

SPIRIT OF THE BARRIO  
FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 1994

A CELEBRATION OF HER LIFE

LAURA RODRIGUEZ, FOUNDER  
LOGAN HEIGHTS FAMILY HEALTH CENTER

Laura Rodriguez  
1909 - 1994



"I've dedicated my life to Barrio Logan. Improving the health of my neighbors in this community has been my primary concern. I've never had much of a formal education, but I've always had a desire to see the people in my community given good medical care.

Making tamales while talking about the health center's needs has put me in contact with hundreds of folks who helped build our center. I'm eighty-two years old now, but I'll keep making tamales and will keep asking for help until our clinic is completely built.

After all, Barrio Logan is my neighborhood. I will give it the best I've got."

---

Laura Rodriguez  
President George Bush's  
595th Point of Light Recipient



*Message from the Chairman of the Board of Directors*

*Logan Heights Family Health Center*

*November 18, 1994*

*What I remember is that Laura was always there...there for everyone that needed guidance, health services and sometimes a good swift kick in the pants.*

*Laura always had faith and counted on all of us to deliver her vision of a much needed health center in Barrio Logan, I remember how proud she was of this center.*

*Because of Laura, I became a personal friend and family member of the health center.*

*I will always remember Laura.*

*Walter J. Scott, Customer Service Manager, SDG&E*

\*\*\*\*\*

*Readers and friends are cordially invited to continue adding stories to this booklet. Contributions to this record are timeless in nature, and will always be gratefully appreciated. Your wirtten reminders will keep Laura alive for those who never had the pleasure of her friendship. For those of us who knew her, the booklet will be a constant reminder of the indomitable lady who personified the "Spirit of the Barrio".*

## Introduction

*Each one of us has a story to tell about Laura Rodriguez. And they always speak about our relationship to her and her relationship to the world. Her humor, her dedication, and her complete commitment to making life better for the poor is not lost on us. But her righteousness, if you will, always made our lives interesting, often uncomfortable, and constantly reminded us of our own responsibility to each other.*

*There was never a question of like or dislike. It was always respect and no respect. Laura consistently challenged our own egocentric view of the world. And she was not above reminding us that we were mere mortals in a world of everlasting giants.*

*How was it that a woman of sixtysomething came into our world and set about making a bonfire out of which the Logan Heights Family Health Center was born. None of us has the answer. Laura was born in Logan eightysome years ago. As a young girl she lost her parents and as a young woman of 16 she married David Rodriguez. For the next forty years she set about raising a family, keeping house, and generally trying to keep everyone happy.*

*Then the possibilities of the sixties and the unresponsiveness of agencies to the needs of community started a flame within Laura that exploded into unheard-of activities to create health services for Barrio Logan. Maybe it was the memory of Mrs. Brackett, the nurse who "doctored" everyone in the neighborhood, or the remains of the "clinica" in the old Adobe that cemented old Neighborhood House as the site for the health center.*

*All of us remember the Laura that chained herself to the clinic door and defied the police. Or the Laura that slept out in the proposed Highway Patrol lot making a point about Chicano Park. Or the Laura that constantly mopped the bathrooms and yelled at us to keep our kids in line. Laura was not the eternal do-gooder. She was real with all the faults and virtues of any frail human. But her determination to make the clinic a reality serving the thousands needing help made her bigger than life. Laura was perceptive, cynical, and unyielding in her quest.*

*Laura Rodriguez will always be in our mind's eye and in our heart's beat.*

*The "Celebration of Life" Committee  
Linda LeGerrette, Chair*

*Irma Castro, Co-Chair  
Margarita Carmona  
Cecelia Estrada  
Maria Garcia  
Manny Guaderrama*

*Yolanda Martinez  
Luis Natividad  
Rachael Ortiz  
Walter Scott  
Norma Tolentino*

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

*The November 18, 1994 Spirit of the Barrio luncheon is brought to you by the following sponsors:*

*Anheuser-Busch, Inc. & Coast Distributing Company  
San Diego City Fire Fighters, Local 145  
SDG&E Employees' Contrib Club  
Kelco, Division of Merck, Inc.  
Pepsi-Cola Bottling Company  
Luis E. Garcia, Inc.  
Wells Fargo Bank  
San Diego Union-Tribune  
Castillo & Guevara  
Grossmont Bank  
IBM  
Dr. James H. Sears  
Mulvaney, Kahan & Barry  
Rodrigo Munoz, M.D.  
NASSCO  
Hernandez Construction Company  
Rubio's Restaurants  
El Sol de San Diego  
S.D. Police Officers Assoc.  
Cesar Chavez Continuing Education Center  
Coast Citrus Distributors, Inc.  
Dr. Cynthia D. Park  
Mini Trucks & Cars  
Union Bank/National City  
Barrio Station*

## REMEMBRANCES

In the late 60's or early 70's, I was a new sergeant on the Police Department. I received a radio call that "radicals" had taken over the Neighborhood House (now the clinic). I organized a group of officers, briefed them and went to that location. When we arrived the situation was very chaotic. People were running in and out of the building, chanting slogans ... something like "Hell no, we won't go!". We, the police, had things thrown at us which resulted in several arrests.

