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SAVING FRIENDSHIP PARK:  
A History of the San Diego Coalition  
Friends of Friendship Park

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## **TITLE: SAVING FRIENDSHIP PARK: A HISTORY OF THE SAN DIEGO COALITION FRIENDS OF FRIENDSHIP PARK**

**ABSTRACT:** This article examines the history of legal and political advocacy to save public access to Friendship Park, a half an acre plaza at the U.S.-Mexico border overlooking the Pacific Ocean at the southwest corner of the continental United States, in San Diego-Tijuana. The plaza sits atop Monument Mesa, a six-acre state park property and part of a larger 800-acre Border Field State Park. In April 2009, the Department of Homeland Security completed a border wall, blocking and restricting public access to the park. A coalition of organizations working to save the park grew out of weekly ecumenical gatherings where they shared communion through the border fence. These gatherings served two important functions in organizing a broader movement in the summer of 2008. First, they provided compelling narratives, messages and symbols for a coherent campaign to mobilize the local and national media, the San Diego public, and San Diego political leaders, and secondly, they provided the occasion for a wide variety of organizations with diverse values and ideological leanings to begin working together on a broader strategy. This allowed Friends of Friendship Park to build a broad coalition, but also revealed the limits of coalition-building. To the extent that the border wall has been opposed in San Diego, this opposition has coalesced around two different priorities that do not always successfully overlap, and at times conflict: 1) protection of the Tijuana River Estuary and local habitat and 2) protecting the dignity, human & civil rights of park visitors. Ironically, the very reasons that give Friendship Park the “crossover appeal” that facilitates strong coalition-building also put limits on the strength and mobilization capacity of coalition members.

### **INTRODUCTION: A PARK, OR A PRISON?**

Dan Watman is not the kind of guy you would peg as a narco-trafficker. An unassuming man, his dark brown dreadlocks pulled up in a ponytail, sporting a t-shirt and khaki pants, Watman doesn't even own a car, but rides a 1980s ten-speed bike that he uses for his daily treks to the San Diego-Tijuana border where he tends and waters the Friendship Park Binational Garden of native plants, plans monthly binational social events with groups of poets, writers and environmentalists in Tijuana, and occasionally volunteers as a lifeguard in nearby Playas de Tijuana.

And so, sitting cross-legged on the ground with his hands clasped over his head, Dan Watman was dumbfounded to find himself detained by the border patrol. On a bright sunny Thursday, September 18, 2008, Watman, director of a binational group called “Border *encuentro*,” was conducting a press conference at Friendship Park, the spot where the U.S.-Mexico border begins at the Pacific Ocean in San Diego-Tijuana. Watman was chatting with reporters and environmentalists from Baja California through the international boundary fence. The group was making final preparations for a two-day binational event co-sponsored by I Love a Clean San Diego and San Diego Coastkeeper, scheduled to begin just two days later. Border *encuentro* had been sponsoring monthly events at the park for over two years, and had in the previous year begun work with this small group of Mexican environmental activists on a binational friendship garden of native plants, located just a hundred feet east of the boundary monument on both sides of the fence.

Now, squinting up into the harsh San Diego afternoon sun, he looked up to see a green-clad border patrol agent with a generous paunch towering over him. Another agent sporting a black bullet-proof vest sat astride an ATV, peered at him through the tinted-black of his face mask, and ordered him to keep silent. In the distance, Watman could see the familiar green and white of two border patrol jeeps emerge from the thick yellow dust of Border Field State Park.

Down below on the beach, children squealed with joy as they splashed in sparkling waves near the international boundary fence, poking each other and peaking through huge gaps in the steel pipes jutting haphazardly out of the water like the tines of a kalimba.

A few feet away on the south side of the border fence, eleven of Watman's colleagues including Margarita Diaz and Ricardo Arana of the Mexican environmental organization *Proyecto Fronterizo*, stood looking on in astonishment. Had the border patrol been more attentive to the group's cheerful blue t-shirts and enormous 10-foot banner reading “*Salvemos la Playa*” (“Let's Save the Beach You are invited to the International Coastal Cleanup,”) they might have determined that Watman was no threat to national security. Watman had regularly collaborated with border patrol and California State on these monthly events at the park, and had never experienced problems before.

