilding as I walked with the young and old, the Mexican people, those from Central American people, United States people. It was a time to confront the evil policies that cause division, hatred and violence. It was a time not to remain silent and to walk the walk and talk the talk of transformation. As I walked from the Americana Hotel in Nogalas, AZ to the border wall and crossed into Mexico, I did not walk alone- I walked with a Notre Dame Sister and a volunteer that I've ministered with in Douglas, AZ/Agua Prieta, Mexico into the welcoming community of Nogalas, Mexico. The spirit of the Mexican people and bienvenido was the gift. A stage was set and people from the School of the America Watch spoke and gave much insight "into the stances they have taken for many years and continue to do so. The organizers then invited the people to speak of experiences of pain and suffering and the support they have received from so many. Some especially touching stories included the pain a woman suffered as the marines from Mexico invaded her home, threatened her with death and kidnapped her husband in March, 2018. Another spoke of the disappearance of her son and how she continues to look for him; this mother continues to weep for her son. Then there were stories of U.S. veterans who have been deported and separated from family and friends. The stories touched my soul and the people shared the hope that life will become better. It took 2 hours to pass through customs into the United States. The conferences in the afternoon connected me with other advocates for change and brought more stories of those who continue to minister for those in

borderland communities in Arizona and Texas. What a wonderful group of ministers. I do not want to forget that there were those from many parts of the United States, Mexico, and Central America. And this was Saturday, November 17.

On Sunday, the experience was on the U.S. side of the border wall and pulled at the heart strings of all of those who have died from the early 1980's on. It was a litany that lasted over an hour and ended in a gravesite that honored the people and those who continue to die. On the U.S. side, unlike former years we were forbidden to be near the wall. A large iron built fence prevented us from touching others on the Mexican Side. Also wire prevented the human connection of touch. In spite of all of this we found ways to make our voices heard. The experience brought young and older people to take a risk and use the space between the iron built fence and the wall to depict a cemetery of those who have died and those who will die. This was a risk that people took; there was a possibility of arrest. Border Patrol did not interfere.

There is much more to tell and I will be in Fond du Lac during the month of December if anyone wants to hear more.