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Why We Resist:
The Quiet, Powerful Work of Saving Families in Southwest Florida

By Margie Vincent

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Our wonderful Vice Chair of the Democratic Party of Lee County, Karyn Edison, has asked me to share some thoughts with you about our resistance activities. Of course, how can I say no, I am too busy to Karyn Edison? She and Keith are at so many events and meetings that I would swear they have been cloned! Her patience, kindness, compassion and decency humble me. Thanks, Karyn and Keith, for all you do for us. So here goes…

When Trump was elected, we cried. Okay, some of us might have been told by our husbands we had to stop sobbing, but I digress. When he started acting like a cruel king, we had to find a way to show our resistance. We worked together and held rallies. Some people came, and we were thrilled! More people came each month. We were more thrilled! People started telling us these rallies saved them from the despair and sense of loneliness they felt in Lee County. They needed to see that they were not alone. They are not the only ones screaming at their TVs, as yet another cruel act is committed by this administration. We decided we needed to harness this power and frustration into more concrete action.

That is how the Food Drive was added to each of the rally days. Food Pantry budgets had been slashed, while need and demand had increased sharply. Many families are afraid to come to the pantries, for fear of being abducted by ICE. Now our rallygoers can just drive up and drop donations at John (Cheesehead) Simon's trailer **behind Longhorn Restaurant** as they come to each rally. We handle the distribution. They can also pick up free signs and flags we provide at each rally (and T-shirts). We have been able to help Gladiolus Pantry, Pine Manor Association, Eva's Closet, Community Cooperative, Villas Elementary, Bootstraps Ministry, Mercy Works, Save Our Democracy, and others I am sure I am forgetting here.

When the Federal Government shut down, and SNAP was not paid, we decided maybe we needed to help more. Weekly food drives are now being held at the same location every **Saturday from 8:30 to noon**. At Thanksgiving, we received so much food (including turkeys), personal care items, baby products, etc. that we helped 3 organizations feed and provide essentials to local families. It was a real high for us!

What we learned from working with Villas Elementary is that children are not being sent to school. Classrooms are half full at best. Parents live in fear of being abducted daily, torn from their children. Education is stalled. This will have lasting impacts on the lives of these children. The emotional trauma to these families will never heal.

This week, my friend Melissa contacted me about two teenagers in Immokalee whose mother, their only parent, was forcibly taken in the Pacific Tomato bus raid in November, along with dozens of other women. Three minor children were thrown to the ground in this bus raid and taken to the hospital for their injuries, per a report by WGCU (Eileen Kelley, Nov 12). Now these kids have to take on all adult responsibilities to house, clothe and feed themselves, all while trying to finish high school.

This sucker punch to the emotional gut has spurred us to do more. We are seeing that the schools can be a way for us to reach those in need. Immokalee High has a food pantry. They send kids home with backpacks stuffed with things their families need, when they have food on their shelves. There are no grocery stores anymore in Immokalee. Let that sink in. People are staying inside their homes, not working, not sending kids to school, and there is not even a local grocery store.

I just learned from Immokalee High that there are two families living together in a single-wide trailer right now. Both of the mothers in these families were taken in the same Pacific Tomato bus raid. Ten people in a single-wide trailer. Ten people whose lives are forever scarred, fear for their safety and well-being daily. We have to do more. What about all the other families whose mothers were taken in that raid, dozens of families we do not yet know about?

You all have rallied and contributed to the two teens Melissa told us about. What a wonderful outpouring of support for them. Thank you so, so much. You keep inspiring me, and all of us who work together on the rallies, and our grassroots activism to help these real, living, breathing, human beings. So much is being said and done by the Trump administration to try to dehumanize people, to give people a group to hate and blame. We cannot let that continue. Our next collections will be focused on the families in Immokalee. I will let you know of any specific needs I hear about. Please let us know if you hear of a particular need.

We are now calling ourselves the **Southwest Florida Coalition for Democracy**. Some are members of organizations, such as NOW, Women's March, Purple Group, Lee County Democrats, Floridians for Democracy, and more. Most of us are individuals just wanting to do SOMETHING! Anyone can be part of this coalition; YOU are part of it if you are rallying or donating, or resisting! Every little thing we do adds up. We cannot do this without you.

Please consider getting even more involved. We could use people contacting other schools to find out if they have pantries, or helping us at rallies, or taking things to Immokalee, or covering the T-shirt table or gathering their friends and family to resist. I am just as scared when I start something new. My feelings of nervousness or inadequacy are less important than helping my fellow human beings in need. That is my mantra. I tell myself to suck it up and try. We are living through the worst times most of us have ever seen. Let's be the ones to say we resisted, we helped. We have to keep evolving and adapting as new, inhumane practices are thrust upon our country.

Call me or anyone in any of the organizations in our coalition and we will be glad to find something you feel comfortable doing, or maybe just start by sending me your email to be added to our rally and food drive notification list (baby steps).

A million thanks,
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