

**SOFÍA AND
MANOLO**

Life

the

VERGARA

Way

Sofía Vergara created a modern family of her own when she welcomed her only child, **Manolo Gonzalez Vergara**, at 19 and brought him to America by herself. The duo chats with *Us* about their unconventional life and exciting new culinary venture

by **JAIME HARKIN & AMANDA WILLIAMS**

For the Vergaras, everything starts at the table. “Our vacations are planned around breakfast, lunch and dinner,” Sofía says. “[For] Latin people, we grow up around food, and that’s like our only entertainment.” The actress and her son, Manolo, have long connected over a good meal — whether it’s celebrating milestones, arguing over

who gets the best order or building their Latin culinary brand, TOMA.

That bond began long before business. Sofía was just 19 when she welcomed her son with high school sweetheart Joe Gonzalez in Colombia. By 24, she was single and moved to Miami with Manolo in search of bigger opportunities. “It was super hard,” she says. “There are things that, as a young person, you’re not supposed to

be thinking about. It’s a lot of pressure and you’re trying to figure out your own life.” They eventually landed in L.A., where she scored her breakout role on *Modern Family* in 2009. For Manolo, it was a childhood like no other. “It was awesome and weird and cool,” he says. “It’s the only life I know, and I wouldn’t change a thing.”

In many ways, the mother-son duo grew up together, and they’re still very



“It was phenomenal,” Manolo reflects on his unique childhood with mom Sofia.

much a team. In addition to launching TOMA, Manolo, 34, joined Sofia's Latin World Entertainment talent management firm. Sofia, 53, who's in her sixth season as a judge on *America's Got Talent* and scored a Golden Globe nod for her role in the 2024 Netflix series *Griselda*, also has her beauty line, Toty, and iDios Mio! coffee brand. On Oct. 18, they'll host a Grand Tasting of TOMA's empanadas at the New York City Wine & Food Festival. "We work very well together," says Manolo. "We've learned not to step on each other's toes."



After transforming herself to play drug lord Griselda Blanco in *Griselda*, Sofia is ready for something lighter. "A comedy or a rom-com with Kevin Hart would be fun," she tells *Us*.

Sofia, congrats on raising such a well-rounded son. What were some of the lessons you tried to instill in Manolo when he was growing up?

SV Well, I was very young, so I wasn't really thinking about anything — I was just trying to survive. But I've always believed the way to teach people is by example. I've always worked very hard, and I've always tried to be around my family. You'll never do the best job, [or be] the perfect mom, but you have to do your best with what you have.

Did you have any nonnegotiable rules for him when he was a kid?

SV Manolo was actually like an old soul. He was always very well-behaved. We'd cross the street when he was 4 years old, and he'd be telling me, "Grab my hand. This is very dangerous."

MGV I'd give myself chores. I used to beg



Sofia says it's "too soon" for a *Modern Family* reunion (the show went off the air in 2020) but reveals she and the cast are in touch regularly. "We're connected, always. We send pictures and we're always supporting each other."

her [and say], "Please give me chores."

SV In Latin America, you always have nannies and people helping you. It's in American culture, where the moms do everything, and so the kids have to do things. I didn't have money, but I needed to work, so the most important thing was for Manolo to have a nanny. He didn't really need to do much.

What were some of the biggest challenges you faced as a single mom?

SV You feel guilty because you can't be available all the time. I had to travel a lot because of the entertainment business. It wasn't like an office nine-to-five job. Every month was a different schedule. That's difficult because you miss birthdays and school things.

How did you get through it?

SV I had my mom's help, and I always knew he was in really good hands. Unfortunately, you cannot be single and also be a 24-hour mother [while you're] working, so you have to learn how to delegate. There's no other way to do it.

What was the best part about being a single mom?

SV I didn't have to deal with anyone telling me how to do things. His father trusted me, so that was really cool — [we] didn't have to fight or put him in the middle. At least [Manolo] didn't have that. It can be really crazy for kids to have two parents [who aren't] going in the same direction.

Is there anything you wish you could have done differently?