When I thought the crisis was over, an officer came up to me and said "There is a woman chained to the front door.". I thought I would give the officer a lesson in diplomacy and went up to the woman, who I did not know, but I later found out was Laura Rodriguez. I told her in no uncertain terms if she did not unlock herself, I would take her to jail. She responded with a "Hell with you, take me to jail!". I then realized I had a woman with a cause and she would not go easily. It boiled down to me pleading with her to leave which she eventually did, but her parting words were "We are here to stay, you haven't seen the last of me yet!".

No truer words were ever spoken. I ended up testifying before the Grand Jury and Laura became the catalyst in making the clinic what it is today. After the dust settled from the incident, I was in my police car driving down the street when Laura hailed me over. She had a "I told you so" look in her eyes, she scolded me and invited me into the Neighborhood House for a tamale lunch.

I benefited quite a bit from this incident. I got the lesson on diplomacy from Laura and I learned what a remarkable woman she was.

**Manny C. Guaderrama, (Former) Deputy Chief of Police, City of San Diego**

\*\*\*\*\*

My fondest memories of Laura Rodriguez I would say started back in the early 70's at Big Neighbor. Laura and I had a disagreement. We had the same goal but we each strongly believed in different methods of reaching it. We got into a really big shouting match. We were both very loud and neither one of us would back down.

I really don't remember what happened after that, or if it was because of that, but something made us get along real good. For over twenty years, Laura was very kind to me, and very supportive.

I remember Laura and I volunteered together on the "Cootie Committee" at Lowell School. A lot of the kids were coming home with Piojos and a lot of the younger parents weren't educated in the treatment or prevention. Laura named it the "Cootie Committee"; she didn't want to say "Piojo".

I remember Laura, Graciela Romero, Anastacia Cortez and Elena Perez hanging together as

members of the Chicano Park Steering Committee. There was a team! I was touched by the special friendship she had with people like Angie Suila, Jose Gomez and others. And she never did hide the fact that there were certain leaders in the community she did not like at all because she knew they had their own agenda and were not what they claimed to be.

Laura always shared knowledge with me, both personal and movimiento. I miss her dearly and will always have a very special place in my heart for my memories of her.

**Tommie Camarillo**

\*\*\*\*\*

She was a lovely person who cared deeply for anyone in need of medical assistance.

**Oscar Padilla, Padilla Insurance Company**

\*\*\*\*\*

Laura was one in a million - a person who gave to others with all of her heart and never asked for or expected any recognition. She was a warm, loving, tough, neat woman that like so many others in San Diego, I loved and respected. She will be greatly missed.

Even though she is gone, all of us will have for the rest of our lives the very fond memories of Laura Rodriguez.

**William B. Kolender, Sheriff-Elect, County of San Diego**

\*\*\*\*\*

Laura, I dedicate part of my being to you, my lifelong friend. You comforted me when I was orphaned as a child and you helped me understand that some of us were blessed to raise ourselves in life because some parents did not love or nurture their children; this gave me courage. You reached out to me with a firm hand when I went wrong as an adolescent; this made me feel cared for. In my adulthood you showed me praise, much like teachers do with their students; this gave me motivation to succeed in life. You watched me like a hawk when I began my commitment to community service and involved me in many empowerment endeavors for our community; this gave me inspiration. And for all that you accomplished for our community you brought me pride as a Mexican-American woman of our beautiful Barrio of Logan Heights. You honored me with your personal friendship and confidence as a colleague in the struggle for social justice. Forever, you will be a part of me and I thank you for helping me shape who I am.

**Rachael Ortiz, Executive Director, Barrio Station**

\*\*\*\*\*

Laura Rodriguez made us all partners in providing for our community. She created in us the spirit of willing volunteers to care for the sick in Logan Heights. The outreach she built through the force of her dedication has now spread to include many outside the barrio.

The Spirit of the Barrio is a return to our caring for each other without a right requirement for compensation. Despite this, Laura knew better than most that resources don't materialize out of thin air or goodwill. She enlisted all of us, individuals and responsible corporations alike, in both giving the services needed, and providing the capital needed for growth and a clinic that will last.

Bonnie Ocampo remembers her as someone who stood up straight to be counted and pitched into make a difference. The key to our common American heritage is non our national origin, but our willingness to put our heads and shoulders together in times of need. Thank the good Lord that Laura had very broad shoulders.

Ralph and Bonnie Ocampo shared Laura's dream with her and can ask no more of any friendship than the continuing inspiration she has provided. It is how they remember her best. May you sleep with the angels, Laura, our sweet one, our foster grandma.

