



## Irene “Pony” Meza-Herrig



We're heartbroken to hear of the passing of beloved community leader Irene Meza-Herrig. For years she oversaw the motorcycle contingent & dykes on bikes, the official parade kickoff. Though her legacy will live on, we will never be the same without her. San Diego Pride theme in 2018 was “Persist with Pride” and Irene Meza-Herrig and more than 100 other women did it full throttle with the San Diego Women Motorcycle Riders contingent. Each year this large caravan of bikes leads the parade with their bone-rattling pistons firing with pride, and it just keeps getting bigger.

Irene, originally from Oceanside, had been volunteering for this group for about eight years after some of the original members moved away, leaving them without leadership. She makes sure the team is organized, informed of the rules, checked in and positioned correctly before making their way down the parade route ahead of the male motorcycle groups. “I love my community,” Irene says, “so I took it upon myself to meet with the San Diego Pride committee and told them I would help in any way I could. With the help of Donna Danzig, we were able to make sure the contingency flows without any issues.” This collective consists of women from other motorcycle clubs as well as those who just want to represent or support the LGBT community riding their own choppers. Irene's love of bikes was inspired by her father who was an avid rider himself. Now, with her own ride, a Yamaha V-Star 1300 Tourer, Irene represents the SDWMR and leads the pack. “I have been riding in the parade since 1994 under the name of Dykes on Bikes, other names this contingency rode under was Women Moto, which was a San Diego motorcycle club,” she explains. “That club no longer exists, hence why it is now called San Diego Women Motorcycle Riders. This encompasses all female riders and does not matter what club they belong too.” The group has grown over the years. “More and more women are buying bikes of every kind and I get emails always asking what it takes to ride with us.” She says all female riders are welcome to join whether they are gay, bi, transgender or straight, and join they do. It's an example of how diverse and accepting San Diego is. “What I love about our community is the unity we have here,” she explains. “It does not matter how young or old you are everyone counts. I love the fact that there are many resources for the LGBT community and that anyone who needs help there is



always someone around to help them.” But this year, through all of the fun, excitement, and roar of the engines, she has concerns; fears she feels make the upcoming parade more important than ever before. “With all that is going on in our country, I am actually scared for myself as a lesbian. I feel we are working harder to just get simple civil rights we are entitled too, and this administration is pushing us backwards and back in the closet.” So Irene is embracing this year's message as a mantra of empowerment. Despite her fears, she not letting anything, or anyone, take her away from her duties, keeping that pole position as one of the first faces people see along the parade route. “This year's theme says it all 'Persist with Pride,’” she says proudly, “that is the only way our voices can be heard.” Well, after high school my dad, who was still in the Marines, moved me to Alameda California. There I pondered what to do with my life, but came to no conclusion. Instead I started playing softball for the wives of the Marines that were station with my dad. I met my daughter's father there and before I knew it I was pregnant, not what I wanted at the time being only 18 years old. Unfortunately, he was one of my dad's men in his division, one he warned me to stay away from, but being 18 when do we ever listen to our parents. When I told my daughter's father I was pregnant he ran liked a scared dog, years later I found out he was afraid of my dad. While I was pregnant I met my son's father and we eventually got married after my daughter was born. Two years later our son was born in Adak Alaska, my son's father was in the Navy, after Alaska we moved to a small naval base called Cutler Maine. From there we moved to San Diego in 1983, and this is where I've been since. I did do some traveling, other states, Germany and Costa Rica. However, this is not the end of my story. In the early 90's two things happen that changed my life traumatically, the first is something that I wish not to discuss this way, but if you want to know I would tell anyone via email, this is out of consideration to my two children. The second thing that changed my life was my sexuality, I have always known that I was different growing up, never playing with dolls or my sister's but with the boys in the neighborhood. Deep down inside I have always had attraction to girls but was afraid to say anything, but in 1993 when my husband and I were separated, I had along time to thing and seek advice about me. And for the first time in my life I was truly happy with who I was. The hardest thing was to tell my family that I was a lesbian, the first to hear were my children. They were confused and hurt at first but I am very blessed because they are my two biggest supporters. The rest of my family came around and realize I was the same person who they known there entire life. Friends asked me why I came out late in life and I try to explained to them if you grew up in an Hispanic, Catholic, military family you would wait too. Even my dad wanted to know why I married, I told him that I did what society told me what to do and I did. With all that being said I have no regrets whatsoever in the path I went down. I decided to go back to college, I have tried since high school but something or someone has always been in my way and I would drop out. In 2004 I finally started college majoring in Criminal Justice, I received my Associates two years later and continue and received my BS in Criminal Justice in 2008. Although these

are great achievements for me I am not done with my education. I am working on trying to get into UCSD paralegal extension program so that I may get my certificate. This will help me decide if I want to continue my law career and become a lawyer. I have always love the law since I was little girl and now I see the light at the end of the tunnel. If I continue and go to law school I want to be able to practice Civil Rights and contract law. Well that's about if for me, thanks for letting me tell you about me. And thank you to Tim for putting all this together.

IN MEMORY OF IRENE MEZZA HERRIG Our Sincere condolences go out to her family and friends. Chrome Diva's lost a Sister March 7, 2021. San Diego a Strong Leader and Advocate for the LGBTQ and Motorcycle Community Irene's dream bike had always been an Indian motorcycle. Last year she bought her Indian Chieftain and joined our Tribe. Irene was an active and valuable member of the Chrome Divas, first with the San Diego Chapter then in 2019, the Oceanside Chrome Divas chapter was created. Irene was our first president and was so driven she became the West Region Assistant Director of National Chrome Divas. Irene was highly involved in the LGBTQ community and Pride Parade ride since its beginning. She was a loving wife, mother, grandmother, daughter, sister and friend. Irene died doing what she loved best, riding her beautiful Indian motorcycle leading her Divas home.