His crime that day? One of the five Mexican journalists who joined Watman at the border fence for the press conference passed Dan his business card through the fence. According to the U.S. Customs and Border Protection, the passage of unregulated goods through the border fence constitutes a customs violation. When Dan Watman reached out and took the journalist's business card, suddenly a park was transformed into a site of illegal entry, an act of civic engagement and regional cooperation reframed as a criminal enterprise.

Encounters like this weren't always so tense.

Friendship Park's location right on the borderline has given rise to many a happy occasion. For decades, the fence at the park served as a boundary marker discouraging unauthorized crossing, but it did not inhibit relaxed gatherings of family members who could join together on both sides of the fence to share a Sunday meal, celebrate a *quinceañera*, or to say goodbye. Dedicated in 1971 by then First Lady Pat Nixon as a state park and symbol of binational friendship (Thomas 1971), Friendship Park has lived up to its promise, fostering the growth of partnerships<sup>1</sup> between Mexican and U.S. groups to work on problems that can only be understood regionally: pollution in our oceans and public lands, human trafficking, human rights violations. International art festivals, yoga classes, salsa dancing, and kite-flying festivals have brought people from Mexico and San Diego together to this place to share insights or simply to have fun.

According to photographer and border artist Maria Teresa Fernandez, it was common practice before 2008 for the border patrol to allow Mexican families to gather near the fence and pass tamales back and forth, to buy *paletas* and candies from vendors in Playas de Tijuana, and even to cross at the bars and gather together down at the beach.

As she shows me photos of a family reunion she documented in 2007, Fernandez recalls missing her chance for a few key shots while she was helping a mother, Mercedes Garcia, wade through the waves to cross over. Garcia's son Carlos Santos had just gotten permission from a border patrol agent to allow his mother to cross for a few minutes to meet him. They hadn't seen each other in five years. As Carlos and his wife Marta stumbled through the sand to embrace their mother, grandsons Carlos and Jonathan bounced up and down with excitement.

A native of San Luis Potosí, Mexico, and based in San Diego since 1991, Maria Teresa Fernandez has been photographing these intimate moments at the border wall for eleven years and has played a key role in documenting the struggle to save Friendship Park. In that time, she has watched the trends in border enforcement come and go. "Before, families used to come every week and sit all day at the fence. But then, very suddenly, it all changed."

In 2008, after the Department of Homeland Security began construction on the border wall, enforcement at the park became increasingly random and arbitrary. Today, Friendship Park has been blocked off by a massive border wall. A "fenced corridor" consisting of a 18-foot high wall of metal bars, a 20-foot road for border patrol access, and a third smaller fence marking the beginning of state property, now runs across the top of Monument Mesa, through the park and down to the beach, severely constraining public access to the plaza around Friendship Park.

New rules for public access to the gathering place leave families feeling like they have entered a maximum security prison on visiting day: visitors must wait outside the border wall 150 feet away from Friendship Park, seek permission to enter a locked gate, then be escorted by a border patrol agent into a "security zone," a five-foot tall pedestrian barrier that confines the space of the concrete circle of Friendship Park. The barrier keeps park visitors at least four or five feet away from the fence. No longer can lovers entwine their fingers nor grandmothers kiss their grandchildren through the fence—no touching is permitted.

Watman remembers one particularly heartbreaking scene when a time limit of thirty minutes was enforced for no apparent reason: "There was a family there waiting to go into the enclosed area who had come from Los Angeles to meet with other family members they hadn't seen in seven years, waiting about 150 feet away, separated by immigration status and two fifteen foot high walls. The family members on the Mexican side had traveled four days on a bus from Veracruz. Two of the four were grandparents who would see their three- and four-year-old grandchildren for the first time. I remember, clearly, the young father's "Woo-hoo" as he took his daughter's hand, and raised his other hand with a victory fist when they were finally permitted to walk through the metal door. After thirty minutes, two agents watching over from the outside entered and asked all of us on the US side to leave."

There's a lot at stake in these simple daily interactions at Friendship Park, not the least of which is the threat to the human dignity of innocent park visitors.

