



A Mother's Day Tribute to You, Your Mom, and All the Mamás

Alicia selects some of the beautiful moments when our brilliant guests recall a special moment with their moms, open up about the struggle to become a mother, and distill the wisdom and strength they learned from their mamás.

Alicia Menendez:

Hey, it's me, Alicia. It is Mother's Day. At its best, a day for moms to get a few hours of the recognition and love they deserve every day. Also, a nap. A nap would be so great. I know that Mother's Day can be hard for lots of people. Those who want to become moms and for whatever reason are finding that path more challenging than they imagined, those who miss their own moms or have complicated relationships with them, moms who are missing their kids. However today hits you, we are sending you love.

It will come as no surprise to you that as I sit down week after week with incredible Latinas, motherhood comes up a lot, and we have talked about it from all angles. Infertility, postpartum, figuring out how to work and mother, mothering our mothers, mothers who were santeras on the DL, and most often the awe we feel as we look back at what our mothers have sacrificed to make our lives possible. As someone who is both ambitious and has wanted to be a mom for a long time, I've always been fascinated by how women who have big careers and kids somehow make it all work. I've also been thinking a lot about motherhood, probably because I am at home with my own two children, and in quarantine, and I am missing my own mom, who I rely on for support, and levity, and who if I'm being honest, this moment has taught me that I ought to express my gratitude for more than I do. Mom, I love you.

So, in honor of Mother's Day, I want to share with you some of my favorite moments about motherhood. The first begins with journalist and broadcast legend, María Elena Salinas. I asked her a very open-ended question that brought us to infertility, miscarriage, and why she believes that family comes first.

Menendez: What's the biggest mistake you've ever made in life?

María Elena Salinas:

Yikes. That's a tough one.

Menendez: As she sips her tea.

Salinas: I think I started really looking into and trying to analyze mistakes after I became a mother, because then you're thinking about everything so much more. Everything comes into play. Maybe I made mistakes of deciding to cover a story when I shouldn't have, when I should've stayed with my daughters. Like when my daughter graduated from kindergarten,

I wasn't there. I was covering Antonio Villaraigosa's election in Los Angeles because I thought it was so important.

Because I grew up in, in my career, without Hispanic representation and I thought, I cannot believe that in Los Angeles, a city that is so important to Latinos, finally we have someone that might be mayor. I covered it, and I shouldn't have. I should've stayed. Not because he lost. I don't regret it because he lost that one time. But I should have stayed home and gone to my daughter's kindergarten graduation.

Menendez: But in the moment, it feels like a hard choice, especially because there are 10 hard choices leading up to it and there are 10 hard choices that follow it. I loved in your book, and I'm grateful to you in your book, that you talk about how important it was to you to be a mom and the lengths you went to to become a mom. It wasn't easy for you to get pregnant with those two girls, which we don't talk about in general, and we certainly don't talk about as Latinas. But you knew that you wanted those daughters.

Salinas: Oh, yeah.

Menendez: It was important to you. There are a lot of women I think also in our business who put that off and off and off if they want it for a long time. What would you say to someone who's like, "But you're laying out the problem. How will I be at the anchor desk and having a baby?" How do you just at one point say, "Okay, that's it. I'm going to do it."

Salinas: It can be done. You just have to respect your own priorities. You have to understand that - and this is gonna sound like family first, and it is family first - family should be. That doesn't mean that you have to leave your job. That doesn't mean that sometimes you might have to miss an important event from your family to cover a story that's important to your career or for yourself. You can't win them all. You can't win all your battles. You have to learn how to pick the battles that are important to you.

In the book that you mentioned, I write a letter to my daughters. I do say how there are some women, professional women, who decide to leave motherhood for later while they build up their careers. But to me, working was something I was doing while I waited for them to come.

Menendez: What would you say? Because I have-

Salinas: There's some people that do plan their lives out, and it comes out exactly the way that they planned them.

Menendez: I haven't met that person yet, but that must be lovely for them. What do you say to someone who is having trouble getting pregnant? Because I think that that is... It's a real truth. It's a truth for us as we get older, and I think it's particularly a choice for professional women, because we do put that choice off. And the longer you put it off, the harder it becomes.

