

Code Pink co-founder, author touts passion

Crusader Diane Wilson brings environmental message to town

By Patricia Miller

Arts & Entertainment Editor

A shrimp boat captain, author and mother of five who stopped multinationals from destroying her bay off the Gulf Coast of Texas came to town this week-end. She's Diane Wilson, and she's also one of the founders of the protest group Code Pink.

If you watch C-Span, you'll see costumed Code Pink mem-bers making satisfying spectacles of themselves in the back of con-gressional hearings protesting the war in Iraq.

Hope you didn't miss Wilson. Several hundreds of people did-n't. They filled the ballroom in the Fort Lewis Student Union on Saturday at a day-long meeting called "A Safer, More Compas-sionate World Community Fo-rum." It was hosted by the League of Women Voters. Wil-son came on the invitation of Bridget Irish with the FLC Eng-lish department.

If you weren't there, Wilson has set her adventures out in a book called *An Unreasonable Woman: A True Story of Shrimpers, Politicos, Polluters and the Fight for Seadrift Texas* (Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 391 pages, \$18 paperback). A quote from that much-missed Texas rabble rouser Molly Ivins high-lights the book's cover: "A stun-ning achievement."

Wilson assured her listeners that they don't need big nonprof-its or money or experts to get on with changing what they want changed in the world.

"Nope," Wilson said. "All it takes is one person. It takes the passion."

"When I started this, I didn't know padiddley squat," she said reassuringly, telling a story about how she decided to go on one of her three hunger strikes, two of which lasted more than 30 days,

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Wilson: Audience stood and cheered at message

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on an impulse. She feared that if she slept on it, she would hear her mother's voice or her pastor's telling her not to do it.

"People told me 'People in Texas don't do hunger strikes. Especially not a woman who is a fisherman. Well, it's some smart man behind her.'" So Wilson called the only re-porter she knew "because when you're on a hunger strike, it's no good if people don't know you're doing it," and she did her striking on a shrimp boat.

"In two weeks on a hunger strike, knowing nothing about it, I got exactly what I wanted," she concluded.

Wilson wore her black hair in what used to be called a coup sauvage, a gorgeous, unreasonable mess to match the title of her book. And she wrapped her-self in a flowing red cape covering a military-green crocheted bra worn over a work shirt.

"My family has been on these waters for 100 years," she said. "On one side, we were Indians and on the other side mystics. We were Pentecostals, and that's the mystic end of fundamental-ism. I wasn't always a trouble-maker. When I was young, I was peculiarly quiet. I refused to acknowledge half of the alphabet." Wilson's love of the bay goes back as far as shrimping in her life. She started helping her dad, also a shrimper, at age 8 and remembers "When I was a kid, I saw an old, old woman in the bay, and she had the grandest personality. She never said anything, but she gave me this feeling she loved me coming there."

Then Wilson described one of the polluting companies that spurred her into action.

"Formosa Plastics Corporation is one that was so bad it got kicked out of Taiwan, but Texas gave them \$ 250 million to come here and pollute for us," she said. "Not a single question was asked when Taiwan's worst polluter came to Texas. They thought it was a jobs bonanza."

She went on to recall how in 1989, she saw a newspaper story naming her tiny county, Calhoun, which is no bigger than 15,000 people, as the nation's worst polluter. So she set up a town hall meeting to discuss what the chemical plants were doing.

Reaction was swift.

"Suddenly the bank president came to see me to ask if I'd formed a vigilante group that's going to roast industry alive," she said.

But the noise worked. Eventually her opponents asked what it was going to take to shut her up. "Zero discharge," she said. And zero discharge she got.

It hasn't been an easy life. Wilson attributes her divorce to one of her hunger strikes, and she's been jailed "about 13 times."

"Commitment has to do with putting yourself on the line," she explained. "Once you're out on the edge, you get into another kind of energy. Every step I move, there is a foundation underneath me." It was a message that resonated with the audience. They stood and cheered. We'll have to keep an eye out for action stemming from all that inspiration. Surely someone's in the mood to be unreasonable.

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