These interactions point to deeper shifts in the social logic which groups like Friends of Friendship Park are working to challenge. As American Friends Service Committee human rights advocate and leader of Friends of Friendship Park Pedro Rios has argued, while we continue to learn more about secret detentions of immigrants and condemn the human rights abuses of migrants, "elements of detention and its horrors get reproduced in how public space is defined. Friendship Park is a clear example of that" (Rios 2010). The logic of enforcement, Rios points out, a forced security through surveillance and detention, has turned even public spaces into emblems of a "containment society."

Describing the new public access, Christian Ramirez remarked: "It's going to be a park inside of a prison." A San Diego immigrants rights advocate and leader of the American Friends Service Committee's Project Voice, Ramirez has fond memories of the park from his childhood. As we hiked down the long path to the ocean side park one day, he recalled hanging out with his friends on lazy Saturday afternoons, when Friendship Park felt like their own special place. When Ramirez was ten years old, he began the naturalization process, and suddenly felt the burdensome reality of the border. Travel restrictions meant separation from family and friends: he could no longer play with his cousins in Tijuana, but Friendship Park was a place they could come to play and feel normal again.

Today the wall and an oppressive set of border enforcement practices have completely reshaped the space through a militaristic logic of detention and containment.

The irony of the U.S. building walls is not lost on Mexicans. Laura Silvan, director of a small community foundation in Tecate, Mexico, remarked during one event, "I find it curious to be standing here in solidarity with you as the wall is being built." When asked why, she explained: "For as long as I can remember, we in Mexico have envied you in the United States because of your government's commitment to principles like democratic transparency and environmental stewardship. Now, when finally we are making some progress on these matters in Mexico, your government seems to be headed in the opposite direction" (Fanestil 2009).

## **THE LEGAL BATTLE TO STOP THE WALL**

By the mid-1990s, the border between San Diego and Tijuana became ground zero in national debates about immigration control (Nevins 2002). Friendship Park marked the point where a new federally-funded border wall would begin. In 1996, in response to the passage of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act by Congress, the planning began for a 14-mile border infrastructure system project in San Diego County (U.S. Congress 1996). The IIRIRA authorized the U.S. Attorney General to plan construction of a 14-mile "triple fence" in San Diego County, consisting of two new fences to augment the existing primary fence put in place by Operation Gatekeeper in 1994. On July 25, 2002 California Representative Duncan Hunter added a rider to the Homeland Security bill that would make construction of the new triple border fence between San Diego and Mexico a priority of the new Department of Homeland Security (U.S. Congress 2002).

But this federal plan did not go unnoticed by local and state leaders. Friendship Park is located at the southwestern tip of the Tijuana River Estuary, an astonishingly beautiful wetland reserve hosting 370 species of birds, many of them endangered, and a wide variety of habitats unique to the southern coastal region of the Californias. Local Imperial Beach environmental leaders like Councilwoman Patricia McCoy and her husband Mike McCoy, had successfully blocked attempts at commercial development after the citizens of Imperial Beach passed a proposition in 1980 to turn the area into a marina and housing development. The McCoy's joined with other environmentalists, the U.S. Navy, and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to create a wildlife reserve and protect one of the last remaining wetlands in North America.<sup>2</sup> Thus, in July 2003, when the Federal Government released its Final Environmental Impact Statement in preparation to begin building border infrastructure through Friendship Park, it was received with widespread criticism from local, regional, state and even federal agencies and organizations.<sup>3</sup> The City of San Diego, in partnership with various regional and state agencies, had already invested over half a billion dollars in land acquisition and improvement projects in the Tijuana River Valley, beginning in 1985.<sup>4</sup> The federal EIS did not take into account any of the specific qualities or features of the area, and locals were worried.

The report prompted the first of two major public-interest lawsuits on behalf of a host of local and state organizations and spearheaded by the San Diego law firm of Cory Briggs.<sup>5</sup> In successive arguments in 2004 and 2007, Briggs challenged the adequacy of “generic” environmental impact statements, and later the constitutionality of federal waivers of environmental laws. The EIS issued in 2001 and 2003, by considering the entire U.S.-Mexico border as a whole, failed to account for the specific environmental impacts on the natural, cultural, and historic resources in proposed San Diego County sectors, in particular the sensitive areas bordering the Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve. Thus, the plaintiffs argued, the project failed to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA).