Salinas: It does. I had my first daughter a month before I turned 40 and my second daughter at 42. I had lost two. I had two miscarriages before the first one, and one in between my two daughters. Of course, the first miscarriage I had, I said, "Oh my god, that's it. I will never be a mother." I was 37, so being pregnant at 37 for the first time, of course you think, "My biological clock has run out its course and it's not going to be able to happen." Especially because I had my first two miscarriages during a work trip.

Menendez: Where were you?

Salinas: One of them, I was in Mexico, and the other one I was in Chicago at an NHJ conference. Yep. I remember that. So, it can be done, especially now with the advance of ... There's so many medical advances that there's so many ways that you can have treatment for fertility.

Menendez: Can we just talk, can we talk? Because I think there's this thing we don't talk about, which is ... This is the crazy thing about how we talk about pregnancy, which is you were working. Did people around you even know that you were pregnant when you had those two miscarriages?

Salinas: Very few.

Menendez: It reminds me that you never know what someone's going through. You never know. Because that was then a happy secret that then all of a sudden became a very sad secret. I think as women we carry these secrets around and we go to work, and we show up in spite of it.

Salinas: Yeah.

Menendez: How did you, after having the two first miscarriages, keep going so that you would eventually get pregnant and have your girls?

Salinas: I really focused on, I really wanted to have a child. I really wanted to get pregnant, and I did go to a specialist, a fertility specialist, to do all the analysis possible to make sure that I could get pregnant again and that I would not lose the child. I remember when there was a trip, it was 1994. There was a mini revolution in Mexico, in Chiapas. The Zapatista Revolution. The story had just broke and their subcomandante Marcos was coming down to the city and for the first time we were going to see him. Mask and all, but we were going to see him for the first time.

The day before my trip, I went to the doctor and he told me, "You're pregnant. You can't travel." I said, "I have a trip tomorrow. It's an important trip. It's a very important trip." "If you're going to do this trip, you have to be careful. We have to inject progesterone every day." He gave me the syringes, and I said, "Well, what am I going to do?" I had to tell the producer that I was with. She was petrified, says, "What do you mean I'm going to have to inject you? What are you talking about?"

Menendez: This was not in the job description.

Salinas: When we got to Mexico, I remember we had to call in a nurse into the room. Because we were going to be on the road, she taught her how to inject me. One of the most important things, she said, "Make sure that you get the air out of the syringe, otherwise you'll kill her." And she was like, "No pressure." So, she practiced. She wasted a lot of syringes because she would practice on an orange, injecting the orange to make sure that she was doing it correctly. The photographer, they carried my purse, they carried everything for me. They treated me like a queen. I said, "I kind of like this."

But thank God Julia came out of it. We survived the trip. There was a lot of support at the time. But it's information that's hard to share, because you have that doubt on I need to show that as a woman, I can do the job just as well as a man can do it. But there are certain things in a woman's life, like motherhood, like pregnancy, that you have to deal with. Sometimes taking care of your parents, of elderly parents. Men usually don't do that. Women do that. But I think that it's a family affair. You need a support group. You can't do it on your own. Some people might not like me to say this, but husbands and boyfriends come and go, but your children are your children and they'll be there forever. Forever.

Your parents and your children are the one thing that will never go away. They will always, always be there.

Menendez: In the course of so many conversations, I've heard from dozens of women who've made their families wildest dreams come true. It's the moment we're all striving for, right? When we can pick up the phone, tell the people we love that their sacrifice has been worthwhile. This part of my conversation with climate change activist Nicole Hernández Hammer sticks with me, in part because when we talked, Nicole was still processing the loss of her mom, and missing her was very much in the room with us.

Menendez: When President Obama was still president, first lady Michelle Obama invited you to be her guest at one of his State of the Union addresses. Did you just pass out when you got that invite?

Nicole Hernández Hammer:

Oh yeah, I couldn't believe it. The first thing I did was call my mom and tell her, "We did it. We did something really great."

