

Window on America

A radio broadcast

By Caridad Svich

[Caridad Svich's plays (*Red Bike*, *The House of the Spirits*, *The Book of Magdalene* and more) have been seen across the US and abroad at diverse venues including Denver Center, The Women's Project, and Cervantes Theatre London. She received an OBIE for Lifetime Achievement and is in the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Latino History*. Her website is <https://caridadsvich.com>]

MC: Welcome, dear listeners, to our weekly installment of Windows on America, a program where people from towns and cities across this great country of ours tell us a little bit about their lives and their hopes and dreams for the future. Our first story today comes from Rockville, Indiana where one Anna Cooper spends her days tending to her children, Nancy and Lorraine, and doing her lion's share of community service for the local VA. Mrs. Cooper is a fine upstanding citizen, the kind of person who doesn't make the headlines, but works long and hard on a daily basis to keep this country moving forward. It is the Mrs. Coopers of the world who, in the end, make us who we are, and it is our privilege, as it is every week, to welcome her to our little program. Mrs. Cooper?

ANNA: Yes.

MC: Welcome to Windows on America.

ANNA: Yes.

MC: Now, don't be shy, Mrs. Cooper, there's nothing to be afraid of. You're among friends here, and our audience is more than eager to hear your story. Isn't that right, Jim?

JIM: That's right, Ed.

MC: So, Mrs. Cooper, tell us a little about your life in Rockville, Indiana. Where is Rockville, by the way?

ANNA: Western Indiana.

MC: Western Indiana. Near our good friends at KOWB in Chicago.

ANNA: Actually, uh, Rockville's not near Chicago.

MC: When in Chicago, eat at Frankie's. Frankie's Steakhouse is a proud sponsor of this little station here and our affiliate at KOWB.

ANNA: I don't know what you're talking about.

MC: Now now, Mrs. Cooper, of course you do. This is Windows on America and your word is golden. Tell us about life, Mrs. Cooper.

ANNA: My life?

MC: Share your story.

ANNA: Well, uh...I was born in Rockville.

MC: Is that right?

ANNA: My whole family is from here. Yes. We've never been too far out of here. Maybe once... we went to Kentucky. We have a cousin there.

MC: Kentucky. Home of WONC, and all our friends at Amy's Ice Cream. When in Kentucky, go to Amy's.

ANNA: I've never been there.

MC: Always make time for Amy's when In Kentucky. It's a big state but Amy's makes it feel like home.

ANNA: Oh. That's good.

MC: Carry on, Mrs. Cooper.

ANNA: What?

MC: Your story.

ANNA: Oh. Yes. Well, I'm a little nervous.

MC: No need for nerves. That's why there's Graystone's Tonic, the magic elixir for everyday stress. Graystone's: to soothe your worries.

ANNA: I don't know what you're talking about.

MC: Carry on, Mrs. Cooper. America is waiting for your story.

ANNA: Well, that's what I wanted to tell you...

MC: What's that, Mrs. Cooper?

ANNA: I don't know if my story's... I mean, there are lots of stories. I listen to your program every week and I just can't believe how fascinating everybody is. All their lives and things, and me, I just do what I do, you know. Gotta keep Nancy and Lorraine busy, doing their homework, and Walter out there, working at the factory. And pretty soon there's not going to be any work cause they're saying they're gonna shut things down, and then what will happen to us? I mean, I can't do everything by myself. I try. But I can't do everything. And all them people out there trying just the same and how do they do it, I wonder? Cause my family, we had it hard during the big recession. Wadn't any kind of work for us. And me with two kids and Walter... we made it through, yes, but just barely. And Rockville's just poor. Just a poor town. Not as poor as others but, we gotta count our pennies. Nobody here makes more than fifty cents on the dollar, after taxes and everything else. If at that. And I look around and think what can we do to change things, you know, make a difference? Cause I want things to change. I know

everybody says this country is all flush and will come back from all the hard times...but I don't know how.

