Find Your Power!

Motivational speaker Yasmin Davidds-Garrido tells Latinas how to take charge of their own lives

by Jennifer Vigil

It took emotional abuse, the devastation of her family and drug addiction to persuade Yasmin Davidds-Garrido that she had to take charge of her life. Now the first-time author hopes she can reach other Latinas before personal calamities undermine them as well.

Davidds-Garrido's first book, "Empowering Latinas: Breaking Boundaries, Freeing Lives," is the result of the 30-year-old's hard-fought battle to overcome years of shattering doubts that she believes can be attributed to the shackling of women at the hands of a dominating male culture.

The motivational speaker, who holds degrees from the University of Southern California and San Diego State University, now hopes to launch an empowerment movement among Latinas. She believes they face a much harder battle than some other modern women because of macho attitudes held by many Latinos.

Latinas often sacrifice their own desires to those of the family: first parents, then boyfriends, husbands and children, Davidds-Garrido argues. And her research indicates that young Latinas have some of the highest levels of depression in the country.

Happily married to Arizona Cardinals football player Norberto Davidds-Garrido and the mother of a two-year-old daughter, she plans to begin a year-long series of seminars in English and Spanish for Latinas this year. She is also forming a corporation, a lifelong goal, and has written a song, "Latina Queen," that she is currently offering to various recording artists.

With the world busy making New Year's resolutions, Estylo decided the time is right to ask the author for advice about Latinas who seek better lives.

More than anything else, women must learn that they don't have to enslave themselves to their families' needs. "Women don't need to kill themselves to have value," she maintains.

Q: What is the first step a Latina should make to change her life? **A:** The way I see it, the first step for any woman to be able to succeed is to realize and expect that she is completely responsible for every area of her life—meaning her happiness and her self-esteem. They need to believe that they're worth enough that they can make their own choices for themselves. They need to make decisions based on consequences and what those consequences are going to mean for their lives. Some women say that sounds kind of harsh, but I say that's reality.

Q: But that can be a very difficult step.

A: Empowerment is not a one-answer kind of cure, like "Now you're empowered!" People want an easy answer. But I don't believe in teaching that. I believe in teaching empowerment as a lifestyle.

Q: In a practical way, how can Latinas make this work?
A: They would really have to sit down and make a list of every-



thing they need to happen in their lives, like a job and a certain amount of money to begin making a lifestyle. Then all their wants, (what) they want but don't absolutely need. And then a list of what they don't want, what they absolutely will not accept in their lives. It takes a lot of discipline. I'm not lying. But the rewards are remarkable. They absolutely have to create their boundaries. That is the hardest thing to do.

Q: How painful is that?

A: That's where pain is involved, in letting go. It's the hardest thing to do, to believe that emotional well-being is the most important thing in life. For me it was tragedy that made me do that. Nobody was going to save me but me. I learned how to do it because I had to for survival. Once I did I realized that I had to continue doing that for happiness and survival.

Q: Some Latinas may find themselves unhappy, but comfortable in their lives or relationships. How can they find the courage to make these choices?

A: Many Latinas have had tragic personal experiences. What I can tell Latinas is to go back to the time when you really believed you could not do it and you could not make it. I tell Latinas to go back to that strength that made them survive, and feel it and pull from that strength. They don't think of themselves as being strong. They say, We just did what we had to do. That is strength and courage! You've got to think: Whatever I did that for, this is as important as that event.

Q: What if they're concerned about the reaction of the men in their lives?

A: I've never known of a man to wake up and say, "You know what, I've been too macho all these years!" I tell women if a man does certain things to you, and you allow it, it's your fault. We need to start changing ourselves and when we do the men will change. They'll even respect us more.

Q: In your book, you urge women to work on their inner child. Why is that so important?

A: To me that is extremely important. That is part of my recovery. I truly believe that we all have an inner child within us. See, when most people go through times of trauma, it usually comes from childhood experience. I believe if they do understand and connect with it, they are able to touch and go back to the pain. In order to

get (past) something you need to go back to the pain. Many people choose not to deal with that. Their bodies numb them out. But it still lives inside the body. It never goes away. Then when they're adults, that's when it begins manifesting itself.

