

Forged from heartbreak

Family hosts Mother's Day event after personal loss

BY RICK COCA
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After Gloria Lazalde's mother and sister died within a month of each other in February 2005, Lazalde and her family decided it would almost be unbearable to face Mother's Day without them. They had to do something to take their minds off their pain.

So Lazalde and her family sponsored "Celebrando Nuestras Madres" (Celebrating Our Mothers), a Mother's Day brunch held for mothers who for any number of reasons would not do anything special on their big day.

Among the participants were single mothers, victims of domestic abuse, women who lost their children to gang violence and women whose families simply couldn't afford to pay for anything special. "The first year, it was more of a healing process for us," Lazalde said. "It was more of a selfish thing."

Lazalde works as the director of adult services for the Youth Policy Institute in Pacoima and was able to get some support from the institute as well as from the Los Angeles Urban Funders and Councilman Alex Padilla, to name a few.

Lazalde and her family weren't prepared for the response they received from the grateful women who they doted on for an afternoon in 2005.

"Last year, after the event I was overwhelmed with women wanting to talk to me," Lazalde said. Some of the women were emotional and needed to vent, she said. Before this year's event, Lazalde set up a support network so women who wanted



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A guest speaks to the 150 women present at this year's "Celebrando Nuestras Madres."

to talk to counselors following the event would be able to.

This year's event was held at Casa Torres Banquet Hall in Pacoima and included about 150 women, referred from various organizations in the Northeast Valley.

Lazalde and her 12 nieces, along with a group of volunteers, hosted the women, who dressed up and had their photo taken when they walked into the restaurant. The guests were then treated to a nice meal and were given a present to take home.

Among the day's guests were a great-grandmother who had never been out for Mother's Day, a divorced woman who came along with her mother, and a survivor of domestic abuse, who addressed the women present.

Lazalde said the woman said she had been told that she would never amount to anything.

Lazalde quoted the woman: "And now I'm at this event with important people, thinking I was never going to be anything in my life," the

woman said.

"They're just in awe," Lazalde said of the women present. "They get a chance to dress up and have mariachis play for them and they also get a gift. (This) event is totally free to them and we try to provide top notch service for them."

As was the case at the first year's event, a photo of Lazalde's mother, Maria Avalina Villagrana, and sister, Lidia Flores, are displayed for the guests to see.



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Gloria Lazalde says the annual Mother's Day celebration she and her family started to mourn the loss of their loved ones has helped scores of Valley moms.

Lazalde said the Mother's Day event is now an annual event. She hopes it grows each year. The event has transcended its initial inspiration, but for those women who didn't celebrate Mother's Day and a family dealing with a loss, it was a match made in heaven.

"They had a need and we had a need," Lazalde said. "It was perfect. We could heal each other."


Celebrando Nuestras Madres