Menendez: Okay, and you also didn't say it to her in English, so tell me exactly how that call went down.

Hernández Hammer:

Okay. Give me a minute. Because she passed away two years ago.

Menendez: Oh, I'm sorry.

Hernández Hammer:

And so, I'm gonna take a minute.

Menendez: No, take all the minutes. Who knew it was gonna be the one on climate change that really wrecked us?

Hernández Hammer:

I know. Yeah, I called my mom.

Menendez: What did you say?

Hernández Hammer:

I said, "Vista mamá, vale la pena. Todos los sacrificios-" Well, I'm not going to do it, I'm not going to be able to do this. This is not going to happen.

Menendez: It felt worth it.

Hernández Hammer:

Yeah. I was like, "You made so many sacrifices." We did something great. It was nice. Yeah.

Menendez: And then when you met Michelle.

Hernández Hammer:

I actually stepped on her foot. I was so excited, and I brought my mom and I was like, "Mom, who would have thought? When we were in that plane from Guatemala that one day we would go to the White House." I had a picture, I wore a jacket and there was like a little pocket inside of it and I had a picture because after we came to Guatemala, I was just terribly homesick. My grandparents found a way to come over for a week and they said, "You should be so proud of your new country. We're going to take you to the White House." So, they took me to the White House, and I got an American flag and I just felt really patriotic. So, I had that picture of my grandparents. They had since passed away and I was holding an American flag in front of the White House, and so I took that in my pocket and I said to my mom, "Who would think that Guatemalans, coming here struggling, we didn't even know how to turn the water on. We had to like try to figure it out. And now we get to go to the White House. We get to go inside." It was amazing.

Ad: *Is there something that's getting in the way of you living the life you want? Of you being happy? In my own life, I have found that talking with a professional can make a big difference, but sometimes the logistics, finding the right person, the time to connect, gets in the way. BetterHelp Online Counseling assesses your needs and matches you with a professional counselor in a safe and private online environment. You can get help on your own time, in your own space. In fact, you can start communicating in under 24 hours. You can schedule secure weekly video or phone sessions, plus chat and text with your therapist anytime.*

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Menendez: This next moment is about two of the questions I hear from young women most often. When will I know I'm ready to be a mom and what will it look like when I go back to work? Those are incredibly complicated questions, but this exchange with Gloria Calderón Kellett, actress, director, writer, and co-showrunner of *One Day at a Time*, captures a lot of shared experience.

Menendez: I had not realized until I was preparing for this interview that you have two kids.

Calderón Kellett:

Yeah.

Menendez: And so, in an interview with you and Tanya Saracho, where she was talking about, "And then Gloria went on maternity leave." And I was like... I feel like-

Calderón Kellett:

I keep them out of the press on purpose. My husband and I, my husband's a cartoonist, we both decided to live very public lives, and so we wanted to honor that our kids are their own people. So, yeah, most people don't know we have kids.

Menendez: But what was interesting about that is like how did you know it was... I mean, you have a hard career to get into.

Calderón Kellett:

Yeah.

Menendez: And then you're like actually hitting your groove. How did you know it was time to have a baby, and that you could step away from work for a little, and that there would still be room for you when you got back?

Calderón Kellett:

It's so interesting. I always knew I wanted kids. I thought I would wake up one day and go, "Today is the day."

Menendez: Same.

Calderón Kellett:

"Today is the day I am ready to be a mother." That didn't happen. It just didn't. I just was waiting for that to happen, and it really did not happen for me, and I think there is a... I want women to talk about this, because I have talked to so many of my friends who were like, "When did you know?" And it's like, you don't know. For me, I didn't know. I knew that when I pictured my life, and when I pictured my aging life, and when I pictured everything in what I wanted from this life, it included children. So, my husband and I... I mean, also, we were together seven years before we had kids. It's not like... We weren't bored of each other. It wasn't like we needed to add a new character to this sitcom because it's dull. It was like, "This is good. I don't know, I like this." We really sat down and said, "Well, I guess like-

Menendez: How old were you?

