

Chino Champion (CA)

Any day they're together is a day for giving thanks

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James and Noemi **Arzola** of Chino have many reasons to give thanks this holiday season. But their biggest "thank you" on Thanksgiving was for their 2-year-old son Robert, who is in remission from cancer. "When anybody asks me how I'm doing, I say, 'If little Robert is fine, I'm fine,'" said Mr. **Arzola**, 49.

Robert was diagnosed with Stage 4 neuroblastoma, a life-threatening childhood cancer, a year after he was born. Mrs. **Arzola**, 39, describes Robert as a "special gift" given to her by God. She laughed while watching her son imitate Elvis Presley playing the guitar. "Look at his Elvis leg," she said.

Robert shook his leg and danced across the living room, hamming it up like any 2-year-old. The Arzolas, who live on Wisteria Place, also have two other children, 15-year-old Crystal, and 12-year-old

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Continued from Page A1 Daniel. They tease each other that Robert was their "vacation souvenir."

But the Arzolas aren't just dealing with the trauma of a son with cancer. The birth of their oldest son was also a life-changing experience. Daniel was born with Down syndrome on Nov. 26, 1994.

Mr. and Mrs. **Arzola** were told of his condition the day after his birth. He was placed in intensive care for a digestive problem, and was released on Christmas Eve 1994.

"He was another little angel and gift," said Mr. **Arzola**. Daniel communicates through sign language. He attends a special education program at Magnolia Junior High.

Just 10 months before Daniel's birth, the **family** experienced a jolt of a different kind. The Northridge earthquake destroyed their Simi Valley home.

Mr. **Arzola** was a self-employed engineer at the time and worked out of his house. He said the home was financially impossible to repair. "We lost it to the bank," he said.

Since then, life has been spent building one bridge after another.

Their daughter, Crystal, said the **family** goes through times when everybody snaps at each other and gets on each other's nerves.

After Robert was diagnosed, she went upstairs to her room every day after school and shut the door. A big 15th birthday party had been planned for Crystal, but her party dress is still hanging in the closet. She recalled **family** birthdays in the intensive care unit, a shortage of money, a world turned upside down.

The Ayala High School sophomore said she hated her freshman year until she joined the swim team. Her coach encouraged her and prayed with her. She said things slowly began to change. Her faith built up. She reached out to her **family**.

The Arzolas believe that God closes some doors and opens others. They were scheduled to move to San Antonio, Texas, in August 2006. Mr. **Arzola**'s position as an area sales manager for Lipton Tea Co. required him to relocate. Although their house was on the market and their future home in Texas was in escrow, Mrs. **Arzola** said she began to feel the move wasn't right. She implored her husband to stay in Chino. Mr. **Arzola** contacted his employer with the news. Two hours later, his counterpart on the West Coast resigned, allowing Mr. **Arzola** to remain in California. One month later, Robert became ill.

His stomach was severely bloated. When a tumor was found in his right adrenal gland above his kidney on Oct. 6, he was immediately taken by ambulance to the City of Hope. The tumor had pushed up all his organs.

Robert has since gone through seven rounds of chemotherapy, numerous infections, a bone marrow transplant, and 12 rounds of radiation.

On Feb. 14 of this year, doctors removed his right adrenal gland and scar tissue. Mr. **Arzola** said doctors told him the tumor was no longer there. The treatments were finished in August, and Robert is on medication to keep the cancer in remission.

Mrs. **Arzola** said she will fight the cancer as a mother would, but she will not fight God. "If Robert is going to die, I have to accept it," she said.

Mr. **Arzola** said Robert has already undergone all the treatments available for his cancer. "We don't look at this as something that is just randomly happening," he said. "We have faith in God that he will carry us through."

Crystal said her **family** intended to celebrate this Thanksgiving more united than last year. "We're all grateful for one another. We realize that we're going through this together - as a **family**," she said.

The **Arzola family** enjoys **family** time in front of their Chino home. Shown (from left) are daughter Crystal, son Robert, father James, son Daniel and mother Noemi.

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