In December of 2005, the first case was dismissed by U.S. District Judge Larry Burns, citing the recent passage of The Real ID Act of 2005, Section 102 (U.S. Congress 2005). The Real ID Act linked the lingering national concerns with immigration control to new worries about terrorism and border security, and it would prove to be the decisive piece of legislation enabling the rapid and unimpeded construction of border walls along the entire U.S.-Mexico border. Section 102 of the Real ID Act authorized the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security to waive all legal requirements the secretary deems necessary to expeditiously complete construction of barriers and roads that are part of border infrastructure systems. The judge ruled that the DHS Secretary was acting within his rights to waive the applicability of NEPA and many other laws because of the congressionally-delegated authority granted by the Real ID Act. Briggs countered with a new suit, filed in February of 2007, arguing that the federal government’s waiver of its own federal laws is unconstitutional and a brief, filed May 7, 2007, arguing that the original provision requiring the construction of the San Diego triple fence was amended by the Secure Fence Act of 2006, which eliminated references to San Diego and added language requiring the construction of five other barriers. After this case was dismissed in 2008, the Sierra Club made one final attempt to challenge the right of the Department of Homeland Security to waive federal laws, seeking a ruling for the unconstitutionality of the waiver authority granted in the Real ID Act, and filing a petition on March 17, 2008 asking that the U.S. Supreme Court hear its argument.

On June 24, 2008 the Supreme Court announced that it would decline to hear the case, clearing the way for the construction of the triple fence in San Diego along with other locations in the southwest U.S. (Berestein 2008).

## **THE PEOPLE RECLAIM FRIENDSHIP PARK**

Looking back on the long struggle to save Friendship Park, John Fanestil’s eyes light up with a passion for justice. Fanestil, the Executive Director of the San Diego Foundation for Change, a non-profit foundation dedicated to immigrant and border communities in San Diego-Tijuana, knows the border well. Ordained in the Methodist faith, Fanestil served for several years as the pastor of a church in the Imperial County border town of Calexico. What Fanestil witnessed at Friendship Park spurred him to organize a network of activists to bring the issue of Friendship Park to national attention. On June 1, 2008 Fanestil joined with Jamie Gates of Point Loma Nazarene University, Dan Watman, who had begun giving border tours to local activists, Pedro Rios and Christian Ramirez of AFSC, Rosemary Johnston of the Interfaith Shelter Network, and Enrique Morones of Border Angels, to rally a broad-based binational group for a vigil on both sides of the fence at Friendship Park. The vigil, “From Friendship to Hope—Gathering for the Future of the U.S.-Mexico Border,” brought together members of twenty-seven separate groups including many of the organizations who had advanced the environmental lawsuits. From faith-based organizations, to environmental groups, to immigrant and human rights advocates, the breadth and depth of participants spoke to a widely shared disdain for the plan to build a border wall through the park.<sup>6</sup> Dozens of people gathered on both sides of the fence, sharing stories, singing songs, and vowed to work together to oppose the border wall, deemed “An offense to the peoples of San Diego and Tijuana.” Organizers Fanestil and Gates had planned a “Lovefeast” to conclude the vigil: a simple exchange of food and drink to symbolize cross-border unity and friendship, marking a commitment to future solidarity (Gates 2010).

With a bright red plastic cup of tamarindo juice and fresh sweetbreads in hand, Jamie Gates remembers how his spirits sank when he was told by the Border Patrol that passing bread and juice through the border fence would be a customs violation. In what he called an “act of lament,” the boisterous crowd turned silent, eating and drinking while their friends in Mexico stood watching and went without. “For the first time ever in our years of gathering at this location,” Fanestil recalls, “we were told that we were not to pass anything through the fence.”

Looking back, Fanestil recalls how his increasing frustration with these arbitrary policy changes led the group to embrace a strategy of civil disobedience. Two months after the first Friendship Park vigil, on August 3, the group

gathered again, and Fanestil could no longer tolerate what seemed to him a “farcical prohibition.” Driven by his feelings of solidarity with the families who, divided by a national border, still maintained family traditions by sharing a simple Sunday meal each week at the park, Fanestil made a weekly pilgrimage to the park, donning a white dress shirt, his hand-embroidered liturgical stole draped over his shoulders, to celebrate communion with park visitors. Fanestil prepared the gifts of tortillas and grape juice symbolizing bread and wine on a little altar near the fence, and shared the eucharist with visitors in Mexico through the metal lattice fence. “What have we come to as a nation,” he asked the crowd assembled, “when the simplest and most common act of human solidarity and fellowship is named an illegal act?”

