



Carmen María Alvarado Rivera

June 26, 2018

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November 23, 1927 - June 26, 2018

Carmen María Alvarado Rivera, a devoted mother and dedicated social worker who put the needs of others before her own, passed away Tuesday, June 26 at St. John's Riverside Hospital in Yonkers from complications related to pneumonia. She was 90 years old.

In many ways, Carmen was a trailblazer. On her own, she raised three children in Harlem and volunteered as an auxiliary police officer to make sure that her neighborhood was safe for her children. At night, she studied at the City College of New York near the family home to earn a bachelor's and master's degree and always insisted her children study hard and be respectful toward others. She was a social worker for the NYC Department of Welfare who cared deeply about the families and children she cared for. She taught her children that it was important to listen to all sides with an empathetic heart.

Her trajectory is amazing, especially considering that she grew up during the depression in Orocóvis, a remote village in the Central Mountain Range of Puerto Rico and sometimes went days without eating. She moved to New York City, as many Puerto Ricans did, during the Great Migration of the 1950s, looking for work because of disastrous federal programs such as Operation Bootstrap, which put the interests of U.S. corporations over the people of Puerto Rico. In New York, she was denied jobs because of her complexion and accent, even though she spoke fluent English. But, as Carmen always said, for every problem there is a solution. She was tenacious and found a way to provide for her three children and send them to parochial schools. Her strong religious faith gave her fortitude. She was a devout Catholic who prayed the rosary every night.

As a young woman and even in her middle-age, she made heads turn. Carmen had long, brown hair and large brown eyes that sparkled. Many suitors came her way but she was not interested. She always said that she wanted to focus on raising her children. She did a

fine job. Her eldest child, Denise, whom she called “Denisita,”. Her son, Eric Vega, whom she called “Sonny” and “el hombre de la casa,” manages a medical company. Her youngest daughter, Cindy E. Rodríguez, whom she called “Chellie” and “la chiquita de la casa,” is a former journalist who teaches journalism at a private college in Boston.

To her family and friends, she was known as "Tití." She was modest and humble, a woman of great determination who thanked God for her achievements. She was one of five children born to the late Edelmiro Alvarado and Carmen María Rivera Muñoz. She was very close to her older brother Victor “Vitín” Alvarado and younger sister Carmen Nélide “Nelly” Alvarado growing up. Her younger brother Ramón Luis “Cuso” Alvarado was 21 years younger than her and while they didn’t grow up together, they became close later in life.

Carmen loved to dance and sing. She played the guitar, the cuatro and piano. She loved all kinds of music: bolero, Cumbia, salsa, merengue, conjunto, corrido, danza, bomba, plena, guaracha, trio romántico as well as the music of the Beatles and Elvis Presley.

She was a longtime member of the Star Senior Center in Washington Heights. The director of the center called Carmen a “spark plug.” After lunch, when the center would play music, mom was always the first to jump up to dance. She would dance with everyone, weaving her way through dance floor, summoning friends to join her. She also loved to paint and read and was always interested in learning new things.

The hardships she endured never altered her sweet disposition. Even in her last months, when she was weak following a cardiac arrest and unable to do much for herself, she would joke with her caretakers at the nursing home. Mom would hug them and thank them for caring for her. The aides told her children that Carmen was their favorite resident because she made them laugh.

Carmen was buried in the family tomb at Cementerio Los Cipreses in Bayamón, Puerto Rico, July 3, 2018, surrounded by family, including her sister Nelly, younger brother Cuso and youngest daughter Chellie. Her brother Vitin is living in a memory care facility in Orlando, but was there in spirit, along with his children Blanca, Eva “Gissy,” and Gaby. She was interred alongside her mother Carmen María Rivera Muñoz, who passed away in 2004. Her siblings all plan to be buried together there, under a bronze statue of la Virgen del Carmen.

Aside from her children and siblings, Carmen is survived by her two granddaughters: Christina and Alyssa Vega who lovingly called her “Mima.” She is also survived by many

cousins, uncles and aunts including her devoted cousin Lucy Rivera.

We love her dearly.

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