Calderón Kellett:

I was 32. I was like, "I mean, listen. I'm in my 30s. What are we doing here?" And we were like, "Well, let's just try, right? Let's give it a try." And in terms of work, I just felt like I don't want to stop my life for things I want. It's going to work out, and I'm going to create a life that's going to make it work out. So, I didn't feel the pressure of I'm going to lose my career if I have a family, thankfully. And I was at *How I Met Your Mother* at the time, and those guys were so sweet. And I felt supported. It didn't occur to me... It was difficult, and both times I got pregnant, there were complications with work that I didn't anticipate, but I was really glad that I did the thing I wanted to do and didn't let that stop me.

Menendez: Yeah, what I found most surprising was after I had her, how I just thought like, "I am a machine-

Calderón Kellett:

Yes.

Menendez: "I have worked my entire life."

Calderón Kellett:

Right.

Menendez: "I love work. Work is my baby. I'm going to have this baby, and then I'm going to have my other baby." And then, all of the sudden, I had this baby and I was so in love with her, I

mean like obsessed. Like it's... It's hard to understand until you go through it, or you're just like, "I-"

Calderón Kellett:

Yeah.

Menendez: It's like the first three months of a relationship for the rest of your life.

Calderón Kellett:

Right.

Menendez: "I just want to be with you all the time."

Calderón Kellett:

Yes.

Menendez: And then I had to go back, and it was harder to go back, both for me, and I had lost some of my heat. Like, there is some reality to stepping away and then going back and having to re-introduce yourself and being a mom when you re-introduce yourself, because in our society it's not cool to be a mom.

Calderón Kellett:

Yeah. No, I would definitely say the hardest part was returning and feeling like I had to be exactly who I was before.

Menendez: Which you're not.

Calderón Kellett:

Which you're not.

Menendez: It's like a bomb went off-

Calderón Kellett:

Yeah.

Menendez: To your self-identity.

Calderón Kellett:

So, I was really grateful. I took a year off after I had my daughter-

Menendez: Same.

Calderón Kellett:

And I just developed, and that was a gift to myself. It was hard to leave *How I Met Your Mother*. I loved that show. I loved those people. But, it was ultimately a very good thing that I got to just sit and heal and be a person. With my son, I went back to work eight weeks after having him, and I should not have done that.

Menendez: Were you nursing?

Calderón Kellett:

I was nursing. I was pumping at lunch. I was pumping in the room, because I had overheard-

Menendez: Which room were you in?

Calderón Kellett:

I was at Devious Maids at the time.

Menendez: Okay.

Calderón Kellett:

I overheard a coworker saying that I was... that it was not fair that I was taking extra breaks in the afternoon to pump.

Menendez: Stop.

Calderón Kellett:

So, I was like, "Then I'll pump in the room."

Menendez: Here it is, you're going to see these boobies.

Calderón Kellett:

Then here we go. Well, I was covered. I mean, I didn't do it out in the open, but yeah, I was like, "All right, then I'll pump in the room." And it was interesting. I had a lot of, at the time, it felt like a badass move, right? And I felt badass every time I did it, like, "Screw you guys. Here I am--"

Menendez: Especially the sound of that machine, and like...

Calderón Kellett:

Yeah, because it kind of put everyone to sleep because it's a little bit... You know, it's kind of like a sound machine. But later on, I felt guilty about it, because I was like, "Have I set up the men in this room to think, to expect, that nursing mothers have to pump in the room? I hope I didn't." And it's the guilt, but we carry this guilt, right?

Menendez: It doesn't matter how you did it.

Calderón Kellett:

No matter what we do, there's guilt. There's a guilt, there's a guilt, there's a guilt.

Menendez: I love her. And yes, there is guilt. So much guilt. I pride myself on minimizing the guilt, but it is still there. Working moms talk about the guilt that accompanies motherhood a lot. What we talk about less, especially in our never-ending quest to know how does she do it, is that the answer is often a mom's own mom. An army of abuelitas who, deep into what could be retirement, are caring for our children so we can manifest our destinies. That was definitely the case for María Cristina González Noguera, Mac, when she was offered the opportunity to be Michelle Obama's communications director.