Fanestil recalls, “I remember sitting there talking with Pedro (Rios) and Enrique (Morones), on August 3, and Pedro remarked, ‘You know, if you just kept doing that, eventually they would have to stop you.’” Fanestil remembers how this and many follow up conversations with coalition members developed into a strategy: “Initially, for the August 3<sup>rd</sup> event, I was thinking of it as a one-time act of resistance, but then after talking with friends and discussing this with others in Friends of Friendship Park, I thought about this differently. By continuing to serve communion, we would eventually force a showdown with Border Patrol. Eventually they would have to enforce the ban that they had created.”

What began as a simple act of fellowship gradually developed into a strategic coalition aimed at challenging the militarization of the border, and “Friends of Friendship Park” was born. The coalition brought together leaders from a wide spectrum of San Diego activism: border-focused groups like Border Angels, Foundation for Change, and Border *encuentro*, and immigrants rights groups like American Friends Service Committee’s Project Voice and the Interfaith Shelter for Immigrants Rights, joined forces with the Save Our Heritage Organization, with environmentalist groups like the Tijuana River Estuary, Wildcoast, Southwest Wetlands Interpretive Association, Sierra Club, and Audubon Society, and peace groups like the Peace Resource Center and the Sweetwater Zen Center.<sup>7</sup>

Christian Ramirez, a key leader in the coalition, reflects on the way weekly communion services at Friendship Park have worked to mobilize people across ideological divides: “For me it has been a true learning experience. Friendship Park has been a symbol for a long time, but it is also a place where you can bring people to, and they can experience the contradictions for themselves. It is just a symbol until you start reflecting on other people’s experiences. At the end of the day, there are folks that live here and people who approach this from completely different points of view. I think Friends of Friendship Park has allowed for multiple social actors to take advantage of this place. If we really work together, we can make this happen.”

In July 2008, several members of the group joined the national coalition No Border Wall, an organization started in Texas to give voice to widespread grassroots community organizing in opposition to the border wall and take it to the legislative level. No Border Wall facilitates national coordination of local efforts all along the border from Brownsville through New Mexico, Arizona and California, and has been managed through weekly conference calls and lobbying gatherings in Washington D.C. Some key strategic directions were mapped out at a meeting held in El Paso in early December 2008 which brought together grassroots organizers, professional environmental and human rights advocates, policy analysts based in Washington D.C. and elsewhere, as well as artists, writers, photographers and filmmakers. National coordination has proved fruitful: in April 2009, the members of Friends of Friendship Park joined with other No Border Wall members for a week of lobbying in Washington D.C. and two San Diego sites, Friendship Park and Otay Mountain Wilderness, were included.<sup>8</sup> Our work together continues.

## **BUILDING A MOVEMENT**

When, in July 2008, the border patrol began to restrict free use of the park, Friends of Friendship Park resolved to engage in civil disobedience. They would continue to meet, share communion through the fence with their brothers and sisters in Mexico, and when the border patrol intervened to stop them, this would provide the perfect illustration of the absurdity of the new policy.

Week after week, throughout the summer and fall of 2008, and into the spring of 2009, Friends of Friendship Park gathered to celebrate communion on Sundays at 3:00 PM at the boundary monument at Friendship Park. The park began to assume a position of importance as national and international journalists joined us, sending out reports to the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Colorado Public Radio*, and *Canadian*

*Broadcasting Company*. Spontaneously, photographers, filmmakers, vacationers and student groups from Europe, Canada, and colleges in the United States would show up for the gatherings, lending credibility to our efforts and carrying our story out beyond the confines of San Diego County. In January of 2009, San Diego Border Patrol Sector Chief Mike Fisher<sup>9</sup> decided that all public access to Friendship Park would be closed, and the announcement garnered considerable attention from the local San Diego media. In spite of regular warnings by the border patrol, we continued to pass the communion bread through the fence.

