



## LAURA DIAZ “CHEF LALA”

Celebrity Chef & Owner of Savor! Catering

CHEF LALA’S (FULL NAME, LAURA DIAZ) ENGAGING SMILE AND EXPRESSIVE HAZEL EYES BELIE THE FACT OF A HORRIFIC AUTOMOBILE ACCIDENT THAT ALTERED THE COURSE OF HER ENTERTAINMENT CAREER. UNDAUNTED, THE MULTITALENTED LALA REGROUPED, MERGING HER PASSIONS OF PERFORMING ON A STAGE, COOKING, HER EDUCATION IN NUTRITION, AND EMPOWERING THE PUBLIC TO MAKE HEALTHIER CHOICES WITH THEIR TRADITIONAL FOODS.

LALA IS A THIRD GENERATION RESTAURATEUR AND OWNS A VERY SUCCESSFUL CATERING COMPANY, SAVOR! HER CLIENTELE INCLUDES HIGH PROFILE VIPS, ENTERTAINERS, AND POLITICIANS. SHE HAS ALSO HOSTED MANY COOKING PROGRAMS AND IS THE SPOKESPERSON FOR ORGANIZATIONS INCLUDING THE AMERICAN DIABETES ASSOCIATION. LALA’S PASSION HAS EARNED HER COVETED FOOD INDUSTRY AWARDS AND HER EXTENSIVE COMMUNITY EFFORTS FURTHER DEFINE HER PASSION TO HELP OTHERS BY PROMOTING HEALTHY LIFESTYLES – ONE MEAL AT A TIME.

~ LAURA

## Inspirational

*Good food and music* were the cornerstones of my childhood growing up in East Los Angeles. I had a great childhood and learned early on the value of hard work. My parents, Luis and Raquel Diaz, were Mexican immigrants who owned various eateries, which is where my passion for food all began. The restaurant business was a family affair and as soon as we were old enough, my siblings, (Myrna, Danny and Veronica) and I were enlisted to help. As a young girl, I often spent summers in Mexico with my grandparents where I indulged in my culture. My parents bought American goodies and my siblings and I set up a little stand to sell the treats. My entrepreneurial spirit had emerged!

Even though I was helping in the restaurants, like my mariachi grandfather, I always knew I was an entertainer at heart. I sang with mariachi bands from age five until I was about ten years old. When I was twelve, I accompanied my sister to an audition for *Pares y Nones*, a five-girl band that would tour with *Menudo*, a wildly successful and popular Latin boy band. There was a minimum age requirement of fifteen, so I didn’t think I had much of a chance. I was surprised when I was chosen and was soon touring the world. I was living my dream as an entertainer in front of thousands of people.

My life was not all song and dance as I often felt out of place. My band mates were older and always seemed to be talking about boys or bras, which held little interest for the late-blooming tomboy in me. However, the kitchen has always exerted a gravitational pull on me as a welcoming space and it was no different on tour. I enjoyed hanging out with the “kitchen help” who encouraged my visits but unbeknownst to me, they held the voting power to whom stayed in the band. I continued touring with Menudo for five years until I was seventeen. I was tutored while on tour and my family values kept me grounded. It was an amazing experience at such a young age.



When I was not touring, I helped at the family restaurant and attended a private Catholic school. I knew education was important but was disappointed by the advice and lack of guidance as my high school counselors failed to challenge me. High School was awkward, even though I had many friends, I felt out of place and the paparazzi made it even more difficult. Because of my love for cars, I took Auto Shop class instead of the traditional girl elective of Home Economics. I wanted to do what I loved, not what was popular and certainly not what I was told would interest me.



After graduating from high school I recognized the importance of a solid education that would last me a lifetime. I pursued a degree in cardio-pulmonary education, only to find it wasn't the right career for me.

I began to tour and perform as a solo artist with my band and dancers. I was in excellent physical and mental shape and I was ready to take on the world. Little did I know singing solo for 75,000 people at a music festival at the Houston Astrodome would be my last concert. While negotiating my record deal, I was involved in a serious car accident that left me unable to dance or walk without pain. My back injury limited the use of my left leg. My dream of continuing to dance and sing was shattered. I couldn't do even the simplest maneuver of my highly disciplined physical fitness regimen and I was emotionally distraught.