**Ralph Ocampo, M.D.**

\*\*\*\*\*

Though I saw Laura many times on occasions when she was recognized or honored, my three lasting images came from elsewhere. There were times when the board was making difficult decisions about the clinic, and Laura would come up with the witty remark or the funny story that would break the tension. I would see her parading among the waiting patients talking to each and to all, until everybody seemed to forget pain and distress. My last image is from meetings held in the evening. Laura seemed to be guarding the premises with her laughter and her presence ... perhaps she is still doing so.

**Rodrigo A. Munoz, M.D., Past Board Chair, Logan Heights Family Health Center**

\*\*\*\*\*

In August of 1983, a group of local concerned citizens banded together to secure federal government funding to establish a medical clinic for low-income seniors in San Diego County. The seniors received clinical screenings for free and when the examination results were received, they were referred to local practitioners or health care institutions for needed care.

Over the years, the clinic grew to become two full services, primary and specialty care facilities; the only organization of its kind in San Diego specializing in geriatric medicine. At its peak, over 35,000 visits per year were provided for the elderly of all income levels, but the poverty level, uninsured senior was still the focal point of care and referral.



Senior Citizens Community Free Clinic of San Diego, Inc., dba Sharp Senior HealthCare, no longer exists after twenty-one years of delivering high quality care in a loving, dignified environment. But, thanks to the foresight of that original group of eleven people who made it possible, over 420,000 visits were provided. They made a difference. Señora Laura Rodriguez was one of those eleven people.

**Michele R. McDougal, (Former) Executive Director, Senior Citizens Community Free Clinic**

\*\*\*\*\*

Laura Rodriguez was the gentle soul with the strength of ten. I was always inspired when I would see this woman of great vision act in a role of service to each and all. As the foundress of the Family Health Center, she left a legacy for future generations and a living reminder of the need to care passionately for the health of our community.

**Sister Mary Jo Anderson, Mercy Healthcare, San Diego**

\*\*\*\*\*

I remember it well, when I first came to the Chicano Clinic, which was the name of the clinic at the time, in the summer of 1972. I was interviewed by Laura Rodriguez and two other persons. I was hired to do whatever was necessary at the clinic and that we did, from sweeping to assisting doctors and translating for patients. I was aware that I was under the strict watchful eye of Laura. I knew she would check my papers periodically. And in a short time, we became a team and she became my most loyal advocate and friend.

She was a good person who recognized the potential in people and she never forgot her roots. In many instances she would come to me, borrowing money in order to feed some homeless person or needy family who came to the clinic. As she was kind, she was also brave. She would not permit anyone to stomp over her. Many times I observed how she would handle certain problems that arose at the clinic. When she said "you go", you went, no questions asked, because you knew that she was right. We laughed and cried together many times. I will miss my dear and beloved friend forever.

**Carmen T. Boaz, Employee, Logan Heights Family Health Center**

\*\*\*\*\*

My favorite Laura Rodriguez story is about the time many years ago, when I was the speaker at the Spirit of the Barrio Luncheon. I had left my admiral's hat on a table in the back and during my talk I noticed that someone was wearing it. Turned out that Laura had put it on "to keep it clean". It was apparent that she enjoyed wearing the hat, and it looked good on her since she wore it at an angle that I could not.

After I left the center that day, it struck me that Laura needed her own admiral's hat - that

she certainly deserved recognition for the highest rank as a human being. It also seemed appropriate since the U.S. Navy had provided help over the years in support of Laura's clinic. So in recognition of her courage, compassion and commitment, I got Laura her own hat mounted on a plaque with a brass plate which read "Honorary Admiral". The only addition I would make to that inscription today would be "with love".

**Jim Sears, Rear Admiral, Medical Corps, U.S. Navy, Retired**

\*\*\*\*\*

Hay tanto que se pudiera decir de Doña Laura. Ella fué una gran amiga y compañera de lucha y del trabajo. Me ayudó mucho con mis hijos. Mi esposo nació en el mismo año que Doña Laura, 1909. Nada más el nació en junio y ella en noviembre. Me acuerdo que cuando ibamos a saludarla en sus cumpleaños, Doña Laura le decia a mi esposo, "Sr. Cortez, yo soy mas niña que usted!"

**Sr. Y. Srs. Cortez**

\*\*\*\*\*

I remember two years ago taking Laura home in my car. We would talk for one-half to three-quarters of an hour on these occasions. On one of those occasions she asked me if she could ask a personal questions and I said, "OK". She asked me if I was afraid of dying and I answered, "Yes". I asked her if she was afraid. She said she was, and we talked for the longest time on how normal it was to fear death. She felt relieved after I told her that I, too, feared death.