MC: Mrs. Cooper, I...

ANNA: You got your radio show, so you're fine. I hear you every week. You do just fine with things and all your products and things. But me out here in Rockville, what do I got? What do my two kids got? And the rest of my family and their friends...they're just hanging on. And I think to myself about that story I read about, about that man in India, Gandhi...He made a real difference once. He talked about things I've never ever wrapped my brain around. I think about him and so many others that talked about civil disobedience.

MC: That's all very well, Mrs. Cooper, but what we want to do is hear about your life, your story.

ANNA: But this is my story. This is what I'm telling you.

MC: No, Mrs. Cooper, your story is what you told us in your letter. You remember the letter you sent to this station? The letter asking us to put you on this program?

ANNA: Yes. Of course. I wrote a letter.

MC: Well, then, that's what we want to hear. About your little life out in Rockville. An American story. That's what this show is all about. Isn't that right, Jim?

JIM: Yes, Ed, that's right. Nothing but America round the clock all the time.

ANNA: I understand that, sir. I understand you're just putting on a show, and well, yes, I'm thrilled to part of it. I know that everyone in Rockville is listening, and well, I feel very privileged to be asked to speak, to be asked to be on your program and represent my town in this way, but if I may say, there are bigger stories out there than what goes on in the US of A. Lots of stories. Heaven knows we keep hearing about the stuff that goes on in North Korea and Brazil and all matter of things, really, and I do worry. I stress my

mind, and I don't need any tonic to soothe my nerves. See, I see men every day with their nerves shot to pieces. They're in the VA Hospital where I volunteer. They tell me stories about things no one has any right to hear. And I keep thinking about all the anger I've inside, about what all these evil men are doing around the world and how we don't really know every little thing about it or can even get a word in edgewise about, except there was a Chinese family lived here in Rockville and one day they were shipped off somewhere, kicked out of here...and I don't know why. People said they were spies, but they seemed a good family to me. But for some reason or another, they're gone, and some other family took their house, and well, I don't think that's right. No, sir. Not right at all when you come to think of it. And I know I'm just Anna Cooper from Rockville, Indiana and I'm not anybody important. My story's what it is. Average. Pretty common, really. But I still think about things and that man named Gandhi. He said things that made sense to me somehow about suffering the anger of the opponent and *satyagraha*. I'm not sure I'm saying that right, but what this man done, what he stood up for... I think to myself what can we do to be disobedient in the way he says? How do we really fight for what we believe in? How do we say to ourselves what war means, and how is it all those people in all those places far away have been dying and we've done nothing about them for years. We've been here in the US of A and we've done nothing for all those people.

MC: Well, that's all well and good, but –

ANNA: You will not cut me off, sir. If what I say doesn't sit well with you and your listeners, all I can say is I'm sorry, but it's what I feel. Here we are in the US of A and I love my country. I do. I've not known anything else in my life. My life's been Rockville and taking care of my family and Walter... well, he's gonna ship out soon. He told me. They called him up. And he's going. Cuz there's always a war somewhere or some kinda peacekeeping. And where does that leave me, sir? Out here in this town with my two girls and no job to speak of, but I know I gotta get one and soon. Where does that leave me? And what kind of stand can I take to safeguard my town, to find out where that Chinese family is that used to live here, and why no one else in Rockville so much as asks about them. They just accept it as law. Where is this law writ, sir? Who gets to decide who belongs and who doesn't? Who decides all of sudden that some decent family is no good

and must be stripped of everything they own? I know I may not make much sense to you sir with your program on the airwaves, cause well, I'm just Anna Cooper, my voice don't amount to much in the big scheme of things, but it amounts to something in the little scheme. I gotta believe that. I gotta believe that whatever it is that's happening to me, to my family, to my town, to this country, and to all those people out there in the world...yes, sir.... My heart goes out. From here. From this lil ol' insignificant place, my heart goes.

End of play