Tensions with border patrol came to a head at a gathering that turned chaotic on February 21, 2009. Friends of Friendship Park had planned a more elaborate communion service for that day, including a 20-minute performance of Faure's *Requiem Mass* sung by choirs and soloists on both sides of the border fence.<sup>10</sup> A diverse group of 150 participants<sup>11</sup> gathered on the beach near the border fence, and were met by a force of fourteen agents, some driving ATVs and wearing bullet-proof vests, others carrying pepper spray guns and rubber bullet guns, others dressed in full riot gear. Agents approached organizers and shouted in their faces, warning them not to approach the border fence. A group of six Minutemen had gathered amongst the group, and throughout the moving performance of the *Requiem*, used a bullhorn directed into the faces of the singers to shout anti-immigrant slogans and blow a shrill whistle. When neither police officers nor border patrol stepped in to separate the Minutemen from the crowd, ten volunteers came forward to create a human wall to protect the singers from Minutemen who were now pushing forward, and had knocked over the music stand of the conductor. Children clung to their parents in fear; no one knew what would happen next. After the mass was sung, the gatherers circled around for communion. This time, Border Patrol raised their weapons and blocked John Fanestil from approaching the border wall to serve. Fanestil informed the border patrol that he intended to serve communion, and if it was deemed illegal, they would have to arrest him. After a tense standoff, John Fanestil and Dan Watman were detained, led off in handcuffs to Border Patrol vehicles waiting at the top of the mesa.

A story appeared on the front page of the *San Diego Union-Tribune* the next day, the cover photo casting the event as a confrontation between armed Border Patrol and a line of demonstrators. While some members of the coalition viewed this as a milestone for the visibility of the issue, others worried that the message of friendship might easily be obscured by the images of violence.

These weekly gatherings served two important functions in organizing a broader movement in the summer of 2008. First, they provided compelling narratives, messages and symbols for a coherent campaign to mobilize the local and national media, the San Diego public, and San Diego political leaders, and secondly, they provided the occasion for a wide variety of organizations with diverse values and ideological leanings to begin working together on a broader strategy. This allowed Friends of Friendship Park to build a broad coalition, but also revealed the limits of coalition-building. To the extent that the border wall has been opposed in San Diego, this opposition has coalesced around two different priorities that do not always successfully overlap, and at times conflict: 1) protection of the Tijuana River Estuary and local habitat and 2) protecting the dignity, human & civil rights of park visitors. In addition, differences in the style, method and tone of various participants stood out sharply at the February 21<sup>st</sup> event (Gates 2010). Ironically, the very reasons that give Friendship Park the "crossover appeal" that facilitates strong coalition-building also put limits on the strength and mobilization capacity of coalition members.

Social movement theorists have argued that even though successful movements surely do carry and promote influential values and ideals, they do not simply provide ready-made symbols and beliefs that participants take up passively. Rather, successful movements provide the occasion for participants, antagonists and observers alike to become actively engaged in the production of meaning through their own framing and reframing of events. Furthermore, when participants feel a sense of "experiential commensurability," or in other words, when narratives and messages ring true to personal experience, they are more likely to move from agreement into action (Snow and Benford 1988, 209). It is in part the opportunity for active participation in making meaning out of an event that enables people from differing ideological, cultural and political backgrounds to come together in common cause.

The weekly communion services at Friendship Park provided an invaluable location and occasion for precisely this kind of flexible meaning-making among participants from a broad spectrum of groups, some coming out of the Quaker tradition of non-violence, others inspired by the Zapatista movement.<sup>12</sup> Members of mainstream environmental groups Sierra Club and Audubon Society stood in solidarity with anti-war protestors, San Diego City College students from Raza Rights and Sí Se Puede, and students from Point Loma Nazarene University. Recollections of park visitors collected in a survey<sup>13</sup> demonstrate how participants in these events actively reflect

upon and reframe the experiences of communion in their own terms. Sacred and secular images mingle in these descriptions, and many gesture to an ideal of postnationalist, universal personhood (Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pierrette et al. 2004).

“My husband and I took communion from the priest on the Mexican side through the fence, and later everyone formed a circle—half on the Mexican side and half on the US side. I remember looking up and seeing a bird soaring above that seemed to be following our circle and thinking how odd, that the border meant nothing to that bird, but we, humans, who are supposed to be so smart, had built this barrier between us” (Anon).

