



Alpha Hernandez

January 23, 1947 - March 28, 2014

At the close of her senior year of high school, Alpha Hernandez received a rare and undeserved grade of B in a typing class. She and the teacher both knew she was a candidate for valedictorian, but this was Del Rio High School in 1965. It had not been consolidated with San Felipe High School, so Alpha was one of the very few "Mexicanas" in her class who had achieved high enough to break the norm. It was no secret that the typing teacher favored another student (who just happened to be white) for the honor. Alpha appealed to the teacher for fair treatment, to receive the grade she deserved, but to no avail. Although they both knew what she had rightfully earned and what was at stake, the teacher did not budge. Even as a high-school girl, she did not take unfairness lying down. She went to the school administration and showed her work with no mistakes. She could not be denied, and she went on to become the first ever non-white, and certainly the first ever Mexican American woman, valedictorian of Del Rio High School. Her academic prowess and tenacity in pursuit of justice proved to be prophetic. She would go on to become a defender of the poor and disenfranchised and, as eloquently put by the director of her firm, David Hall, leader in her community and indeed in all of Southwest Texas. She went on to UT-Austin, where she was a founding member of the Mexican American Student Association and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Latin-American Studies in 1969. After short stints as a social worker in Texas and a job counselor in California, and an internship in Washington D.C., she went to law school, graduating from the

UCLA School of Law, receiving her Juris Doctorate in 1976 and fulfilling her mother's dream of pursuing higher education. She was licensed in California and in Texas and was admitted to practice law in the Western District of Texas, United State Tax Court, Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, and the Supreme Court of the United States of America. She worked for the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles for a year, and then jumped at the opportunity to open a new TRLA office back home in Del Rio. In 1977 the Legal Services Corporation under Board Chair Hilary Rodham was expanding into every county in the country. As part of that expansion Alpha served a brief apprenticeship in Crystal City, then moved to Del Rio as soon as her father, the Del Rio Parks Superintendent Felix A. Hernandez, remodeled an office building for her. One of her earliest projects was desegregating Del Rio schools and instating bilingual education (monitoring the implementation of the order by Judge William Wayne Justice in *US v. Texas*, 342 F. Supp. 24 (E.D. Tex. 1971), spelling out detailed instructions on how to implement an effective desegregation plan, including bilingual education). Early on she realized that a legal services lawyer is most effective when working directly with client community leadership, and she labored for over three decades with those leaders to create a legacy of community-based organizations to serve her community: Buena Salud (health clinic), Amistad Family Violence and Rape Crisis Center (domestic violence shelter), Casa de la Cultura (cultural arts, community center in the San Felipe Barrio), Familias Unidas de Val Verde County, Inc. (self-help housing program), Project N.I.N.O. (a children's benefit organization), and the Adobe Association of Del Rio (sustainable adobe building initiative). There can be no doubt that the low-income residents of Del Rio are in a better place because of Alpha's effective work with these groups. She also litigated several significant cases for her clients and has argued at the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals (only one step below the United States Supreme Court) more times than anyone in TRLA. One of the most important was *Hernandez v. Cremer*, which she ultimately won before a split panel in the court of Appeal. 913 F.2d 230 (5th Cir. 1990). She represented

Carmelo Hernandez, a US citizen who had been born in Puerto Rico. He was denied reentry into the US after a trip to Mexico because the INS inspector thought that Puerto Rican birth certificates were inherently suspicious. Hernandez spent 46 days in Mexico, working sporadically for 1 meal a day; he lost his job in Houston, his apartment, his clothing. Alpha won an injunction, affirmed on appeal that revised the way INS officers must process re-entry cases at border ports-of-entry. After Hernandez, inspectors must treat voter registration cards as probative evidence of citizenship. She protected women from sex discrimination at work. Estrada v. City of Eagle Pass instructed city leaders on the perils of sex discrimination and opened many jobs to women, including that of City Manager. She worked with several TRLA colleagues to establish federal recognition for the Traditional Tribe of Kickapoo in Eagle Pass, and, in Cuellar v. TEC, established the principal in unemployment insurance hearings that merely filing a controverting affidavit does not give the employer an automatic win. And she played a major role in protecting Hispanic Voters in Val Verde County from an onslaught of votes from military officers who had passed through or had yet to arrive at Laughlin Air Force Base, but were no longer or had never been county residents. Their votes had elected a Klansman to the county commissioners court; he was forced to withdraw when his Klan activities in Germany came to light during the litigation in Casarez v. Val Verde County. After the program merger in 2001, Alpha became the manager of the immigration practice area team. She and Luis Gonzalez, her paralegal who died in December, carried on a robust immigration practice for TRLA under the highly restrictive rules of LSC and TAJF. Their compassion and effective advocacy stabilized and improved the lives of hundreds who sought to make their homes in the US. She fought and won an effort to protect Sierra Blanca from becoming a toxic sludge waste site. She was able, after the flood of 1998, to win the fight to keep the Casa de la Cultura open when it was under threat of closure on multiple fronts. Most recently, she worked to ensure the future of Del Rio by defeating an attempt

