We Are Willing to Sacrifice

La Meza, 1988
pull into the parking lot of the Sunset Drive-In Grocery. Young couples with sniffling children are waiting. One woman holds a little girl of about 2 whose left eye is encrusted with a blackened tumor the size of a lemon. Several older men and women are in the crowd, their wrinkles and callouses granting them rights to a certain skepticism that they wear on their faces like translucent masks. A boy of 6 holds a small sign, its message hand-lettered in red paint: "Help us, Ann Richards. We need water to drink."

On this warm day in February, Texas Treasurer Ann Richards and a small group of state officials come to La Meza on a "fact-finding" mission. Richards, the witty and attractive grandmother who had made her mark both in Texas and nationally, had been invited to tour the communities of the Mexican border. Richards is a Spanish word for neighbor, and along the Texas border, the communities have come to signify a particular kind of rural slum, especially in the 40 Rio Grande Valley parishes that are the poorest in the nation. More than 100,000 people live in these communities, which are the lowest in per capita income in the nation. Cotonia is a Spanish word for neighborhood, and along the Texas border, the communities have come to signify a particular kind of rural slum, especially in the 40 Rio Grande Valley parishes that are the poorest in the nation. More than 100,000 people live in these communities, which are the lowest in per capita income in the nation.

Mrs. Bocanegra, G0ish, small, and serious in her turquoise cotton pants suit, call the group together, makes polite introductions, and tells the officials about the problems of La Meza. She has the figures they need. There are water main along the county road a few hundred yards from the homes of La Meza. Big is the figure they need. It would take only $29,000 to extend a line from the main water pipe to provide hookups for the residents of La Meza. She has questions. "How is it possible to go without water in the richest nation in the world?"

Mr. Bocanegra's words are echoed by old Father José Mateus, whose mismatched clothes, scuffed shoes, and kindly smile indicate that he might be a true Christian of the Roman and Rio Grande Valley Catholic church. The church was joined with the Catholic church of Father Mateus and the Catholic church in this quest for water and good sense. A powerful endorsement. But whereas it may have been Father Mateus and the Catholic church that supported her, it was Ernesto Cortes and Valley Interfaith that had given Mrs. Bocanegra the tools she needs to make the case. The tools that had given Mrs. Bocanegra the tools to act. Tools that allow Mrs. Bocanegra to confront the officials before her. Her voice gains strength, Her black eyes fix on the group with determination. She is like a fourth-grade teacher patiently explaining the logic of the multiplication table. It is simply illogical for the people of La Meza to have no water.

The group listens to Mrs. Bocanegra. They ask questions, "We are willing to pay whatever we can," Mrs. Bocanegra says. "But we don't have the chance." The group listens to Mrs. Bocanegra. They ask questions.

At least $29,000 is needed to provide water for the residents of La Meza. The Valley has the highest incidence of parasitic intestinal diseases outside of the Third World. Shallow water wells are frequently polluted by overflowing septic tanks. After heavy rains the water wells are frequently polluted by overflowing septic tanks. Few water wells are frequenly polluted by overflowing septic tanks. Few water wells are frequenly polluted by overflowing septic tanks. Few water wells are frequenly polluted by overflowing septic tanks. Few water wells are frequenly polluted by overflowing septic tanks. Few water wells are frequenly polluted by overflowing septic tanks. Few water wells are frequenly polluted by overflowing septic tanks.

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In fact, throughout his career, he has lived to defeat the others. Cortes cheaply does not dress to be the center of attention. His spiritual work is not yet noticed by the public. He is the leader of his course, a 3-year-old. But among the rest, he is a minor figure of his course, a 3-year-old. During the day, he is so much of his course, a 3-year-old. When he is out to lunch, he is so much of his course, a 3-year-old. But among the rest, he is a minor figure of his course, a 3-year-old. During the day, he is so much of his course, a 3-year-old. When he is out to lunch, he is so much of his course, a 3-year-old.