**Stephanie Perez, Board Member, Logan Heights Family Health Center**

\*\*\*\*\*

Of and about the remarkable lady, Laura Rodriguez, and if brevity is like platinum, I'm compelled to say:

Laura Rodriguez  
for her labor and for her beloved community:  
"Few have done as much,  
No one has done more."

**Otto Hurr, a long, long time friend and a three-decades co-worker**

\*\*\*\*\*

Do you know Laura? Yes she is the janitor at the Chicano Clinic!  
Do you know Laura? She is the tamale lady.  
Do you know Laura? She dispenses medicine at Logan Heights Clinic.  
Do you know Laura? She is the Executive Director of the Clinic.  
Do you know Laura? She is the parking attendant during the Spirit of the Barrio luncheons.  
Do you know Laura? She is the personnel time keeper at the family Clinic.  
Do you know Laura? She is on the Board of Directors of the Logan Heights Family Health Clinic.  
Do you know Laura? Yes! She is that women who is always yelling at the brats who are running around the Clinic.  
Yes! She's my Grandma, My Mom and my friend.

Someone asked me to describe Laura - I called Grandma, and this is what I said:

Hard work, dedication, fearless, honest, simple, angry, pain, pride, commitment, caring, compassionate, understanding, determined, stubborn, gentle, inspiration;  
and those of us who felt the pressure from her work ethics and the passion for her people and community;  
and those of us who got a tongue lashing and two minutes later hear her voice asking how is your wife and kids (brats);  
and those of us who got close enough to her, to see the sweat on her bandana, who many thought she wore to hold down her hair;  
and those of us who felt the sword of her anger and pain when our actions threatened the issues, programs and people who she championed;  
and those of us who saw the pain in her eyes for those who were victims of racism and circumstances which made them less fortunate;  
and yes, Laura, those of us whose lives you touched and made us so fortunate to have worked with you and known you.

To those who don't believe, there will always be a "Spirit of the Barrio" - Laura.

### **Luis Natividad**

\*\*\*\*\*

I remember one night very late, almost midnight, Jack Thomas and I came out from under the clinic dripping wet covered with mud. We had been working on the plumbing for hours. Laura came in and brought us two six-packs that she had taken out of the clinic refrigerator and said, "Here, you guys need this."

### **Frank G. Perez**

\*\*\*\*\*

I was assigned as principal to Lowell School (renamed Perkins school) in 1975. During the next two years I had many an occasion to work and demonstrate with Laura Rodriguez. Eddie Oriol and Jorge Parra, two young men with a vision and a dream for the barrio, had united this community to work for that dream. First step was to get rid of the junkyards--and who was out in front of every junkyard demonstration? Laura Rodriguez. During this same period she was busy working at the clinic, not only cleaning and making tamales for the "Hour in the Barrio" but busy hustling financial support for "her clinic". Laura was a woman with an overabundance of drive and determination and I feel honored to have known her.

**Margarita Carmona, Principal, Balboa Elementary School**

\*\*\*\*\*

Yo y mi niña chica, Laura, de cuatro meses andabamos con todo cuando tomamos la clinica. Yo cargaba a la bebé y Laura traía un garrote. Habia mucha gente del Chicano y nos pusimos a bloquear la entrada al edificio. En eso llegó la policia gritando qué queriamos allí. Uno me empujó y Laura les grito que me dejaran en paz, que si no veían que traía yo a una bebida. Laura los empujó y les dijo que el edificio era de la comunidad y como edificio de la comunidad lo queriamos para hacer una clinica. Entonces, George Varela, que era un patrullero llegó y preguntó que estaba pasando. Laura le dijo que el policia me habla empujado y que yo representaba a las mujeres de la comunidad. Entre todas gritaron que si lo era. George ayudo a que la policia se fuera de alli.

**Lilia Lopez**

\*\*\*\*\*

Thinking of Laura brought back many happy memories of my five years as principal of Lowell, now known as Perkins Elementary School. I knew Laura as a community activist and as a grandmother concerned about her grandchildren's education.

During my first week on campus, Laura stopped by to see me. As we all know, Laura was direct in her approach and did not hedge on seeking information. After a few brief pleasantries, Laura said flatly, "You know that our kids deserve a good education ... so what are you going to do about it?". After spending 30 minutes explaining my vision for Lowell (Perkins) to Laura, she briefly looked around the room, paused and moved closer to me and said, "It all sounds good, but you left out one important thing ... butt kicking ... some of the adults around here need some butt kicking to get them going. Make sure you get that done right away. Also, plan to see a lot of me.". Laura kept her word. She was on campus almost daily, and on occasion would comment on the progress we were making. We must have been doing something right.

**Dr. Luis C. Villegas, San Diego City Schools, Instructional Team Leader, Alternative Education Programs**

I remember when Laura led a group of residents to a downtown book store that contained X-rated material. She was televised storming into the store and knocking the books onto the floor. The next day, she telephone me and said that I better alert the S.W.A.T. Team because until the books were removed from eyesight of the children walking to school, this would continue. Laura then joked and said things you can't publish regarding the photos in the books.