by SAWS to pipe such severely high volumes of water from the San Felipe Springs to San Antonio that the springs would have been critically compromised, and Del Rio would not survive. All this went on while successfully fighting to keep her office open in the face of branch closings and reductions in force at TRLA, in efforts to ensure proper defense of the chronically underrepresented in Del Rio and in Southwest Texas. The community recognized her for these victories and many more by naming her Woman of the Year at the 2011 International Women's Day Conference. Her achievements would not have been possible without the love and support of her family and community. Alpha was born January 23, 1947 in Del Rio, TX, to Felix and Maria Hernandez, baptized and raised at El Principe de Paz United Methodist Church. There she served as Youth sponsor for 22 years and served on the Board of Ministries as President, on the United Methodist Church Rio Grande Conference and on the Board of Higher Education, always guiding and encouraging youth to work to achieve academically and instilling a love of service to the community in the young people she worked with at church and beyond. Alpha ended her battle with cancer at her residence in Del Rio Friday, March 28, 2014, at the age of 67. Left to cherish Alpha's memory are her husband, Rodolfo Felipe Reyna and her children, Teresa Tonantzin Hernandez Reyna and Rodolfo Cuauhtli Hernandez Reyna, her mother, Maria G. Hernandez, her brother Felix G. Hernandez III of El Paso, TX (wife Estela and children David and Monica), her brother Apolonio Hernandez of Del Rio, TX (wife Julia and children Apolonio, Pauline, Jose and Patricia), her sister Diana H. Gonzalez of Del Rio, TX (husband Angelo Gonzalez and children Carmen, Angela, Ben and Bethany) and her sister Denise Hernandez of Del Rio, TX (husband Jose David Perez and children Jose Francisco and Juan David). She is predeceased by her father, Felix A. Hernandez, her nephew, Felix C. Hernandez and her great-niece, Sarah Hernandez. The family would like to thank the following persons for the loving care they provided Alpha during her illness: Dr. Amy Lang, Sara Perales, Marie Perales Morin and Carmen Gonzalez, RN. Visitation will take place

Wednesday, April 2, 2014, from 5:00 to 9:00 PM at the Trinity Mortuary Chapel followed by a gathering of family and friends at La Casa de la Cultura. Funeral services will be Thursday, April 3, 2014, at 10:00 AM at El Principe de Paz United Methodist Church at 404 W. Chapoy, Del Rio, Texas, with Pastor Ricardo Rubio officiating and pallbearers: Rodolfo Cuauhtli Reyna, Jose David Perez, Jose Francisco Perez, Juan David Perez, Apolonio Hernandez Jr., and Roland Andrade, internment at Sunset Cemetery and reception afterward at La Casa de la Cultura. Funeral arrangements are under the care and direction of Trinity Mortuary, 206 Kings Way, Del Rio, Texas, 78840, (830) 775-2230. In lieu of flowers, please send donations to the Casa de la Cultura, 302 Cantu St., Del Rio, Texas. Alpha lived in celebration of life and so shall be commemorated in celebration. "I will Praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well." Psalm 139:14

Tribute Wall

SH

“ To the Hernandez Family, My deepest sympathy for your lost, It appears, Alpha led a fulfilling life and was a marter to people whose lives she touched. I wish I had started my genalogy search earlier because when I look at her, I saw myself. My father was Fredric Andre Hernandez (Chico) from San Antonio Texas. He died a long time ago. I believe his parents were Apolino and Perfecta who I never had the opportunity to meet. My name is Selina Michelle Hernandez, (now my last name is Henry) and I am one of three siblings. I hope to find out more about Alpha and contact her mom.

Selina M. Hernandez - June 02, 2015 at 02:01 PM

SM

“ The greatest compliment to someone who has passed, is to live your life and keep their memory alive.

Sylvia Moreno - April 03, 2014 at 06:20 PM

GC

“ My deepest condolences to the Hernandez family. Alpha's contributions to her clients and community are vast. She left behind a community of friends, fellow TRLA advocates and others will be miss her immensely. The effect of her work on her community will continue to be felt. She leaves a lasting footprint.