SV A million things. When I see younger people now, I'm like, "How did I do that when I was 19, 20?" When all you want to do is not have responsibilities? I had to think about having people to take care of him, and not being able to do everything you want to do when you're at that age. When I was doing it, I didn't think it was that hard. But now I'm like, "Wow. It's a big responsibility to have a kid so young."

Would you have taken a different approach if you had him later in life?

SV Yes, of course. You know more when you're an adult. You're mature, you've lived. What did I know about raising a kid at 19? You would do things differently [with everything]. You would always do things better.

What was it like having such a small age difference between you?

SV We're kind of in the same generation, even though I don't know anything about technology, and he's more

advanced than me.

MGV It definitely wasn't a common son-parent relationship, especially compared to my friends or everybody else at school. She was 30, and all the other parents were 50. [They were like], "Is this your sister?" Like, "No, it's my mom."

Were you aware of how much your mom was sacrificing for you?

MGV I knew she was busy, and I knew she was working for us, but I don't think when you're a kid, you're thinking, "Oh, she's doing it for me."

Do you feel more appreciative of all she did for you as you get older?

MGV One hundred percent, yes. Of course.

You're 34 now. Can you imagine having a teenager at your age?

MGV I have an 11-year-old Chihuahua, and even that's too much. Yikes. No, it's crazy.

What was it like growing up with Sofia as a mom?

MGV It was fun. She was the best. I don't know how else to describe it — it's the only life I know.

So she was the fun, cool mom?

MGV She was funny. The whole family is. **SV** Everybody has a sense of humor. I think it's because we come from a country like Colombia, where people had to make everything fun and lively because life was hard.

MGV It is a trauma response.

SV Yes, you have to cope with trauma with fun dancing.

Sofia, was it ever hard to separate your glamorous public persona from your private life?

SV No, I think because this has been my job since he was a kid. I've been in the entertainment business since I [was] 17. This is just how we've lived our lives.

"Anything Food Network-related, I'm like, 'Yes, we're there,'" Manolo says of joining NYCWFF.



TOMA Takes NY

Sofia and Manolo's Latin food brand will be front and center at the New York City Wine & Food Festival this fall

WHO: Sofia and Manolo Vergara will join celebrities (last year's attendees included Blake Lively, Snoop Dogg and Martha Stewart), Food Network stars like Bobby Flay and Katie Lee Biegel and more than 500 chefs, mixologists and culinary creators.

WHAT: Food Network New York City Wine & Food Festival presented by Invesco QQQ (NYCWFF) is NYC's premier wine and food festival. Guests of the buzzy event are treated to world-class wines and spirits from Southern Glazer's, culinary demonstrations and tastings.

WHEN: The festival runs from Oct. 15 to 19. On Oct. 18, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Manolo and Sofia will host the Grand Tasting, an all-day celebration of food and fun.

WHERE: The brand-new Invesco QQQ Festival Campus in the historic Seaport district in downtown Manhattan.

WHY: Since its inception 18 years ago, NYCWFF has raised more than \$14.8 million for charitable causes. This year, net proceeds will support the James Beard Foundation and the Event Zero Foundation.

HOW: Tickets are available at nycwff.org

Manolo, was she strict with you? Do you recall any specific rules?

MGV Just like grades and general [stuff]. Once she's angry, you're done. All Latino kids are afraid of pissing off their Latin mom. You're not scared of anybody except your mom.

You've said that you earned an allowance by running lines with her.

What was that like?

MGV Traumatizing. These are not age-appropriate lines that you're reading. These are like romantic lines that you don't want to read with your mom.

SV I don't even remember. It was more traumatizing because he was so upset about my accent...

MGV Also that, and you couldn't remember the lines.

SV He would correct me, and then two seconds later, the words came out even worse, and that would drive him crazy.

MGV Even recently, she went out for a role that she hasn't done in like 10 years because I don't think she's auditioned for anything, and I was still running lines. I [had] PTSD.

Were you ever embarrassed by your mom growing up?

MGV I'm not easily embarrassed that way.

SV Sometimes when I'd go to talk to the teachers in school, he'd tell me to dress like a mom. We were living in Miami, and I would always be in a bathing suit with shorts.