**George Saldamando, Assistant Chief, San Diego Police Department**

\*\*\*\*\*

There are so many beautiful, warm, loving memories that I have of Laura.

I first remember having met Laura during the early 70's at the lot that was planned to have become a Highway Patrol Office, but the community, along with Dona Laura, as I later came to call her, was there every morning, setting up tables of food that we would take to feed the workers. During these mornings she would be dishing out frijoles, warming tortillas, picking up paper plates and napkins, never stopping to feed herself.

I later had the opportunity and pleasure of working with her during the first few years of the clinic's operation, back when it was called the Chicano Health Clinic. I remember being cursed by Laura, being hugged, scolded, taught and loved by her. She showed me what it was to work long hours, by volunteering - to do paper work (intake sheets for the clients), to serve food to the people who later came to the luncheons, to clean the kitchen, mop the bathrooms, pick up forks and punch cups. Yes, I may have complained, but at the time I did not realize what she was doing to mold my life. These experiences later became very helpful and rewarding, because I had Laura as a model. I can now go to any function and not feel that I need to be served, but be the one to serve, and have the satisfaction that I have given something to someone.

I remember calling Laura, and telling her when I was going to take a trip. A couple of weeks later she brought me a make-up case to take with me on my trip. Once, she brought me pot of calabasitas, as only Laura could make. She had gone home during her busy schedule at the clinic, and walked down the street carrying this warm pot of food to my office.

I remember talking about problems at home, and she would advise me as only Laura could, make you cry because you knew what she was telling you was right, for she was a righteous woman. Years later when my son was born, I took him to her, and she stopped what she was doing in the kitchen (her office) to hold him and spend some time with me. It gave me such joy to know that another generation had been touched and held by this special woman.

I remember Laura, on the picket lines. She never stopped walking, yelling, and fighting long and hard for what she believed in. At Christmas time Laura would always send Christmas cards, addressing them to "BRAT". What I treasure most is that she took time out of her

busy schedule to address them personally. I still have some of them.

To me Laura was a friend, a mother and grandmother. She taught me many things, but what will remain with me always is her determination, her strong yet loving spirit, her smile, her scent, and yes, even her cursing (with love), and her hearty laugh.

I hope that when I reach age sixty plus, I too can be a model to the younger generation growing up, being able to work as long and hard as Dona Laura did!

**Diane Bolivar-Armenta**

\*\*\*\*\*

There are always wonderful stories that speak to the specialness of LAURA RODRIGUEZ. There are in fact many which impacted on my life and make my and my family's memories of her warm and full of life.

My children were two and one at the time and we lived next door to La Central Market across from Chicano Park. Everyone knew that every afternoon I would close the door and that it meant that the babies were napping and not to disturb. But this one day, there was this urgent pounding on the door; a voice screaming, "LET ME IN! LET ME IN!".

I opened the door. Who was there but Laura, scratching to open the door and come in the house. "The cops are after me. They're going to arrest me. Let me in!" I opened the door and Laura ran into the house. "Laura, what's wrong? What happened?" But Laura ran into the kitchen and sat down. She was hysterical and yelling "The cops are after me. They're going to arrest me." As crazy as Laura sometimes acted, there was no way that the police was going to arrest her. I gave her some tea and made her quiet down. "OK, Laura, what happened? The cops are not going to arrest you. You can stay here and I'll take you home in a while."

"Well, I went next door to get a head of cabbage that I needed for dinner. But they were all brown and rotten. I told Marta (the cashier) that it was disgraceful that there wasn't better produce in the store. Marta told me to complain to the owner who was standing in one of the aisles. So I went to him and said 'Hey, look at this cabbage, it's rotten. Why don't you keep good produce in the store?' But he told me, 'That's all that you Mexicans deserve.' And I got so mad that I hit him on the head with the cabbage and ran. Now that's why the cops are going to arrest me. Hide me here until I can get home." Well, Laura eventually went home. The cops never arrested her. But the store always had better produce.

I had a wonderful opportunity to be a Research Fellow at MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology). And as usual I went to tell Laura that I was leaving for Boston, taking the children, and would be gone for one year. Laura's answer - WHAT'S MIT?

When I was offered the job as Executive Director of Chicano Federation, Laura was just incensed I would even consider taking the job. "You can't do it. What will happen to the

kids? Who's going to take care of them? You are too nice to work with those people. They're going to eat you alive, ETC., ETC., ETC." Laura was upset enough to go to the Board of Directors of Chicano Federation and tell them in a public meeting that I was not the kind of person to work for the Federation, that I wouldn't do a job, that they were a bunch of crazy people to hire me, ETC., ETC., ETC.