Guadalupe Canales - April 03, 2014 at 03:57 PM

AR

“ Wish I could be there in person, she will always be remembered. .My condolences and prayers...I remember her always getting my son Eloy and Joe Frank to do as she said and get involved in different events...

Anita Beltran Ramirez - April 02, 2014 at 10:53 PM

AF

“ *Mr. Reyna, Even when loss is expected, it does not make it any easier to those that are left behind. Please know that I keep you and your family in my thoughts and prayers. With deepest sympathy,*
Anne Fonseca

Anne Fonseca - April 02, 2014 at 06:34 PM

DH

“ *We love you Teresa and Cuahutli From the Perez Family*

Denise Hernandez - April 02, 2014 at 05:20 PM

SL

“ *May others aspire to be like the person Alpha was. What a great loss for Del Rio and the many who came to know her. My deepest sympathies to her family.*

Sara De Leon - April 02, 2014 at 02:01 PM

ES

“ *I didn't know Alpha, but I work with Debbie Salinas, who recommended that I read Alpha's obituary. I am very moved by her accomplishments. I would like to express my sincere condolences to Alpha's family and friends. May God bless you!*

Elizabeth Sanchez - April 02, 2014 at 01:31 PM

JB

“ Alpha became the President of Community Council of Southwest Texas in the late 1980's after we fought to have adequate representation of the poor and added 9 positions from Val Verde county to the board, mostly representatives of the poor. For years we fought many battles together and our work culminated in the development of many people over the next 25 years. Under Alpha's leadership, Early Childhood Development Programs expanded throughout Uvalde, Real, Kinney and Zavala Counties. Home ownership opportunities became possible for hundreds of families and Jobs were created as the organization grew to become the sixth largest employer in Uvalde Texas. We created an after school program in Del Rio and then a Charter School in Uvalde. We also created a newspaper called the Servant Leader and an FM Radio Station. We effectively created a self-governed system of education from pre-K to 12th grade, empowering people to have assets and keep the hope to break away from poverty, while we trained people to wake up to realize that their dreams could happen. She truly inspired a lot of us to commit to creating real institutional change and promote equality and social justice in the region. Her leadership represents a loss to a generation of leaders that demonstrated results through action. Her legacy will continue through those whose life she touched loved and may she rest in peace and represent us from above.

Jorge and SanJuana Botello - April 02, 2014 at 11:53 AM

SS

“ Nuestro más sentido pésame para Rodolfo, Cuauhtli y Teresa y toda la familia. Alpha ha significado siempre un gran ejemplo de dignidad, lucha y compromiso para los más desprotegidos. Nuestra familia siempre la recuerda y tiene presente con mucho cariño, respeto y admiración. Alpha es y será siempre una inspiración en nuestro trabajo por un mundo mejor.

Salvador y Socorro Sarmiento - April 02, 2014 at 10:57 AM

DR

“ My deepest condolences to the family of Alpha Hernandez, the TRLA staff, Diana Abrego, the other members of the clients' counsel, and the members of Del Rio's community who so respected and loved Ms. Hernandez. I was so blessed to have worked in Del Rio on litigation with Ms. Hernandez, George Korbel and the staff of the Del Rio office in years past. For her goodness, her determination, her keen intelligence, gracias a dios.

Dianne Luark Ross - April 02, 2014 at 12:17 AM

LE

“ Alpha, you will be missed so much. To her family...I have many wonderful memories of her quiet, yet firm spirit, her love and passion for helping others, her willingness to help those unable to help themselves, and so many more. I wish I could be with the family especially during this time of loss.

Lizabeth Jean Elkins - April 01, 2014 at 10:31 PM

EF

“ Our deepest sympathies to the Hernandez family. May you find strength in the love of family and in the warm embrace of friends.

Eddie and Fela Hidalgo and family - April 01, 2014 at 10:27 PM

EF

“ Estamos con Ustedes con nuestras oraciones. Deseando que El Senor consuele sus corazones.

Eliseo Rodriguez and family - April 01, 2014 at 10:25 PM

JE

“ Deepest sympathy to the family, you are in our thoughts and prayers. May God bring comfort to you at this time.

jackie eagle - April 01, 2014 at 08:23 PM

RH

“ Descendant of the early Hernandez farming pioneers (before Del Rio was part of the U.S.) and great-great-granddaughter of the cofounder of the first Spanish San Felipe Methodist Church, Alpha continued the legacy by establishing organizations promoting civil rights, Mexican cultural fine arts, and education.