MGV [I was] at a Catholic school.

Were the kids ever like, "Manolo's got a hot mom"?

MGV Yeah, but I would've gotten that regardless [of whether] she was famous or not.

How was being on set with her?

MGV I used to love it. I went to film school because of that. We were in New Orleans for three months once because she was shooting [2015's] *Hot Pursuit* with Reese Witherspoon, and that was a completely different experience, which was super fun. *Modern Family* holds the most special place in all of our hearts. It was 11 years.

SV You interacted with everybody, but you didn't go to the set of *Modern Family* that much because most of the time you were in school. But I just did

Did you get close with the cast?

SV You interacted with everybody, but you didn't go to the set of *Modern Family* that much because most of the time you were in school. But I just did

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: NETFLIX; GREG SWALES FOR TOMA; SLAVEN LASIC GETTY IMAGES; © ABC/EVERETT COLLECTION



Like Mother, Like Son?

Who texts more often?

Sofia: Me. No, both. [It's] equal.
Manolo: [She's] worse. She voice notes.

Who spends the most time on social media?

Sofia: Me.

Who spoils their dog more?

Sofia: Me. My dog and his dog.
Manolo: Yeah, both dogs.

Who has better taste in music?

Sofia: I only like reggaeton.
Manolo: I [like] a more eclectic mix. I like a lot of things.

Who has better taste in movies?

Sofia: Manolo for sure.
Manolo: I went to film school. I like the classics, anything on Turner Classic Movies. And a good rom-com.

Who's most likely to be out on a Saturday night?

Sofia: Manolo.

Who's most likely to be on the couch?

Sofia: Me with the dogs.

Who's funnier?

Sofia: Me.

Griselda with a bunch of young Colombian guys, and Manolo became very good friends with all of them.

Do you ever feel like you're becoming more like your mom as you get older?

MGV Yeah. [There's] a lot of things. You can ask my exes whether or not I react to things like my mom.

SV Personality-wise, of course, if you grew up with a person, you inherit things. I see more of my personality in him than that of his father, but I also see things of his father sometimes.

MGV [My mom] is very overly dramatic and kind of catastrophizes minor things. I'm more like my father, and where I can handle a flood, but it's the drip that drives me crazy. If the dog sneezes, she's like, "Ahhh!"

Sofia, what was your coparenting relationship like with Manolo's dad?

SV He was my high school sweetheart, and we got divorced, but we were always good friends. He lived in Colombia, so it was difficult for him to see Manolo a lot, but he'd make the effort [and they'd] see each other at least once or twice a year. He's always been there, and he has a great relationship with Manolo.

MGV We're totally cool. We don't see each other as often because of the distance, but we do what we can.

Society has changed so much since Manolo was a kid. How different do you think it is to raise a child now?

SV I was talking with somebody on a plane the other day, she was telling me all the things her kids have access to now with social media and computers and phones. I'm so thankful I didn't go through that, because it's a completely different animal [in regards to] what parents have to be monitoring and thinking about. Manolo was the last generation to have to figure things out on his own. There was no Amazon — you had to plan your days and go buy things. If I wanted to watch a movie, I had to go rent [it], then give it back to the freaking movie place. Those things seem funny, but it does create

character. People don't really need to struggle anymore with anything.

Has anything surprised you about how Manolo turned out?

SV Usually, if you only have one kid and you have money, your kid [will have] spending problems and [be] very spoiled and entitled, and Manolo is none of those things. He knows he has to work, and he wants to do his own thing, and [he lives] his own life without expecting other people to fix every problem for him.

MGV I spend all my money on my dog.

How has your relationship changed over the years?

SV It's different because I don't have to watch him all the time. He's an adult, and he's very mature and responsible. I try not to be on top of him.

What have you learned from Manolo?

SV To keep calm. I want to call the police immediately. I want to hire a helicopter to get places. So I try to be, like, "OK, maybe it's not that crazy."

Tell Us how TOMA came about.

