

Yvonne Vazquez Rangel

Education Advocate
1966-2009

By José Faus

Yvonne Vazquez Rangel, 42, of Kansas City, Missouri, died January 28, 2009, after surviving end-stage cancer for five years. Yvonne was born October 28, 1966, to Jesus and Amelia Vazquez.

Rangel's cousin Vivien Perez remembers growing up together playing games, taking long drives to Wichita, Kansas, and sharing their childhood dreams and secrets. "My most vivid memory of Yvonne is walking into her bedroom closet. She had the most magical closet that any girl would like to have. In her bedroom she had a four poster bed, a little round table with a tea cup set on it, and she had books. I still admired Yvonne, but I was the cousin that always fought with her because she was so strong willed and tenacious," she said.

Rangel's tenacity was evident in her activism on behalf of the Latino community. Her first professional position was as a counselor and advocate at a shelter for victims of domestic violence. In 1992 she started work with the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) National Educational Service Center as educational advisor and eventually director. She met her husband of 11 years, Juan, through her work with LULAC.

"She had a true love for students, not just Latino students, but all students. As director of LULAC and as a director and mentor for the Hispanic Leadership Opportunity Program, she touched the lives of countless students in the Kansas City area from junior high to college," Melissa Amaya, client manager at In-Roads recalled. Amaya remembered when Rangel came to her house to help her family complete financial aid paperwork so she could attend college. "She sat down with us and helped us fill it out line by line because I was the first one in my family to go to college and this was all new to us."

One of her initiatives was the implementation of a Saturday reading program for children kindergarten to third grade whose first language was Spanish. In an interview, she once admitted that her work involved odd hours but there was a well-reasoned argument



for it. "There are evening [activities] and weekend [activities], especially when you're dealing with young people," said Rangel. "Young people don't just exist between the hours of eight and five. In order to make sure that we are meeting their needs we have to adjust ourselves as well."

When Rangel was diagnosed with cancer, doctors told her that she would live only two more years. She was determined not to allow the cancer to slow her down or rule her life. She continued to work in the community, touching many with her smile, her optimism, and her faith in God. When Pastor Dennis Capra of Faith Ministries learned about her cancer, he tried to offer her support, but she shied away from it. Instead she would insist on praying for others. "Some of the issues and some of the pain that she was going through didn't seem to bother her.... She only wanted to comfort us and encourage us. Most of the time we wanted to pray for her and she ended up praying for us and praying for the things we were praying for. She was always thinking about somebody else," Capra said.

In 2005 the LULAC Educational Service Center, 500 Delaware St., dedicated a computer room as the Yvonne Vazquez Rangel Student Resources Library & Technology Center. The center was the result of a partnership between LULAC, the H&R Block Foundation, and the AT&T SBC Foundation. Rangel's dedication was also recognized by the *Kansas City Star* which awarded her the first Shining Star-Young Woman's Achievement Award.

Sources

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