Instead of complaining about that door slamming shut – I looked out the window. I had to find my passion and not focus on what I could not do, but instead create what I was going to do. Up to this point, I had shied away from the food industry because I saw how hard my parents worked and the long hours they spent in their restaurants, rarely taking a vacation. I discovered that I really liked cooking by exploring with new

flavors, textures and world cuisine. Paired with my enjoyment of eating and creating something decadent from food, I continued to be lured into the food industry. I learned a lot from my dad who is an amazing cook. When I opened my first restaurant it sparked a hunger for knowledge and I wanted to know the 'why' of cooking and how flavors changed when food was prepared a certain way. Subsequently, I pursued an education in culinary arts at a Le Cordon Bleu school and then opened my catering company, Savor! I loved showcasing the exotic flavors of our Latin food. My business was built on a pristine family reputation that served celebrities in entertainment as well as politicians, including two United States presidents and Vicente Fox, former president of Mexico.

Around the same time, a friend asked me to teach a healthy cooking class at a church. That class sparked a new direction for me to study the fundamentals of

*Quote*

**I HAVE LEARNED THAT PEOPLE WILL FORGET WHAT YOU SAID, PEOPLE WILL FORGET WHAT YOU DID, BUT PEOPLE WILL NEVER FORGET HOW YOU MADE THEM FEEL**

~ MAYA ANGELOU



to responsibly educate people about diabetes and its correlation to food, I returned to higher education and obtained several certifications in nutrition.

In addition to my catering business, I host nutritious cooking programs on television and in the community. My web site [www.cheflala.com](http://www.cheflala.com) has fresh and enticing recipes and techniques and tips for a healthy lifestyle. I have also written two cookbooks in an effort to promote wholesome and nutritious meals. All of these efforts are in hopes of reducing the epidemic of obesity and the many diseases associated with being unfit. I am also a lifelong learner, which is necessary in my field as nutritional guidelines and rules are constantly changing. In addition, I am certified in fitness nutrition, kids nutrition, and lifestyle and weight management. I am an empowerment speaker advocating healthy lifestyles that can affect the quality of each person's health and life.

My goal is to inspire and empower people through my passion for food and nutrition. Being successful in business allows me to have a platform for educating people. I believe in making a difference through innovative giving and volunteering. I believe in educational outreach, which builds strong and productive communities. Knowing that I can make a difference with people comes from within and I accept and embrace my purpose in life. In hindsight, the car accident made me who I am today. I enjoy nothing more than to celebrate any occasion around a big table laden with delicious food surrounded by the people I love.

nutrition and how good nutrition can positively impact our health. Affected personally by a strong family history of diabetes, great-tasting meal choices previously seemed like an oxymoron, especially with a cultural twist. Diabetes, hypertension, and obesity are huge problems worldwide. Realizing the need

On a personal note, I have a three-year old son, Maddox and my priorities have shifted with motherhood. I want to provide my son with the best opportunities possible and inspire him to great heights. I caution him as I do all young people – choose your path wisely as the decisions and choices you make today can and will be the foundation for your entire future.

I would also suggest to all Latinas to have a life plan but remain flexible and first take care of yourself so that you may be a more effective individual in your life's journey. Decide what you want from life, work toward that goal and you will arrive in the place of your choosing. Mentors come in all shapes and sizes and can be as simple as reading an inspirational book, or having a conversation with a counselor, neighbor or sibling. Always look for opportunities to learn and try new things. If you do not like your career path you can completely change it. Look at me – perhaps it was destiny, luck, chance, hard work, talent, or purpose driven passion—I dovetailed my experiences as a music entertainer, healthcare professional, and a love for food into what is my life and career is today.

Perhaps the best advice I can share to young Latinas is to encourage you to stand up and say, "I want to be my personal best." Celebrate your greatness. Life is a gift you get every day, that is why they call it the present. Indulge in yours daily. Go after what you truly want from life and you too can live your dreams out loud.

*Advice*

**MAKE TIME FOR YOURSELF. AS WOMEN, ESPECIALLY LATINAS, I THINK WE HAVE THIS GENE IN US THAT MAKES US VERY NURTURING. WE WANT TO TAKE CARE OF EVERYBODY, ESPECIALLY OUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS. UNFORTUNATELY THE RESULT IS THAT EVERYONE ELSE'S ISSUES, PROBLEMS AND WELL-BEING ARE PLACED BEFORE OUR OWN NEEDS.**

*Chef LaLa inspires many people to make healthier food choices, which will improve their overall quality of life. She supports the American Diabetes Association [www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org) and Para Los Niño's [www.paralosninos.org](http://www.paralosninos.org)*