Priceless family memorable experiences included: being my childhood playmate; occasionally working together at the fruit/vegetable stand at her dad's farm on Hudson Dr; attending slumber parties and huge family reunions; attending Methodist youth summer camps; visiting each other at universities we attended in Texas, Arizona, and California; enjoying our youth during the psychedelic 60's; attending each other's weddings; and camping under California redwoods and Santa Cruz beaches. Christmas was a very special time for our families filled with numerous activities. A feast was hosted by Alpha's parents attended by family and the entire church congregation at their large barn. Entertainment included singing, dancing, and performance by the Matachines. Alpha hosted Comedy Night, Tango Night, and Games Night at her home. Dr. Salinas Ranch hosted baseball tournaments, fireworks, and my dad's BBQ dinners on New Year's Eve. Uncle Lalo provided moonlight hay rides. Finally, my parents hosted Christmas Eve Italian dinners (by hobbyist Chef Tony Mazzarini, my husband) and gift exchanges. Happiness and laughter were enjoyed by family togetherness. What rich experiences we had!

My cousin Alpha, a feminist, civil rights activist, a woman who made a difference in the democratic process for the oppressed. This family member will be missed!

Rebecca Hernandez - April 01, 2014 at 07:51 PM

SS

“ *She will be missed in our lives. Although we will know tears and sorrow for her passing. I know she is with our Lord and at peace.*

Sonia Sosa - April 01, 2014 at 06:12 PM

FS

“ *Our deepest condolences to the family. As you grieve know that we are remembering you and honoring the memory of Alpha. I fondly reflect on the X'mas gatherings I was fortunate to attend--the talent show preparation, the music, the laughter, the meal and the joy of being surrounded by family. May you be comforted by the out pouring of love surrounding you and by God's guidance during this time of grief. Sincere appreciation of Alpha's life.*

Frank & Brenda Salinas - April 01, 2014 at 04:50 PM

FH

“ *Our sincerest condolences to the family and friends of Alpha. She will be remember for successes and commitment to her community and her tenacity in serving those in need of help. She has reached the ultimate goal of standing before our Lord, wrapped in His arms freed of earthly pain.*

Federico & Laura Hernandez - April 01, 2014 at 04:29 PM

AC

“ *Alicia Collier has sent this Expressions of Sympathy card.*

Alicia Collier - April 01, 2014 at 10:43 AM

WB

“ *Alpha Hernandez*

Wesley Bushrod - April 01, 2014 at 10:19 AM

DB

“ I am so glad I got to spend some time with her the weekend before her return to the hospital. She looked well and was in good spirits. She and her children had made plans for some together trips; but she also said she had put everything in order and if she had to go she was at peace, unafraid and ready to meet her Lord. She was happy. I will miss her

Dina Bushrod - April 01, 2014 at 09:44 AM

UR

“ Alpha was a co worker that we will miss dearly. May God give her family the strength and comfort to sustain their loss. Adios companera .

Ubaldo Rodriguez - April 01, 2014 at 09:38 AM

DP

“ Beautiful; gifted; loving; passionate about righting the wrongs - Alpha, lovely lady, we will miss you. To her family: may the peace that comes from memories shared comfort you now and in the days ahead.

Diana Gonzales & Rudy Pena - March 31, 2014 at 10:46 PM

TC

“ Our thoughts and prayers go out to the entire Hernandez family. Alpha was such a special person, always lending a hand to someone in need. She was such an exceptional leader and compassionate person. We will miss her!

Tom & Vicky Contreras - March 31, 2014 at 06:27 PM

BR

“ *My thoughts and prayers for each and everyone of you. What a blessing to have known Alpha.*

Bertie Robles - March 31, 2014 at 03:11 PM

SG

“ *On behalf of Sigma Delta Lambda we offer the family of Alpha Hernandez our deepest and most sincere condolences especially to our sister Teresa Reyna. May the family find comfort with one another and friends during this difficult time.*
The Hermanas of SDL

Sharon Gonzales - March 31, 2014 at 11:21 AM

MZ

“ *One of the smartest people I knew, she always smiling. My condolences to the family.*

Marco Zambrano - March 30, 2014 at 08:51 PM

EH

“ *Rejoice as Alpha joins the Father in Eternity.*

Ed Hernandez - March 30, 2014 at 01:24 PM

BH

“ *To all the family, please accept my deepest sympathy for the passing of Alpha. May The Lord bring you peace and comfort.*

Blanca Davis. (Hernandez) - March 29, 2014 at 08:41 PM