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## Voting Rights Watch 2012

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## UndocuBus Riders Find Struggle and Hope in Knoxville

*Voting Rights Watch 2012 on August 30, 2012 - 3:38 PM ET*

Knoxville's Church of the Savior was buzzing with energy last night. Some seventy locals prepared a potluck feast for UndocuBus riders, who have spent the last three days in eastern Tennessee. Riders include people of all ages, including students, day laborers and domestic workers, and they're headed to the Democratic National Convention.

Last night's generosity is indicative of the support riders have experienced since the ride started in Phoenix, Arizona, more than a month ago. While UndocuBus is reaching out to those people who have been most affected by draconian immigration laws, they're also building community with white allies who are helping to feed and house the riders as they head towards Charlotte for the convention.

After dinner, the riders were given the pulpit to share their stories. A candle was lit to signify the sacredness of the moments that followed, when more than a dozen people spoke, sometimes sharing poetry, sometimes singing music, always reflecting on why they joined the ride, and ending with the refrain, "No papers, no fear!"

What might sound like a catchy slogan to some has real resonance in Knoxville. Local sheriff J.J. Jones has applied for 287(g), which is a memorandum of understanding with the Department of Homeland Security so that local deputies can enforce federal immigration law. A coalition of immigrant rights groups have attempted to meet with Sheriff Jones, but he has so far refused. A Knoxville teenager, Alejandro Guizar, who was already facing deportation when he joined UndocuBus in Nashville early this week, wanted to join an action to challenge Sheriff Jones.

Guizar, 19, was arrested after his high school graduation—he had some drinks at a party and was charged with public intoxication. Despite the fact that the charge was dropped, he still faces deportation proceedings. As he addressed the packed church, he explained why he decided to risk arrest the previous day, when he and three others blocked the bridge that leads to Sheriff Jones's office. Because he was the only one participating in the civil disobedience without identification, he was, indeed, arrested—but mounting pressure from UndocuBus and the social media network they've created secured Guizar's release, just six hours after his arrest.

I learned that one of the women he was arrested with was named Fran—described to me as a white ally who works on immigrant rights locally. When I sought her out after the event, I didn't expect to meet a 66-year-old white woman. A retired law professor, Fran Ansley grew up in what she described as Jim Crow Atlanta. She works with Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition, and although she's committed a lot of time to social justice, the last time she was arrested was during a student war protest in 1969. She explained she's been so inspired by the way people have been inventing new ways to fight against anti-immigrant initiatives that she wanted to do what she could to be part of a civil disobedience. If Sheriff Jones had been able to ignore the coalition so far, the action would just make it that much harder.

As the riders headed back to the Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist church to spend the night, they sang a song popularized in Chile called "*El pueblo unido jamás será vencido*," which translates to, "The people united will never be defeated." In an ever-changing nation, UndocuBus challenges how we define

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“the people,” and who creates change.

Before the night was over, Maria Huerta, a 65-year-old undocumented rider from northern California who was cited the previous day for participating in the civil disobedience against Sheriff Jones's 287(g) request, got a text and became visibly excited by the news. Huerta, who works with Mujeres Unidas y Activas (United and Active Women), arrived on UnodcuBus on a delegation of six women sent by the National Domestic Worker's Alliance about two weeks ago. Four of them headed to California soon after as that state's domestic worker's bill was moving through the legislature. Huerta's text alerted her that the bill had just passed—largely due to the efforts of undocumented women who are claiming their stakes in electoral politics.

—*Aura Bogado*

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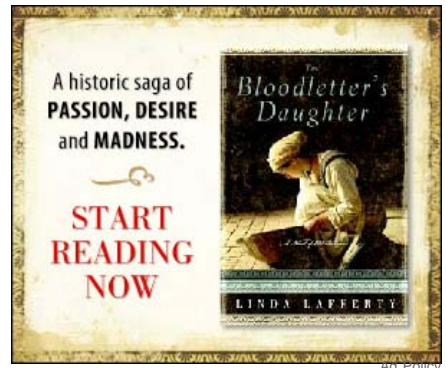


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