Q: Many people seek therapy, but is it a problem for Latinas to do so?

A: No estas loca—you're not crazy, they are told. They don't need a psychologist. What are people going to think? It's such a taboo issue.

Q: The pressure from family members must be intense.

A: A lot of what Latinas experience and live by is through family. We all know that the first teachers are our parents. Unfortunately, in our homes empowerment issues are not a topic. I never heard a Latino father saying, "Go ahead, mija, take a lot of risks today. Take on the world!" So what do they do? We have such similar stories. We just don't talk about them.

Q: So how can madres help raise sons to be more tolerant and supportive?

A: That is so important. Mothers can teach their sons that first of all their self-esteem is not based on ego. I know a lot of Latino men make decisions based on ego, because that is what they see. Looking at women as equals is very rare. Take them to places where they can see women of power. When you repeat something a lot it becomes part of their thinking. In society they get the opposite, hearing demeaning comments. There are boobs and butts everywhere! The message at home needs to be completely different. And these women cannot be with men who disrespect them. They need to practice what they preach.

Q: And daughters?

A: When you think of Jennifer Lopez you don't think of her as a great actress or a great singer. You just think of her butt and her body. I want a new generation of Latinas, for (whom) their body and their looks (are) beside the point. I don't want it to be driven by sex.

Q: And what will you tell your own daughter?

A: I will te!! her that it is up to her. It is her choice if she wants to live a happy life.

Nobody has that power but her. She has the option to have a happy, good life. Once you have that nobody can take that away from you—no man, no institution, no nothing. She has the power to create her own destiny.

(Davidds-Garrido's book arrived in stores November 1, 2001.)

illénate de poder!

La oradora motivacional, Yasmin Davidds-Garrido, les explica a las latinas cómo hacerse cargo de sus propias vidas

Yasmin Davidds-Garrido tuvo que pasar por abuso emocional, la devastación de su familia y drogadicción para que decidiera tomar control de su vida. Ahora, la autora que acaba de publicar su primer libro, espera poder llegar a otras latinas antes de que también se debiliten con calamidades personales.

"Nunca he conocido un hombre que se haya levantado y dicho, "¡He sido demasiado machista todos estos años!" El libro de Davidds-Garrido,
"Empowering Latinas: Breaking
Boundaries, Freeing Lives"
(Dándoles poder a las latinas: rompiendo barreras, liberando vidas), es el resultado de una gran batalla de 30 años para vencer años de dudas frustrantes, que ella cree pueden atribuirse a los problemas de las mujeres que están en manos de una cultura dominada por los hombres.

La oradora motivacional, que recibió títulos de la Universidad del Sur de California y de San Diego State, ahora espera lanzar un movimiento para darles poder a las latinas. Ella cree que la batalla es más difícil que para otras mujeres modernas por las actitudes machistas de muchos hombres latinos.

La latinas generalmente sacrifican sus propios deseos a los de su familia: primero los padres, luego los novios, esposos e hijos, dice Davidds-Garrido. Y su investigación indica que las jóvenes latinas tienen uno de los más altos niveles de depresión en el país.

Casada con el jugador de fútbol estadounidense de Arizona Cardinals, Norberto Davidds-Garrido, y madre de una hija de dos años de edad, ella planea empezar este año una serie anual de seminarios en Inglés y en Español para las latinas. También está formando una corporación, un sueño de toda la vida, y ha escrito una canción, "Latina Queen" (Reina latina), que está ofreciendo en la actualidad a varios artistas contratados por compañías grabadoras.

Mientras todos están ocupados haciendo las resoluciones del Año Nuevo, Estylo decidió que es el momento perfecto para pedirle a la autora consejos sobre las latinas que ansían una vida mejor.

Por sobre todo, las mujeres deben aprender que no tienen que estar esclavizadas a las necesidades de sus familias. "Las mujeres no necesitan esforzarse demasiado para ser valoradas", declara ella.