

Literary Opinions

Mrs. Hilda Arevalos, or as we De La Zerda kids call her, Mrs. A.

Mrs. A. was a true Renaissance woman, multi-talented and youthful in spirit. She had *joie de vivre* and a zest for life that captivated everyone. She had a natural talent for interior decorating and a flair for fashion. Her gardening was to be envied and her cooking was divine. She was a skilled guitar player and enjoyed dancing. She could have been a professional artist, musician or painter.

Instead she chose to become the loving wife of her sweetheart, Henry, whom she adored. "I loved that man so much, I really loved that man," she would say wistfully for many years after his untimely death. She was a devoted mother to Mona, Enrique and Laura, as well as a loving grandmother to her grandchildren, great grandchildren and a great-great granddaughter, in whom she delighted. And she loved her dogs, Silk and Sissy. She had many friends and might as well have adopted the De La Zerda kids, we were underfoot so much. She is a mom in our hearts.

She made a beautiful, Christian home for her children taking them to voice and dance classes at the Mexican Cultural Institute, to choir at Laurel Heights Methodist Church and to events at "Momo" Florinda's church, La Trinidad United Methodist. Mrs. A. enjoyed taking her children and later her grandchildren to the beach, fishing, to parties and concerts, often with friends in tow.

She had a tremendous knack for putting together a unique look, somewhere between bohemian and high fashion. She wore berets, scarves, pretty belts, animal print sweaters, sunglasses and unusual jewelry and combined them effortlessly to create an *only-Hilda-could've-thought-of-that* look.

The last time I spoke with Mrs. A. at a recent luncheon, we spoke only of the here and now. Suddenly, she raised a foot up onto her chair and said, "Look at my shoes." I admired her chic tennis shoes. She said, "They're something ...they're, uh", she hesitated. I said, "They're Coach sneakers, Mrs. A. They're very nice."

She shrugged. "Jessica got them for me." I think Mrs. A. loved fashion regardless of brand names.

Mrs. A. also had chutzpah; she was a highly intelligent woman with a quick, often provocative, wit. I remember telling her once when Mona, Olivia and I were in high school that we'd sort of "crashed" a party and were asked to leave. It was common for kids to crash parties then, so it really stung to be "kicked out". I thought the hostess was just jealous. To that Mrs. A. replied, "You should have told her 'I've been thrown

out of better places!'" I still chuckle when I think about that. She soothed my hurt pride and replaced it with righteous indignation.

Mrs. A. was the cool mom. She didn't just take us places. She joined in the fun. She'd talk and joke with our friends and enjoyed poking fun at some of our silly boyfriends more than we did. Never afraid to speak her mind, she became a strong advocate for justice in her community. She even joined in protests at City Hall, especially defending the rights of immigrants. She was very proud of her Mexican heritage and would often say, even recently at Ali's graduation luncheon, "I never say I'm Hispanic or I'm a Latina. I always say I'm Mexican... *Soy me-ji-ca-na...*" Needless to say, she always held her chin high when she spoke those words.

After her children were grown, she gave much of her time serving lunch and performing guitar recitals at the Commander's House senior center. She provided food for anyone she saw in need and she supported the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center and the artists of La Casita de MujerArtes.

People younger than herself loved her company and she had many admirers, but her heart and soul belonged to her sweetheart, Henry, whom she has joined in the place Our Lord has provided for them in Heaven.

On behalf of the Arevalos family I want to thank Mrs. A's provider, Eusebia (Chata) Gomez who tended to her, took her places, ran errands and went beyond the call of duty for the last three years. Chata was with Mrs. A. at the time of her passing, as was my sister Olivia, who loves "Hildie" as her own mother. We are praising the Lord for Chata's devotion to Mrs. A. God bless you for your loyalty and dedication, Chata.

On behalf of the De La Zerda family, I'd like to say: We are grateful to God for bringing "Momo" Florinda, the Romos and the Arevalos families into our lives since our childhoods on Mistletoe and Woodlawn Avenues, when we dug holes under a backyard fence and became lifelong friends. We have had Henry and Hilda as second parents and Mona, Laura and Enrique as another set of siblings.

We thank Mrs. A. for countless fond memories throughout the years.

She taught us to be proud and to speak out. She provided us with a great role model of a true Renaissance woman. She did it all. And she had a blast doing it!

You will be missed Mrs. A. We love you forever.

