

## **Diaries of the Campaign-1996**

As required, I decided to join the Clinton and Kerry's Campaign. *These are some of my impressions of this period.*

**On Friday, October 25, I went to the Clinton's Campaign Office, at #133 Portland Street in Boston. A very kind women, Allison Mitchell ( Volunteer Coordinator ), oriented and gave me all the instructions. The first thing to do was to attend the introductory meeting for volunteers which was held that very night.**

### **The first day. The introductory meeting:**

Most people think that Campaign offices in America are well organized. But that is not true . When I got in that office I noticed that there was not much difference between this work place and electoral offices in my country, Venezuela. Papers everywhere, many people at the phones, litter and disorder are the same characteristics of any Campaign Office in my country. Allison chaired the meeting. "You can do whatever you want . Just tell us when you are able to come to help and we will find you something to do. The important thing here is that you must work.....Volunteers are so: people who want to cooperate and they get , in return, the tremendous satisfaction of having done it". We were ten new volunteers attending that meeting. I began wondering if joining someone's campaign in this country was really that easy. It seemed to them that there was nothing special that some people wanted to participate in the campaign. *Perhaps,...just another volunteer !.*

I felt something strange. In my country most campaigns are completely headed by employees rather than volunteers. Volunteers are exceptional, employees represent the rule. Therefore, when someone finds a volunteer it becomes a great surprise and a gigantic satisfaction that we usually celebrate. That is, perhaps, the cost of having lost the illusion and the sense of commitment. In USA they do not have much of them , but they still have some. Another important thing: most participants in the meeting, including some of us, were not native Americans. At the end of the meeting, some of them told me they care a lot about the future of this country and so, volunteering their time became almost a moral obligation.

### **The second day: Canvassing on Sunday 27**

Allison asked me to call some people to list them on a volunteer work on the election day. Two pages with phone numbers represented my assignment. I wrote down a message : " Hi, this is Vladimir, I am calling you from the Democratic National Committee and we were wondering if you want to volunteer your time on the election day. As you know, on that day we have many activities: driving people to the polls, working at the polls and calling people . Would

you like to volunteer your time on that day?". I started by calling the first woman of my list and I got a positive answer . I wrote down her name and informed her that someone would call later. I filled out a form. At the end of my three-hour work, I found my self with eleven filled forms and the record of no angry answers. In fact, even the people who refused to join us on the election day due to the fact of illness or work, gave me the best wishes for a successfully outcome,...." in the name of god and in the name of freedom...". It was amazing. After a while, I took a break. Walking around I found a vending machine in front of the rest rooms' doors . In my country people working at the campaigns are well attended, specially if they are volunteers. Usually, the candidate himself/herself, no matter the level of the process, thanks the people who are working for him/her, and order to provide them food and sodas. In this case, nobody talked to me but about my work. I realized that a vending machine in a campaign office is something that you could not find inVenezuela. Perhaps in few more years but not now.

### **The third day: enveloping on Wednesday 30.**

Five days before the elections there was an impressive increase in the activity of the Office. Many people, many volunteers and many women who were working on the organization of the polls. I talked to Allison and she asked me : "Is that true that you are President Of a Congressional Standing Committee in Colombia ?". I responded:.." Yes, it is true but not in Colombia. I am from Venezuela ". .." Ah!. Great. Someone told me that..... How many hours do you plan to stay in office today? " I answered that about three. "OK. Let's help us envelop some Kerry's letters " .

And for first time in my life, I did envelop about one thousand letters. I matched the corresponding letter with the envelope and glued it. Many contradictory thoughts assaulted me:..... Why she asked me that?.....Why she asked me to do this work right after that question?.... Maybe the message was clear.... We do not care about who you are. You are just a volunteer and that's it.....The strange thing is that I did not feel bad about that. I enjoyed reflecting on it a lot. At the end of the enveloping process, Allison gave me 25 posters and asked me to put them in the houses of my closest friends. I agreed on that. And I did it that very night. On my way out she reminded me : "On the election day you are supposed to stand for a while in front of the precinct number 141, in Cambridge. Call me before going, I will give you some instructions".

### **The fourth day: getting shocked at the polls on Tuesday 5.**

I called Allison at ten o'clock in the morning, in order to inform her that I would be free after 2:30pm. "OK, go get some posters and join our stand group in front of Rindge and Latin School in Cambridge". Rindge and Latin? I asked myself.....My daughter goes to that high school. She

always thinks her daddy is such an important man in her country and I did not know how she would react to my new appearance as an American volunteer, carrying a poster in front of her school. I walked to the school. I joined the group and I stayed with them about two hours. After that time, some back up came and I went to see the real activity of the polls.

I talked with the facilitators of the precinct. A very kind woman was pleased to ask all my questions. I got surprised: there was no special vigilance, I saw no soldier. Just one cop who had the computer key. Also the school was at full activity. It was just a normal day. Just like any other day. I got one specimen of the ballot. Below the candidate's name was his/her current address !!! And when people were coming to vote they were not supposed to show any ID Card. They identified themselves by saying their current address. On my way out of the precinct I noticed that the computer was plugged into a wall jack that was about twenty feet away from the room in which it was located. The orange wire was along the aisle and there were no people paying attention to the source of power of the electoral counter.

When I was returning to the Kennedy School, I was laughing. I was just realizing many differences and analyzing the new information about American politics:

1)In my country the elections are scheduled on Sunday and voting centers are under a rigid military control. The following Monday is day free. Therefore, is not a normal day but a very special one ;2)The scrutiny system is still manual in Venezuela;3)No candidate would ever agree on printing the address below his/her name. Also we use a picture of the candidate and the identification of the current partisanship;4)Plastified ID CARD is a legal requirement. Otherwise many people would try to vote twice.5)During the electoral day, electricity power and lights' centers are under the control of the armed forces in order to prevent any sabotage attempt.

Having finished my volunteer campaign service I felt satisfied for the new information I could get and the intense reflections this experience allowed me to make.