

AMAZING WOMEN: MARTHA 'PATI' RUIZ CORZO

Hosted by *Quien*

Speakers:

Martha 'Pati' Ruiz Corzo,
Environmental Activist,
Founder Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda IAP

Laura Manzo Aguilar,
Editor in Chief, *Quien*

Sierra Gorda is a protected heaven in the state of Queretaro in Mexico, a biosphere where nature leads. All thanks to the efforts of Martha Isabel Ruiz Corzo, AKA Pati, who has dedicated a third of that Mexican state – the equivalent of the State of Rhode Island in the United States – to nature and conservation.

Laura Manzo Aguilar: If you had one message to share, what would that be?

Martha Isabel Ruiz Corzo (Pati): The Sierra Gorda is the most protected area in the central Mexico. It is a wildlife area and a capital that is basic for life to continue to exist on the planet. We should put our heart in Mother Earth. All this modern life has disconnected us from nature as a whole, and we have already forgotten about our origins; we have already forgotten that when we move on to a different dimension, we become earth. Our bodies become earth, soil for growing plants.

LMA: How did you decide to move to the Sierra Gorda, stay there and find a new way of living 30 years ago?

MIRC: Life challenged me with health. One of my children had asthma, and I was always racing to the hospital. One day, a doctor told me, 'You should keep her from playing or practicing karate and swimming,' and that day I decided to live in the mountains and fully rely on Mother Nature. I was saying, 'My child, you are not anymore on the hands of your hypochondriac mother; I'm going to un-toxicate you.' And, Laura never got sick again.

I stopped searching for answers and counting cents in order to have access to all the abundance of nature. I found in the Sierra Gorda the means for me to live out my passions. I have always wanted to help and to give since I was a kid, but I was looking for my path, for my own way. That's how I approached the Sierra Gorda.

LMA: What is the current situation in the biosphere?

MIRC: After I was first appointed by Mexico's president [Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León] as the director of the reservation, I was told, 'OK, you want to protect your land so you have to tell the governor that he cannot build his dam, tell him that he cannot increase or lengthen the highway....' I had to meet with each official and tell him that he has to ask for permission. I was defending all this territory. I fought with everyone and I won.

LMA: So we should all learn how to fight like that?

MIRC: I had some campaigns in which I was almost down. The police came and took my kids. I was on the front page of the newspapers as if I had extorted and misled people. That was very harsh for me, and this was the work of a governor against me. I am no longer a federal authority over there; however, the current governor said, 'OK, no, we're not going to do anything that Pati Ruiz Corzo has not authorized.' Two weeks ago, there were 80 police officers in my training center: Federal Police, State Police, Municipal Police... They came to be trained so that they can be in charge of [fighting against] all the illegal activities in the reservation.

LMA: Do you think this has meant progress for the situation of women in the Sierra Gorda?

MIRC: Well, there are four women in the municipalities in Jalpan, Becerra, in Matamoros, and Pinal de Amoles. There was something very favorable for us: gender quotas in five municipalities of the Sierra Gorda. I met with the five women, and when they were elected, I told them: “Hey, friends, it’s great that now women are in charge of all this territory, because we know what products to use for cleaning, how to sweep and we know how to do all the household chores. The Sierra Gorda was like an apartment for single people. Nobody took the trash out, did the dishes, flushed the toilet or turned on the washing machine. That’s how they left the Sierra Gorda to me. It is now very different with these five women leaders. They once were five girls who were raised with [awareness of] ecology. I have been educating them in the community in Sierra Gorda for 30 years. I asked them, ‘So who knows all the ecology songs?’ And all of them knew them.