“I remember once joining the kids moving back and forth through the holes in the fence, when there were holes. The sea recognized no borders and made the holes on its own” (Anon).

“I remember the first time I ever went to Friendship Park, and I just fell in love with the place—not just the physical beauty but the human beauty of the place. People could come up and touch, and talk, and we could really make a connection. It is a beautiful place geographically—I’m always drawn to edges of things—people at the margins on two sides meeting” (Catherine Thiemann, member of Friends of Friendship Park).

Environmental groups have remained partners in the effort to save Friendship Park. In this reflection, we can see how values of family and environment shape the reflections of Serge Dedina, executive director of the bi-national organization Wildcoast/Costasalvaje:

“When my sons were about 4 and 6 we drove down to Friendship Park and spent a fall afternoon at the beach and made a giant fort out of driftwood. Wildcoast organized a restoration and clean up event with REI and the Tijuana Estuary a few years back. With the board and executive team of REI and over a hundred volunteers, we cleaned up trash and planted native plants in the park. On the Mexican side of the fence we had organized dozens of Mexican families to clean up the Tijuana side of the beach. When we were all done, our entire group gathered on both sides of the fence and cheered when I made a short speech talking about how walls and fences could not divide us. The CEO of REI was in tears” (Serge Dedina, Wildcoast).

## **EPILOGUE: WHERE WE ARE NOW**

On the weekend of Oct 30, 2009, the Border Patrol assembled a 5-foot tall pedestrian barrier inside the locked gate of the main border wall. It was their intention to restore public access to the historic monument at Friendship Park; albeit, access to a cramped space under close surveillance by armed Border Patrol agents, offering neither the possibility to touch nor to converse comfortably with friends on the Mexican side of the wall. Those who gathered at *La Posada Sin Fronteras* in December of that year remember how the Border Patrol’s apparatus of operational control cast a pall of sadness and horror over the entire event. The seven-year-old son of one of the organizers commented on the scene: “It looks like we are going into a jail.”

In the summer of 2010, Friends of Friendship Park welcomed Jim Brown, owner of the San Diego architecture firm PUBLIC Architecture and Planning, to join us in the struggle to restore a more humane and dignified public access to the park. Brown had spent a year on sabbatical, after winning Harvard’s prestigious Loeb fellowship for mid-career architects recognized by their peers as emerging leaders. Brown’s work that year culminated in a design for a single, binational park bringing together the spaces of Friendship Park and Playas de Tijuana and became part of the San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art’s 2009 exhibit *MIX: Nine San Diego Architects and Designers*.

Upon his return to San Diego, Brown met members of Friends of Friendship Park and began work on a new design, this time to create a welcoming space at Friendship Park, on the U.S. side only. For the past eight months we have been negotiating with the San Diego Sector Border Patrol on the implementation of this new design.

August 2011 will mark the 40th anniversary of Friendship Park. What happens in the coming year will be decisive.

<sup>1</sup> Many like Borderhack and inSITE have garnered international attention in Europe and Latin America, while local groups like Border *encuentro*, WildCoast/CostaSalvaje, and Border Angels have a more local focus.

<sup>2</sup> In 2005, the Tijuana River Estuary was named “a wetland of international importance” by RAMSAR.

<sup>3</sup> The list includes the Department of the Interior, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the City of Imperial Beach, the City of San Diego, the County of San Diego, the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG), the California Coastal Commission, the California Department of Fish and Game, the California Resources Agency, the California Department of Parks and Recreation, and the California Coastal Conservancy and the following plaintiffs in the 2004 lawsuit: Sierra Club, California Native Plant Society, Southwest Wetlands Interpretive Association, San Diego Baykeeper, and Center for Biological Diversity.