MGV TOMA is the best of Latin American food. We cherry-picked our favorite things from every country in South America, and made [it] our own. We're in over a thousand Walmart stores, and we're expanding to more retailers this year. We have a standalone location at Busch Gardens that just opened. It's going really well and it's exciting.

Have you always been into cooking?

SV He made his first Thanksgiving turkey at 14, and since then, every [year] he's forced to make the turkey. He can cook everything. He saved us during Covid. I don't cook; my ex-husband didn't cook. Thank God he was there.

You don't like to cook?

SV No. Even the eggs I do for myself in the morning are always horrible. I have to ask the simplest things, like, "How long do I put this in the microwave?" I don't understand how people find it fun, because it's a lot of prep and then

She welcomed Manolo on Sept. 16, 1991, in Colombia.



"Manolo was always very well-behaved," she tells *Us*.



They traveled to Mexico together in 2012.



Manolo joined his mom at her 2015 Hollywood Walk of Fame ceremony.

A Bond Like No Other

It's been Sofia and Manolo against the world since he was born



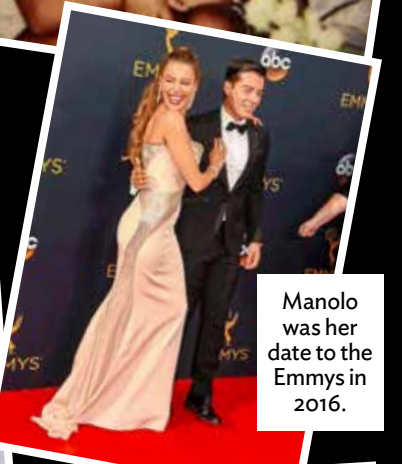
"I wouldn't change a thing," Manolo tells *Us* of his childhood.



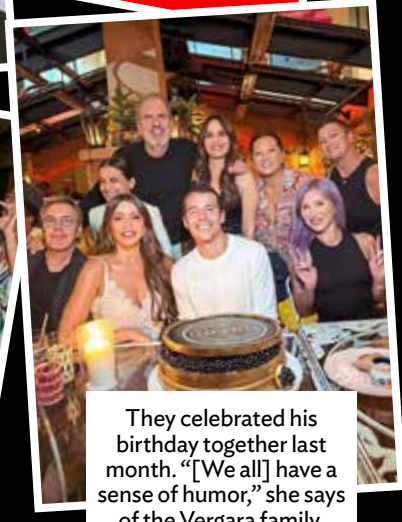
The duo partied at her 40th birthday together in Mexico.



"Nineteen years is a super small age difference," Sofia reflects.



Manolo was her date to the Emmys in 2016.



They celebrated his birthday together last month. "[We all] have a sense of humor," she says of the Vergara family.

doing it and then you have to clean.

What's your favorite thing to eat together as a family?

SV Everything. [On vacation, we have] big groups [and] it's not like you can be going places all day long together. So it's about enjoying a good meal together.

MGV My problem is I don't like to share...
SV He orders something, then we order something different, and then we all want what he ordered. And he won't give [any to] us.

MGV You should have ordered it in the first place!

Sofia, what's the most important lesson you want to teach Manolo?

SV It's great to have money and it's great to have work, but the most important part is to be surrounded with people who are supporting and loving you.

How's your love life?

SV I'm single again and having fun. I'm not really looking for anything right

now, I'm just trying to have my options open. Eventually, I'd like to have someone who's in tune with what I do and my age. I can be picky because I'm not in a hurry.

You recently teased that you're ready to be a grandma. Manolo, will that be happening anytime soon?

MGV She'll be an amazing grandma in maybe 10 years or so.

SV As long as he [also] has a nanny, I'm fine.

LEFT PAGE: MANOLO GONZALEZ/VERGARA; RIGHT PAGE: CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: RIGHT: SOFIA VERGARA/INSTAGRAM; JEFFREY MAYER/WIREIMAGE; SOFIA VERGARA/INSTAGRAM; JESSE GRANT/WIREIMAGE; STEVE GRANITZ/WIREIMAGE; SOFIA VERGARA/INSTAGRAM; (C)