Menendez: Take the job, you move to DC, you got your mom in tow. Did you two bond over the fact that you both had your moms with you helping you raise your children?

María Cristina González Noguera:

I certainly spoke about it with her, more in terms of the shared values of families, and of family members making sacrifices, for sure.

Menendez: Really? There wasn't a day where you were like, "My mom is driving me bananas."

González Noguera:

Yes, there were definitely days where I'm sure... I cannot remember specifically, right? During those years in Washington DC, I truly had a lot of love and patience for my mom, because she was doing my husband and I such a solid. That's not to say that now, later, she doesn't drive me bananas sometimes. There's just that window, right? Of that time in Washington, where my mom could do no wrong, because she literally uprooted her entire life, and moved to the same building we were living in.

She was on one floor, we were in a different floor, and she would come up every morning with a smile on her face, with a kiss and a hug, and, "No te preocupes, todo estará bien." I will take care of your son. She raised my son for the first three years. My son is such a happy child, my son has incredible vocabulary. He just speaks, speaks, speaks, speaks, because my mother would narrate her day to him during the day.

Típica, Latin grandmother, "Y ahora me estoy haciendo el café. Y ahora me estoy haciendo la sopa. Y ahora, nene, ¿que tú haces? No hagas eso, Cayetano." My son is a product of a loving, nurturing grandmother, who did so much for our family, and continues to do.

Menendez: Now I'm nervous that my child is going to have a New Jersey accent, because the version of that in my house is like, "Grandma's making coffee. Grandma's going to go answer the door. Oh, who's at the door?"

González Noguera:

My version is, "Calletano, do you want some coffee?"

Menendez: Do you remember, or did you have a worst-

González Noguera:

I'm so sorry, I shouldn't say that. My mom's accent isn't quite that bad, but she has quite the accent.

Menendez: My mother's accent is that bad, I want to be very clear. That was kindness on my part.

Menendez: Sorry, mom. Okay, but you are still wondering how to make it all work. I cannot answer that question for you in a 30-minute podcast, but I can offer you this dose of motivation to just keep it moving from author Lilliam Rivera.

Menendez: You wrote both the first book and the second book, each in 90 days.

Lilliam Rivera: Oh, yes. Yes.

Menendez: What?

Rivera: Yeah, that's crazy. There's an author who's my mentor, who used to be my mentor, Al Watt, and he does this thing called the 90-day novel. I took his class, his workshop, in LA, and it really is, like every single day he just sort of like, you write every single day for 90

days until you have a finished draft. I mean, by the end of that draft, you know, depending on how many words you produce every day, you will have a full novel. And so, I've done that for both *Education of Margot Sanchez* and for *Dealing in Dreams*.

Mind you, it's a rough draft, it's terrible. But it's a great skeleton for me to start, and then the rewrite process takes years for me. You know, so it took years for both books to just finally get it to where I liked it. But, you know, producing content, or writing fairly quickly, I try just to get out of my way, and just write it, and let it be.

Menendez: I would find writing a book in 90 days impressive for anyone, but having just written my first non-fiction book as a mom, that's the part where I don't know how you cranked that out in 90 days.

Rivera: Because I was a mom, it felt even that much more pressure to produce, in a way, because I didn't want, you know, there was a lot of people who were coming up to me, especially for *Dealing in Dreams* when I was rewriting that book, who were like, "Oh. Well, now you got two kids. You might as well just forget about that lifelong dream."

Menendez: That's the quickest way to get me to do anything.

Rivera: Right? It's like spite. Like, I'm all about rage writing. Like, let's just rage write all day. I'm like, "You telling me I can't do it? All right, here I go." So, you know, for me, that's just... That was the way it was for both those books.

Menendez: But does that mean you also have to be less precious, like does that mean you're standing in the grocery line writing, does it mean you're at soccer practice-

Rivera: Oh, yeah. No, it's me in my car. I can't tell you how many times I've written in my car. I will have my laptop. I'm waiting for someone to get out of practice and I'll just be writing in my... You know, I'll find a library. This is the best thing is to find the nearest library, 'cause I don't like to go to Starbucks a lot, and all those kind of coffee places. I just want to go to a library and just work. And so, I'll find a library nearby and I'll just stay there.

