



## **Gladys Sepulveda**

Attended 1985-2003

“What are you doing for the next 10 days,” asked the AF pilot in full uniform of the beautiful young woman. At her urging, her father had introduced them following the worship service at the church the pilot’s father pastored in Brooklyn NY. Little did she realize that her answer would stretch the 10 days into 46 years of marriage. But it’s not surprising considering their similar backgrounds: both native Puerto Ricans (Gladys from Aguirre, Carlos from Lajas); raised in NYC; attended Rev. Carlos Sepúlveda’s church; first-borns with 3 siblings each (Gladys, Sylvia, Nancy, Priscilla; Carlos, Ruben, Judith, Doris); teenage years under strict Christian fundamental upbringing; well educated; looking to expand their horizons. Gladys dreamed of owning her own home away from NYC and becoming a nurse, but her family’s finances were insufficient for a formal education in medicine. Her determination led her to study everything she could about the practice of medicine in case she would need it later in life. Carlos Jr. had been chased by the Selective Service draft into joining the USAF Aviation Cadet program of pilot training and had earned his wings three years earlier. Gladys saw in this military man the opportunity to change her life and fulfill her dreams. (She would later claim that she fell in love with the uniform more than the man.)

After the honeymoon they drove to Topeka Kansas where Carlos flew 4-engine aerial-refueling tankers. Gladys loved the glamorous life of an officer’s wife, hobnobbing with other military wives. She even decided to learn how to cook, so she called her Mom asking instructions on roasting a Thanksgiving turkey, a very ambitious undertaking for a beginner. Two bachelor friends of Carlos joined them for Thanksgiving dinner but the turkey tasted awful: her mother had failed to mention that the sack inside the bird must be removed before cooking. Everybody had a good laugh over the culinary skills of this novice cook (who later in life became an expert).

It was a great disappointment to Gladys when six months into their new life he decided to leave the Air Force and resume his studies for a degree in Electrical Engineering. It was very difficult to change careers in the middle

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of a recession, but her parents generously offered to take them in while they worked to afford their own living arrangements. During this time God blessed them with baby girl Cheryll Lynn. Eventually he landed a job with the prestigious firm Bell Telephone Laboratories, whose relocation to Holmdel NJ (and the GI Bill) allowed them to purchase a beautiful home in the suburbs of Lakewood NJ. The family took to suburban living like a duck to water; it had been a lifelong goal for both of them. Soon her parents moved nearby and helped to raise Cheryll in a Christian manner.

Fast-forward five years: the desire to improve their lot led Carlos to accept employment by ITT in San Juan PR as manager of circuit design at their R&D labs, with expatriate benefits and a substantial increase in salary. To Carlos, it was fulfillment of his ambition to live in a mild climate high up on the island of their birth in a home with a pool. To Gladys it was a cultural shock, as it is with a good many women in PR. At the time, women were not permitted to wear pants in public, machismo was rampant, no smoking in public, no shorts, etc. Fun-loving Gladys rebelled against those antiquated social prohibitions for women.

Cheryll's grandparents could not keep themselves away from their granddaughter for long, so Gladys and Carlos decided to return their favor and invited them to live with them in a small house they built on their property. Later Grandma Nellie learned that a neighbor's very young daughter had given birth to a beautiful baby boy but could not afford to care for him, so Gladys and Carlos made arrangements in 1974 to adopt the boy and named him Carlos Daniel (Danny).

Thankfully, PR society soon caught up with the times and Gladys found an outlet for her energies in volunteer work. She joined The Ladies' Auxiliary at San Pablo Hospital, and organized the volunteers so well they elected her President in 1979. Dr. Cadilla, Board Chairman of the hospital, prized her work, as did all the doctors. On one red-letter day of her life she was allowed her lifelong ambition of working in an OR, handing instruments to the surgeons just like a nurse. Later she joined the local chapter of the American Red Cross as a disaster services volunteer and worked on four disasters in the US mainland. By this time her skills as chef were honed so well she frequently cooked for large groups of ARC volunteers locally.

Gladys felt guilty spending so much time away from family chores so she would sneak out of the house after Carlos left for work and return to prepare the evening meal before he got home. Carlos made out he didn't notice, for in truth he was very proud of the work she did. Gladys recalled that back in her youth she would feel embarrassed by her father's habit of disappearing during family outings only to be found again witnessing to complete strangers about what God had done for him. Now that she was so involved in

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volunteer work, she realized what a great asset that would be for dealing with strangers.

She picked up the habit and made it into an art form, developing her unique gift of making friends of strangers as she witnessed about her Savior's love for her. Gladys had her priorities straight: she loved God above all else, loved her family, her friends, and everyone else, especially small children. She also loved animals and her friends were often shocked to see her playing with long garden snakes wrapped around her arm.

Gladys had a natural talent for making friends and she loved to party, so she soon found herself as hostess of lavish affairs around the pool that were attended by many. She would also help set up parties at her friends' homes. Whenever she arrived early at a party she would ask, "Who died?" and the quiet affair would soon turn into a celebration filled with laughter.

Both Gladys and Carlos felt a spiritual need to return to God's house. A visit to 2UC during the tenure of Pastors L'Anni and Bill Hill-Alto in 1985 convinced them to join. They were so enthused that they soon found themselves as members of Council, and for years afterward served as several different chairs. Pastor L'Anni formed a small group of prayer warriors that she called The Shepherds and she invited Carlos to join. He felt so honored that he donated the church's first computer, a state of the art Apple Macintosh SE with a nine inch B&W screen, similar to the one he used at work, and he taught Pastor L'Anni how to use it for the church bulletin, and Second Thoughts was born.



Second Union members Karen and Charlie Akers from Little Rock, AK invited four couples to attend the men's and women's Emmaus walks in Arkansas for the purpose of learning the skills involved in conducting walks and thus organize an Emmaus community in PR. Among them were Gladys and Carlos. Upon their return, the couples worked diligently to organize the program and recruit candidates from other local churches. Together with 30+ team members from AK, the first set of walks was conducted in 1990 at Casa Manresa retreat center in Aibonito PR.

With that small core of "veterans," the organization of the community began. Gladys became the Community Registrar, a job she held for the rest of her natural life and to which she dedicated her heart and soul. It was she who gave the program its name, "SONlights in PR." Carlos was elected as the first Community Lay Director

During this time Gladys was also busy in a monthly program originated by the Wesleyan Church in Guaynabo called Heart to Heart, feeding the poor and homeless in Old San Juan. Seeing such a great need for that

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ministry, she convinced members of several other churches, including the Outreach committee of 2UC, to emulate the program in their own churches. For over 20 years it has been a great blessing to the recipients of the nourishing food, as well as to all who have served their brethren.

Unfortunately for this loving family, tragedy struck in 2001 when Gladys was diagnosed with small-cell lung cancer with a poor prognosis. Chemotherapy and radiation followed which left her debilitated. But her spirits remained high and she began another ministry, that of evangelism. Her talent for making instant friends served her well and she spent much time talking to anyone who would listen about her Savior, even from her wheelchair at the waiting rooms of doctors' offices. Patients' spirits were lifted listening to this smiling lady in the wheelchair giving her faith witness.

The Lord took her home in 2003 while on a visit to her sister in SD. Her Second Union friends were devastated; they wanted a chance to say goodbye to her, so arrangements were made to bring her body back to PR where a memorial service was held in her honor in June 2003. She was 63 years old.

RIP faithful servant.

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