Well, I went to work for the Federation and stayed over 12 years as Executive Director and stayed Laura's friend. At the time that I had been at the Federation about five years, Laura came to see me especially to tell me that she was glad that I had become Director and that she was wrong. I had raised great kids, I did a terrific job, and I was still her friend.

### **Irma Castro**

\*\*\*\*\*

One of my fondest memories is the marches we had with the children of the community when we wanted the world to know that we needed a park adjacent to the bay. There we would be, Laura leading the way like a Pied Piper, all the children, community members and teachers chanting ... "All The Way To The Bay, Hey! ... All The Way To The Bay, Hey! ... All The Way To The Bay, Hey!" Talk about Spirit of the Barrio. I'm sure the children never forgot the feeling of unity. I know I've never forgotten.

Another memory that comes to the surface as I remember the love and respect I feel for Laura. Early on, when the clinic first opened, Laura and I talked about the children feeling comfortable coming to the clinic...about them finding fun and laughter there as well as healing. We decided to try a story hour. Each week, we were met by Laura who took us up on the very top floor and invited the children to listen to stories. Each week a few more students would come until we had a full house. We even got some students from San Diego State's class in Story Telling to come and assist. We all had a grand time!

Laura was all-inclusive. I never felt like an outsider. Though Anglo in body she knew I was Chicana in corazon. She included us - my husband and family - in her Celebrations of the Barrio and she participated in our celebrations of the family. I was so touched that she took time to come to my 50th birthday party that my family gave. She was indeed an honored guest and part of my "family".

### **Gail Guth, Principal of Ericson Elementary, former teacher at Perkins Elementary (Lowell)**

\*\*\*\*\*

In 1974 I spent a year at the then Chicano Clinic as a student intern working as a pharmacist and Physician's Assistant. I had actually met Laura Rodriguez a few years earlier when as a community activist, she took part in the takeover of the clinic's building. But it was at the clinic that I really got to know this incredible woman with the heart of a lioness and a temper to match. She worked tirelessly in the clinic and no job was too little or too big for her to handle.

It was a critical time for the clinic with funding cuts and management changes. Several times a year, potential contributors and funding sources would tour the clinic. On one occasion, an individual, who will remain nameless, ordered Laura to remove all the community volunteers before he arrived, so the clinic would appear more professional to his guests. Laura knew exactly what he meant by "more professional" and she expressed to me how angry this request made her with words of non-scripture that only she could utter.

Yet, the survival of the clinic and the health services to her beloved Logan Heights was her life passion. So on the day of the VIP tour, she arranged a "tamale" assembly line in the kitchen in order to keep all of our faithful volunteers busy and out of the way (out of sight) of the so-called "VIPs". Her compliance with this request was painful and she seemed to never forgive herself, or that nameless individual.

She taught me an important lesson that day, for I was adamantly opposed to any compliance on principle alone. Sometimes we have to be willing to give up a little of ourselves, no matter how painful, to gain a greater good for the whole. The clinic could not have served the thousands who have walked through its doors on my principles. Laura eventually banned that nameless individual from any association with the clinic. The clinic survived those turbulent years and today is a model for community clinics. Laura Rodriguez must be smiling ... I miss you Laura.

**David Valladolid, Policy Administrator, United Domestic Workers, of America and  
First Vice Chair of the Chicano Federation Board of Directors**

\*\*\*\*\*

AMIGA DE TODOS...

I KNEW LAURA RODRIGUEZ  
SINCE 1971 WHEN THE LUNCHEON  
WAS CALLED "AN HOUR IN THE BARRIO"  
LAURA WORKED SO HARD MAKING TAMALES TO HELP OTHER  
PEOPLE LESS FORTUNATE THAN  
HERSELF BY MEANS OF A  
HEALTH CLINIC.

MAY HER SPIRIT OF THE BARRIO  
ALWAYS BE WITH US.

**Margarita L. Alvarez, Coast Citrus Distributors, Inc.**

\*\*\*\*\*

I Remember Laura Rodriguez

Otto Hirr (retired SDG&E executive) and Laura were quite a team getting this Clinic off the



ground. Over the years, they developed a special affection for one another. In fact, there were times some of us caught Otto and Laura sleeping together.

Yes, during the monthly Board of Directors meetings held right here in the Clinic's kitchen, when Laura would speak, Otto would sleep. And when Otto would speak, Laura would sleep. Theirs was a special kind of affection.

**Told by Don Parent of SDG&E at the "Spirit of the Barrio" luncheon during a "roast" of Laura on her 80th birthday.**

\*\*\*\*\*

I first met Laura in 1972 when I was assigned as a patrol officer in the area. It seemed that she always knew who was doing something wrong in the neighborhood. But, the same way she knew who the "Bad Guys" were in the area, she also knew which police officers were not doing their job. And she would let them know. I mean, she would let them **know**. You never forgot it if Laura chewed you out for not doing your job, but she would never forget if you did a good job.

