

Margaret Randall, the Art of Dissent

by Lisa Albrecht

I am a huge Margaret Randall fan, and someone who has read her work for over 30 years. I have an entire bookshelf devoted to Margaret Randall, and I don't come close to having all the books that she has published in her lifetime. Now in her 70s, Margaret is a feminist poet, writer, photographer, and activist who has published over 90 books. Her work includes poetry, oral histories, essay collections, anthologies, photo collections, and a number of books that she has translated into Spanish. There is also a wonderful film about her life, *The Unapologetic Life of Margaret Randall*, made by Minneapolis filmmakers Lu Lippold and Pam Colby (and distributed by Cinema Guild).

Margaret will be speaking at a number of local venues and will read from several new works: *To Change the World: My Years in Cuba* (Rutgers University Press), *First Laugh – Essays 2000-2009* (University of Nebraska), and *As If the Empty Chair: Poems for the Disappeared/Como si la silla vacia: Poemas para los desaparecidos* (Wings Press, limited edition).



Margaret lives in New Mexico now, but also lived in Nicaragua (1980-84) and Cuba (1969-80) during their revolutions. She also lived in Mexico City during the 1968 student movement. When she tried to return to the U.S. from Nicaragua in 1984, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) ordered her deported under the

ideological exclusion clause of the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act. The INS judged her writing as subversive, argued that her viewpoints contradicted U.S. foreign policy, and specifically said that her opinions were “against the good order and happiness of the United States.” Sound familiar? From 1984 to 1989, Margaret was defended by the Center for Constitutional Rights. Her case went through various levels within the U.S. court system; she ultimately did win back her citizenship and the right to live here in the U.S., where she was born. Yes, this was over 25 years ago, yet it mirrors much of what is happening today – the use of the Patriot Act to attack activists, FBI raids on anti-imperialists, and the war against undocumented immigrants.

In 1990, Margaret was awarded the Lillian Hellman and Dashiell Hammett grant for writers victimized by political repression, and in 2004 she was the first recipient of PEN New Mexico’s Dorothy Doyle Lifetime Achievement Award for Writing and Human Rights Activism. In 2010, she was selected to be a judge for this hemisphere’s most prestigious Spanish language literary prize, the Casa de las Americas.

Margaret is the mother of four – Gregory (living in Uruguay), Ximena and Sarah (living in Mexico), and Ana (living in the U.S.) She is the proud grandmother of ten children. Margaret has lived with her life companion, painter Barbara Byers, for over 20 years.

As an activist writer, Margaret has always stood in solidarity with struggles all over the globe. Besides her words, Margaret’s photographs, particularly of women and children, capture the revolutionary spirit within all of us. What I most love about Margaret’s work is its feminist humanity. She speaks to all of us in a language that is accessible for all. Start reading her work today! Hear her speak at WAMM’s Annual Meeting Saturday, March 5.

Lisa Albrecht is a WAMM Board member. She directs an undergraduate social justice minor at the University of Minnesota, is active in many local and national organizations, and is the local co-chair of the White Privilege Conference to be in the Twin Cities April 13-16, 2011.

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