

## Deputy District Attorney of the Month

### Carolina Lugo

Carolina joined the office in 2000 after graduating from UCLA School of Law. She is currently assigned to the Family Violence Division. Her previous assignments include Whittier, Pomona, West Covina, Alhambra, CT-11 and CT-15, and Pasadena.

Carolina is receiving this award for securing a first degree murder conviction and six attempted murder convictions against 21 year old Eduardo Villareal for the killing of Zurisaday Bonilla and the attempted murder of her family members. Zurisaday had recently given birth to their daughter, Naomi, whom Villareal was also charged with murdering.

On October 31, 2010, the defendant, his girlfriend Zurisaday and their newborn infant spent the day together. The couple got into an argument about the baby.

Defendant Villareal entered his Escalade SUV shouting that he was going to kill himself on the freeway.

Zurisaday, the infant and her parents returned to their residence. Once they arrived, Zurisaday, her two children and other family members gathered in their parents' bedroom. About ten minutes later, the defendant's SUV came crashing through the bedroom wall. The defendant pinned Zurisaday against a wall with the truck. She was in a sitting position on top of fragments of the bed. However, her body could not be removed until they pulled the truck out. She was pronounced dead at the scene. The infant was transported to USC Medical Center and pronounced dead approximately one hour later. Zurisaday's sister was seriously injured.

Initially the defendant claimed that he was being chased by someone pointing a gun at him, but eventually admitted that he drove the SUV into the residence because he was trying to kill himself.

The case presented many challenges for Carolina:

Zurisaday's parents spoke to the police the day after the murders and gave their accounts. Unbeknownst to Carolina, three months after the murders, they held a reconciliatory mass in their home with the defendant's family. Zurisaday's sister communicated regularly with the defendant. All recanted their original statements.

By the time of trial, the family was openly hostile to Carolina. They demanded that the defendant be released from prison immediately. Both families attended the five and one

half week trial daily to demonstrate their solidarity. At times they could be seen locked arm in arm with their priest at their side.

The defendant presented a mental defense claiming that he had autism spectrum disorder. The prosecution's expert disputed that claim. The mental health experts testified over the course of three days.

Carolina had to overcome the "suicide" defense and explain to the jury the results from the Bosch Systems analysis of the SUV in a way that demonstrated that the defendant acted with the requisite intent to kill.