<sup>4</sup> Tijuana River Valley Expenditures data from Tijuana River Estuarine National Research Reserve

<sup>5</sup> Sierra Club et al. v. John Ashcroft et al. filed February 10, 2004 and Save Our Heritage Organization et al. v. Alberto Gonzalez et al. filed February 9, 2007. Full text documents of each lawsuit are available on the website of Briggs Law Corporation. <http://www.briggslawcorp.com/index.htm>

<sup>6</sup> The following twenty-seven organizations signed a coalition statement condemning the border wall as “offense to the peoples of San Diego and Tijuana”: Activist San Diego, American Civil Liberties Union (San Diego & Imperial Counties), American Friends Service Committee’s U.S.-Mexico Border Program, San Diego Audubon Society, Border Angels, Border Meetup Group, California Native Plant Society, Center for Social Advocacy, Citizens Oversight Projects, San Diego Coastkeeper, Endangered Habitats League, Environmental Health Coalition, Foundation for Change, San Diego Friends Meeting, Fundación La Puerta, Green Party of San Diego County, Immigrants Rights Consortium, Interfaith Coalition for Immigrant Rights, Lipan Apache (El Calaboz) Women Defense, Peace Resource Center, Proyecto Fronterizo de Educación Ambiental, Save Our Heritage Organization, Sí Se Puede Immigrants Rights Organization, Sierra Club (San Diego), Surfrider Foundation, WildCoast/CostaSalvaje.

<sup>7</sup> The difficulty of this kind of base building across disparate sectors in the world of public policy advocacy is the subject an emerging body of scholarship on human rights and environmentalism. As Romina Picolotti and Jorge Daniel Taillant point out, in spite of the fact that current problems of environmental degradation have a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable, marginalized populations, human rights organizations and environmentalists have historically framed these issues in ways that travel along separate legislative tracks (Picolotti and Taillant 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Coordination between Friends of Friendship Park and No Border Wall continues, and our members are considering other models—like the International Peace Arch Park between Vancouver, British Columbia and Blaine, Washington or Big Bend-Rio Bravo International Peace Park, officially recognized in May 2010 by President Obama and President Calderon of Mexico as a natural area of binational interest. Efforts are now underway by the Department of Homeland Security to scope the northern border of the U.S. and Canada. Public comments were solicited from July 6 to August 5, 2010, and environmental impact statements are now being developed.

<sup>9</sup> Mike Fisher is no longer sector chief in San Diego. He was succeeded by Rick Barlow, who served as Acting Sector Chief in 2010, and most recently by Paul Beeson, who assumed his position as San Diego Sector Chief in January 2011.

<sup>10</sup> See Gates for a detailed description and extended analysis of this event.

<sup>11</sup> “Congregants included pastors; local “emergent church” leaders; choir members from various churches; self-identified “Minutemen;” American Friends Services Committee staff and volunteers; Friends of Friendship Park volunteers; professors from Point Loma Nazarene University; students from Point Loma Nazarene University, University of San Diego, University of California San Diego, San Diego State University and Mexican American Catholic College; Marcha Migrante participants; supporters of Border Angels; Veterans for Peace; Border Ambassadors; Sierra Club; Peace Resource Center of San Diego; San Diego Coastkeeper; Surfrider Foundation; WildCoast; No Border Wall; Border Yoga/Meet-up/Friendship Garden participants and a number of children” (Gates).

<sup>12</sup> In her study of the annual border-themed Christmas celebration “*La Posada Sin Fronteras*” at Friendship Park, sociologist Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo examines how these events, while religious in nature, have such a broad appeal to participants from differing social, political and ethnic backgrounds. “In all of these instances, there is a clear political position advocated by the organizers and, presumably, the participants. There is also a strong religious, moral component behind both the objective and the collective, corporeal ritual. The events combine the sacred with the secular, the moral with the political. A public, collective dimension contributes to feelings of authenticity” (Hondagneu-Sotelo, et al. 2004, 137). Because the *Posada* is neither exclusively religious nor political but a “hybrid event,” Hondagneu-Sotelo argues, it allows for the emergence of a “politicized spirituality” that

appeals to a much wider variety of people. The convergence of religious belief and morality with secular values of human rights and ethnic solidarity makes possible the formulation of new political claims grounded not in national citizenship but in a postnationalist, universal personhood. Thus, Hondagneu-Sotelo suggests, these events represent a “postnationalist, interfaith challenge to U.S. immigration and border policies that are construed as immoral and unjust” (138).

<sup>13</sup> In August 2010, Friends of Friendship Park created an online survey asking basic questions about what days of the week respondents most often visited the park and for what purpose, and soliciting recollections from park visitors to questions about their most memorable experiences at the park. The survey was posted on the Friends of Friendship Park webpage and a link was made available on the Friends of Friendship Park Cause Facebook page. To date, the survey has garnered fourteen responses.

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