**Ernie Salgado**

\*\*\*\*\*

#### I REMEMBER LAURA

When we think back on our lives there are those that have deeply impacted each of us in significant ways. Laura was one of those people. She is a role model we all looked up to - a mother, a teacher, an advocate for the community she cared for and so deeply loved. Most importantly she was our friend. There is a part of her in each one of us and she fully expects us to carry on with her work. In our minds we will always hear that part of her guiding us forward.

I recall many of her achievements but what I remember most was her ability to reach out and profoundly touch everyone around her. In her typical and very unassuming way she quietly gave of herself to anyone who needed her help. Her dedication was as unwavering as the foundation of the Clinic. The Clinic we have all watched grow over the years is a physical testimony to her accomplishments. The real testimony, however, is the people; mothers, fathers and children who have been helped since the doors first opened so many years ago. I cannot think of a greater legacy to leave behind.

I also recall the "Luncheon at the Barrio" when it was first held in the auditorium of the original Clinic, and watched it grow to what it is today. What I remember most about the luncheons are Laura's tamales. I always looked forward to Laura's tamales. They will forever be close to my stomach.

We will always carry Laura in our hearts and in our memories. She taught each of us how to

be better people, and that bit of herself she gave to each of us, is now part of each of us. Don't be sad, she would not want that. She would want us to celebrate her life, our lives and the lives of the people around each of us.

Jay Shepard

\*\*\*\*\*

Laura had a mischievous side and would often delight in pulling something over on someone. She said things like, "The old F- -T believed it." This was also said with a lot of satisfaction. One day I went to pick Laura up for some event. Mr. Rodriguez was laying on the couch rather sick. He was pale and complained of having had stomach flu for the last couple of days. He also mentioned that he must be getting old. Since every time he took a drink, he got sick. I showed a lot of sympathy for his plight; however, Laura not only failed to show sympathy, but seemed to be in a hurry to leave this sick man alone. As we reached my car and wheeled out of Mr. Rodriguez' ear shot, Laura smiled and said, "You know why the old f - - t is so sick? I put some medicine to induce vomiting in his booze bottle. Every time he takes a drink, he will get sick." She was so thrilled to have pulled this over on Mr. Rodriguez. Her whole face smiled with the inner smugness of a person who had achieved a secret accomplishment.

Laura considered the security of the clinic her personal task. In the 70's and early 80's, when the entry alarm went off during the night, Laura would receive a call from the alarm company. She would get up and take her dog Blanco for a walk over to see why the alarm had gone off. It could be 2:00 a.m., and Laura, in a nightgown with a coat over it and the famous bandana would go over to "check it out". She would unlock the door, send Blanco in and follow him in to make sure there wasn't a problem. Then she would wait for the police. Laura would then lay in wait for the police so she could yell at them for having taken so long. It used to worry me that she was so brave about walking the streets at 2:00 a.m., even if she had Blanco with her. She also said, "No one would dare mess with me." She was right! No one messed with Laura.

**Maria Garcia, Principal, Baker Elementary School**

\*\*\*\*\*

I was one of Laura's first doctors when she started what was then the Chicano Community Health Center, and she and I would care for the patients one evening per week. She would take the history on most of the patients, who spoke only Spanish. I gradually learned to speak some medical Spanish and would talk to the patients directly. Laura would also run the pharmacy and give the patients their needed drugs. We would see and treat 30 to 50 patients each night from 7 to 10 p.m.. This was after Laura opened the clinic each morning at 7 a.m., closing each night after the last patient was examined and treated.

Between directors, I was the acting medical director, but the daily operation of the clinic was always directly in Laura's capable hands. At one period, when the building was owned by

Neighborhood House (we were paying rent at the time), Laura asked me to accompany her to then Mayor Pete Wilson in an attempt to purchase the building and land (Otto Hurr can tell you more about this). In any event, Mayor Wilson, who spent a considerable amount of time with us, was instrumental in helping us with this purchase.

At this time, I decided to give up my medical activity and served my five-year term of duty on the medical board. During this period, Otto and I were successful in having Laura appointed "Woman of the Year" by the Salvation Army of San Diego, and since I was instrumental in her receiving this honor, she asked me to accompany her when she was given this accolade. She was my irreplaceable and dearest friend, one who was totally dedicated to helping people.

**Donald H. Atlas, M.D., (Former) Medical Director, the Chicano Free Clinic**

\*\*\*\*\*

There I was, my first day of work at the Logan Heights Family Health Center, and, wanting to make a good impression, I arrived a little early, 7:30 a.m., to be exact. I saw the security guard open the back door. Not knowing the routine, I was going to introduce myself, but then the guard told this tiny, frail white-haired woman to "guard the door". I figured she was keeping the patients out until the staff arrived. As I got to the door, I tried to just walk in, but this "Chiquita" mujer put her hand to my chest, stopping me and asking,

"Do you belong here?"

