

# MARY CASTRO

## EXCITED TO BE AN ACTIVE ‘PRESIDENT’S WIFE’

*By Shirley Melikian Armbruster*



**M**ary Castro's role as "president's wife" presents a plate overflowing with responsibilities. But it also unleashed a cup overflowing with joy.

From the moment she learned that her husband would become the eighth president of California State University, Fresno, Mrs. Castro says she has been "thrilled beyond belief." This appointment is the fulfillment of a dream they shared.

"We wanted for a long time to come back home to the Valley," she says. "There just wasn't a fit that was right. When Joe got the call [offering him the Fresno State position], it was all joy. It was something we had hoped for, dreamed about, made sacrifices for as we moved to different areas to get experience."

As she settles into her new role and the family's new residence at University House, Mrs. Castro brings energy and enthusiasm for what she calls the "exciting adventure" ahead.

Her role, she says, is to support her husband and to help him be as productive as possible. That will include hosting and planning functions at University House, Bulldog Stadium, the Save Mart Center and other venues, and attending community events with President Castro.

She also is mom to their three children: Isaac, a graduate of UC Berkeley who spent a year serving in AmeriCorps, now works in an after-school program in Richmond and plans to become a teacher; Lauren, starting her fourth year at Humboldt State, who is majoring in critical race, gender and sexuality studies; and Jess, almost 3, the Castros' much wanted "bonus baby," who is enrolled at the Joyce M. Huggins Early Education Center on campus.

Mrs. Castro also is eyeing an oft-delayed personal goal: completing her college education. She attended Dominican College in San Rafael for one year, studying musical theater. She views being at Fresno State as the perfect opportunity to explore new interests and to achieve her goal of earning a degree.

Like many Fresno State students, Mrs. Castro comes from a hard-working family of modest means. She was raised in Laton, a small farming community 23 miles southeast of Fresno, where her father, Manuel Borges, milked cows for 40-plus years, earning only one or two days off a month. Her mother, Mary Borges, was a certified nursing assistant in nursing homes in Hanford and took on extra work doing in-home care or cleaning houses.

When she was 16, her father was injured and unable to work. She and her mother took over her father's responsibilities for four months — going to the barn, milking the cows and feeding the calves.



Cary Edmondson

**Above** - Mary Castro takes a tour of a Hanford dairy with Gloria Soares.

**Below** - President Castro and Mary Castro meeting staff at a welcome reception.



During her senior year in high school, she worked at a Burger King restaurant in Hanford where she met Joseph Castro, a UC Berkeley freshman home to work during his winter break. She needed the paycheck for her tuition and uniforms at Riverdale Christian Academy and to make payments on a car for which her parents had co-signed. She also gave a portion of each check to her parents to help cover household expenses.

Life was mostly good growing up, and she and her younger sister, Victoria, enjoyed close ties with their grandparents and extended Portuguese family.

A fond memory is frolicking in a makeshift swimming pool.

“Our houses on the dairies were not the most glamorous and never had swimming pools,” she recalls. “My dad would open up the irrigation drain in the front yard, which had a dip to it, and it would flood the yard. We would slip and slide like it was our swimming pool. Then we would lie back on the grass, with the smell of the fresh-cut alfalfa around us and enjoy the peace.”

Before she went to kindergarten, she spoke Portuguese, but “lost” it when she started school and the grandfather who spoke to her in his native tongue passed away. She still understands some of the language and hopes to relearn and use it again.

What she didn’t lose was her love for Portuguese culture and food: She’s marched in Portuguese *feira* celebrations throughout the San Joaquin Valley and at Pismo Beach, starting at age 6. One of her signature dishes is sopas, a soup of beef and cabbage served over sliced French bread that was brought to the U.S. by immigrants from the Azores.

Mrs. Castro loves to cook, and mindful of her husband’s Mexican heritage, has a good menudo recipe that her family loves. Last year, for the first time, she canned peaches from the family’s adopted tree at the Masumoto Family Farm in Del Rey.

She also has a passion for reading, instilled when her parents began \$2-a-month payments on an encyclopedia set sold to them by a traveling salesman. “That was a big deal for them to commit to, but my parents ‘got it,’ and it started a love of reading for me,” she says.

While Mrs. Castro is a digitally connected, high-tech woman, she’s old-school in her reading preference, resisting her older children’s suggestion to use an electronic reader.

“I have a passion for books and a respect for bound books. There’s just something about holding the books and looking at the paper. I see my parents making the sacrifice [to buy the encyclopedias] and my mom taking the time to read to me.”

Mrs. Castro is no stranger to the needs of students and their families. She worked as an information specialist in financial aid at UC Santa Barbara. Answering calls and helping students or parents understand the options available to them was her favorite part of the job.

At UCSB, she was the office representative during the annual campuswide United Way fundraising campaign. She was recognized during a special ceremony by the United Way two consecutive years with the Department Representative “Super-Star” Award for raising or increasing the most donations.

She says she is eager to learn of ways that she may become involved in programs at Fresno State that directly affect the lives of students.

Mrs. Castro knows much is required and expected of the Fresno State president’s wife, and after multiple moves for her husband’s career and the jobs that she has held, she feels ready. Her life experiences — from milking cows to enjoying vacations on Hawaii beaches and plenty in between — have prepared her for whatever is ahead.

Says Mrs. Castro, “Some jobs require heels, some jobs require boots. I can put on a pair of either to get it done.”

— Shirley Melikian Armbruster is the associate vice president for University Communications and Integrated Marketing.