

Former children's home residents fondly recall tasty Mexican meals as one housemother's labor of love

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SAN ANTONIO-Whether it was a grateful gasp of recognition ("he still wears the same hat") that greeted Leslie Pullin or the public appreciation of Beatrice Gasca Atu ("no other housemother cooked us Mexican food") for her culinary generosity, former staff members were a welcome part of the alumni reunion at Baptist Child & Family Services.

Pullin and his wife, Louise, worked at what originally was called Mexican Baptist Orphanage from 1952 to 1981. Alumni recognized the white straw cowboy hat even before they saw the couple's faces. Later, alumni produced photographic evidence-40- and 50-year-old images of Pullin wearing identical headgear.

The quiet, slim Pullin maintained the grounds and vehicles at the home and spent hours with the kids driving the bus that took them to church and on outings. Mrs. Pullin was in charge of the clothing dispensary-and the star of some photographic memories as well.

“She always had everything so well organized that whenever we needed any clothes, we'd go see her, and she would take care of us immediately,” Adela Esquivel Booth recalled. “But what I liked best was when she would take us shopping in downtown San Antonio for our Easter outfits. That's the pictures I have in my album.”

Atu, the first Hispanic housemother, began a 17-year stint at the home in 1953-two years after placing her own three daughters in the facility because, as a single mother, she could not provide for them.

“So, I raised my girls here along with all the others I got to take care of,” the 77-year-old explained. “I had a great time here. Our cottage usually won most of the trophies in the July 4 competitions.”

Atu began as a relief housemother, rotating among the cottages while the permanent houseparents had time off. That's how she gained universal acclaim for preparing and serving the traditional Mexican food most of the children were used to before coming to the children's home.

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