

Adrienne Germain

I met Adrienne on the eighties. Brazil was emerging from a dictatorship. Feminists were advocating for women's rights in the new constitution. I was President of the National Council for Women's Rights and was participating on a meeting in Rio that was more of a battle field between feminists and controlistas. I did not know who was that American woman but we were raising the same points. I invited her to my house. There was a tropical storm on the forest reserve on the back. I was worried she would be scared. She was delighted because it reminded her of Bangladesh.

We met on the trenches and that was our connection ever since. We agreed on goals and discussed strategies. We always reached consensus. I believe we never went to a movie together, but we worked as close allies since that day, a starting point on this long journey of political activism for sexual and reproductive rights in which Adrienne made a difference.

With Joan Dunlop, Adrienne, and a group of key reproductive health advocates from around the world CEPIA, the feminist organization that I founded after I left government and the IWHC organized in January 1994, in Rio, a major international event Reproductive Health and Justice that brought together more than 200 women from 90 different countries in what was considered the feminist prep com for Cairo.

Adrienne and I worked endless hours on all aspects of this event. In spite of the challenges of logistics and ideological tensions, it was beautiful and powerful. It showed the strength of something new, women's international coalitions. It played a major role in the UN prepcoms and the Cairo Conference itself, where feminists were included in the official delegations of many governments, and were also active lobbying delegates on the corridors.

Both Adrienne and I were in the official delegations of the US and Brazil. As such we were included in the working group called by the chair of the Conference to help draft the language on abortion for the Platform of Action. After 12 hours of debates we were able to come up with paragraph 8.25.

I have vivid memories of Adrienne in that hostile group, with Pakistan, Iran, and some Latin American delegates who were from opus day. Her elegance and her smile while proposing exactly the opposite of those delegates is unforgettable.

The work on international coalitions, strategizing across borders and cultures was her battle field and her oasis. Feminists were her extended family. Adrienne opened up so many paths, respecting and recognizing local strengths and building joint initiatives such as the IWHC work in Brazil, which I helped to map and plan with her. Her work with the Coalition has provided incentives and support to organizations on the ground that have persisted in spite of challenging political environments. Today Fòs Feminista's mission and strategies on coalition building does very well celebrating and emulating her intellectual honesty and freedom, her strategic perspective and her courage.