"Today is my first day here", I answered.

"Which department", she asked.

"Pediatrics"

"What's your name?"

"Yolanda Martinez"

"You're not from here, are you?" and before I could answer, the security guard came back and thus she removed her hand from my chest. I watched her as she walked down the hall. I finally had the pleasure of meeting the legend. Well, just what did I expect? This was the woman who laid down before the tractor in the founding of Chicano Park. This was the woman who had chained herself to the doors of the clinic to keep it for the community. Now I know some of the reasons why the person to whom I looked to as a role model once told me that if she could be any other person in the world, she would have wanted to be as much as possible like Laura Rodriguez.

**Yolanda Martinez, Pediatric Case Manger, LHFHC**

\*\*\*\*\*

This true story/memory is a tribute to two real pioneering spirits of the Chicano healthcare movement of the 70's and whose diametrically opposed belief systems helped to shape the present day Logan Heights Family Health Center and its services.

Mrs. Laura Rodriguez and Ms. Carmen Lopez Morales were great dames of their times. Mutual respect and admiration notwithstanding, these two women stood for and on the opposite poles of the abortion/birth control issue so much so that I witnessed some of the most furious cat/mouse games ever played out in full teatro libre style, right there on the corner of National and Beardsley Avenues. The moral and feminist issues that continue to rage today with such horrific outcomes were deeply and intimately felt by those two wonderful Chicanas then. Sra. Rodriguez was adamantly anti and Carmen was resourcefully pro and working with Planned Parenthood, where many Latinas would go for services, due to the Chicano Free Clinic not providing any birth control.

Where the teatro comes in is that las mujeres de Logan Heights lacked transportation up town to the Planned Parenthood offices for intake or other services. So Carmen, having the courage and convictions to act on her moral beliefs and access to the Planned Parenthood Econovan, would organize a weekly pick-up and delivery routine at the Clinica corner that just infuriated Laura. So what would ensue would be Carmen driving in and scooping up las mujeres with such speed that many times the sliding door of the van was still in motion as the van would pull away from the curb, with Laura rushing out the door in chase, screaming her moral position along with more than a few "bleeps". On less energetic days, Dona Laura would just hang out the window and shout out her references. Both women were invigorated by their special responses to the circumstances, and even more importantly held each other in great respect and regard. Anyone that had the honor of knowing these two special Chicanas, as I did, learned the invaluable lesson of how to argue and disagree with mutual respect and for the greater good of their community.

**Tonatzin Guerra Rennick**

\*\*\*\*\*

ONE OF MY MEMORIES OF LAURA THAT ALWAYS INSPIRES ME IS RECALLING A NIGHT BEFORE ONE OF THE LUNCHEONS. THE PARKING LOT BESIDE THE ADOBE BUILDING HAD FINALLY BEEN SURFACED. BUT SEVERAL OF THE TENT PEG HOLES HAD BEEN ACCIDENTLY COVERED WITH ASPHALT. BY THE TIME IT WAS DISCOVERED, IT WAS NEARLY 11 PM AND ALMOST EVERY ONE HAD ALREADY GONE. GEORGE VARELA, THEN PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD TOLD LAURA TO GO HOME AND REST SO SHE COULD OVERSEE THE VOLUNTEER-LADIES COOKING TAMALES IN THE MORNING. WE SAID "GOOD NIGHT" AND WATCHED HER WALK AWAY IN HER FAMILIAR GAIT, WEARING A HOUSEDRESS, HER HAIR POKING OUT FROM UNDER HER BANDANA AND STRAW HAT, HER SHOELACES UNTIED, AS THEY ALWAYS WERE. WE STUMBLED AROUND IN THE SEMI-DARK, GUESSING WHERE THE NEXT HOLE MIGHT BE. NEXT THING YOU KNOW, THERE'S LAURA, POKING HOLES IN THE ASPHALT TOO, WITH A TIRED SMILE ON HER FACE, BUT WITH A DETERMINED AIR TO SEE THAT EVERYTHING WOULD BE READY FOR THE MORNING.

LAURA HAD A GENUINE SENSE OF LEADERSHIP. SHE WAS ALWAYS IN THE TRENCHES, NEVER GIVING ORDERS FROM A DISTANCE, KNOWING THAT TRUE LEADERS, LEAD BY EXAMPLE. WHETHER IT WAS SWEEPING THE CLINIC'S FLOORS OR PLAYING DAVID TO THE ESTABLISHMENT'S GOLIATH, SHE WAS ALWAYS THERE, SHOWING US THE WAY. SHE WAS MY MENTOR AND MY FRIEND AND I WILL NEVER FORGET HER.

LEA DAVILA