Menendez: I found though my home is lethal for me, because there's a part of me that's like, "I should be folding laundry. I should be loading the dishwasher."

Rivera: I don't want to do any of those things.

Menendez: Never! Ever! But there's a part of me that's like, "None of the stuff I want to do can get done until these things are done." So, I've had to learn to just kick myself out of the house.

Rivera: Oh, okay. Yeah. No, I could write with everyone talking to me in the kitchen, and asking me for things, and I will just continue. I'll be nodding, yes, and I'll just keep writing. 'Cause I just, there's no way, there's no time, I don't have time to waste.

Menendez: I don't have time to waste. Someone put that on a t-shirt for next Mother's Day. Here's one last moment and it is a good one, from one of my favorite people and favorite moms, which is why I saved it for the end. It's from Dr. Laura Scott about a photo that went viral following her Harvard Med School graduation. I don't have time to waste.

Menendez: You, Nathan, and Olivia, from your Harvard graduation.

Laura Scott: Oh yeah, that one.

Menendez: And you and Nathan are in your cap and gown, and you have on Black Lives Matter buttons. Olivia is at like peak toddler, chubby, and she has one of your stethoscopes and

she's listening to Nathan's heart and that photo went viral around the time of your graduation. Why do you think it got the response it did?

Scott: We like to celebrate black excellence. We must celebrate black excellence, and I think that that's what came up. I think because we were wearing the Black Lives Matter, it immediately identified it as like black excellence, but I think equally it could have gone into any Latina excellence thing, but you know, people don't know your backgrounds based on a picture. There was a lot of debate about what my background was. He always has to settle... "Black guy always have to settle for some white girl, some Latina. They can never..." And I'm like, "Excuse me, actually he's half white and half black. If you really want to get technical, I'm more black than..." But that's not how it works. That's not how it works.

Menendez: Not in a picture.

Scott: It really frustrates me that people try to box you in, and they always want to define you in the way that works best for them, and what their expectations are. But I think it went viral because we needed it to go viral, like I wish more things like that would go viral, because there's so much... You know, minorities just doing incredible things in science, and law, and politics, and every field. You know?

Menendez: When Olivia sees that picture, what do you want her to know about that day?

Scott: Well, I want her to know that she didn't hold me back from anything. That we did it all with her and for her. It's fun, because I was actually pregnant with Ellie while I walked across the stage, too. I think I was maybe three or four months pregnant with Ellie. For me, it's really important that she just knows there are no mutually exclusive things. Maybe a few, but don't let anybody's expectations, or what they deem possible, define what's actually possible. You can do anything if you want to, and it doesn't mean that you're going to do everything, but you can do anything, and you just have to want it bad enough. You have to find your tribe. You have to find your why, because that's the biggest thing. At the end of the day, you need to know your why.

You need to know it damn well, and it better be a good one. It can't be, "Because my parents wanted me to." Or, "Because I think it's prestigious." Those aren't going to last. Those whys do not last. It needs to be a good why and you can do it. You can do anything. And so, that's what I want her to see when she sees that. Usually now she just says, "I have a stethoscope. Where's that stethoscope?" And she tears down the playroom looking for the stethoscope." But someday she'll look at that picture and I think, I'm hoping, that those are the things that she'll see.

Menendez: And on that note, happy Mother's Day to you and to yours, sending you love and gratitude today and always.

Menendez: Thank you as always for joining us. Latina to Latina is executive produced and owned by Juleyka Lantigua-Williams and me, Alicia Menendez. Cedric Wilson is our sound designer. Emma Forbes is our assistant producer. Manuela Bedoya is our intern. We love hearing from you. Email us at hola@latinatolatina.com, and remember to subscribe or follow us on RadioPublic, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, wherever you're listening, and please, please leave a review. It is one of the quickest and easiest ways to help us grow as a community.

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