

Revised 2019

Michoacan

To

Michigan

An Immigrant's Journey



**The Family History of Martina
and Valeriano Fraga
—A Personal Account
By Their Family**

Daniel E. Fraga

Michoacan to Michigan

An Immigrant's Journey

2019 Revision to

Michoacan to Michigan Document

This revision has come about, again motivated by my nephew and godson Lenny Radjewski. His motivation is to revisit this journey of my parents, his grandparents, upon the hundredth year anniversary of the beginning of their journey from Michoacan to Michigan which began in February 1919. This revision isn't because any of the facts previously presented in my earlier narrative of almost a quarter of a century ago have changed, but because, in some cases I have found a little more detail, gained a little more insight and, in other cases, to reexamine some of my earlier assumptions.

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DEDICATION



IN LOVING MEMORY OF:

Valeriano Fraga; born April 19, 1891 — died Sep 7, 1982

and

Martina (Herrejon) Fraga; born Nov 6, 1895 — died May 1, 1978
(We celebrated her birthday on Jan 30)

"We don't care for us, we suffered, but we suffered for our family"

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INTRODUCTION

How do you measure success? I've always thought of my father as a very successful man. And yet, the only property he ever owned was a small 80 acre farm in Michigan with old weather beaten buildings. He bought this farm at age 60 and very happily worked and lived there for about 25 years. When he died in 1982, at the age of 91, he had sold this farm and was financially worth around \$ 20,000. This may not sound too impressive, but what makes this a success story, to me, is considering where he and our mother started from, and what they accomplished.

When they entered this country in 1919, with the two children they had at the time, they were all considered illegal aliens. They had no money, they crossed the border with nothing but the clothes on their backs, they didn't speak English, our father had a very limited ability to read and write in Spanish, our mother had none. Not only did they eventually own their own farm, but more importantly, they managed to raise eleven children, and, under sometimes severe circumstances, they instilled in those children a sense of values and ambition that enabled all of them to become successful in the more conventional sense.

This story, I believe, is a microcosm of many immigrants struggle in this country and their search for the American dream. Like many other immigrants, my parents suffered not only hardship and exploitation, but also experienced the heartwarming generosity and goodwill that exemplify some of the best attributes in people.

This story is not unlike thousands of other immigrant stories, yet it is also unique, as each immigrant success story is a unique journey. Each of us who is a product of such a family feel compelled to tell our own story, perhaps hoping that we can pass down to our children, and each succeeding generation, some of the admiration, respect, and inspiration we have derived from our parents' accomplishments over adversity. Their remarkable lives and the stories that they told and retold to us, have over time taken on the aura of family myths to each succeeding generation. I hope with this narrative that we can recapture the essence of that experience and make it real again for the younger Fraga generations.

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I. LIFE IN MEXICO

Our father was born April 14, 1891 in Mexico in a small village called *Cotzurio* about ten miles outside the city of *Morelia* in the state of *Michoacan*. He was born with the name Jose Valeriano Andelmo Guadalupe Fraga. In Mexico he was known as Valeriano Fraga. When he came to this country he was known as Tony. I never thought to ask why he was called Tony. Our father had very little education, although he indicated that at one time in Mexico he did get a couple of months schooling. Our mother on the other hand, received no education, as was typical for that era. During this period in Mexico, education in rural communities was not a high priority objective. The rural Mexican of this era has been described as "... illiterate, hungry, ill-housed and marked for early death because of disease."¹ Thus Dad was essentially illiterate until in his middle years when, after he had been in this country for a time, with the help of his daughters Frances and later Ellen, he taught himself to read and write in both English and Spanish.

Dad and mother both grew up in a small village called Cotzurio. There were essentially 5 families there: Fraga, Chavez, Calderon, Herrejon and Sanchez. Dad's mother was Mercedes Sanchez. The Calderons were very prominent in this area. One of them owned the biggest ranch in Cotzurio and some of them were very wealthy. Dad's Grandmother on his father Jose Fraga's side was Maria Calderon. One of Dad's aunts, a sister of his mother, married Antonio Calderon who was an important person in Cotzurio and might have been it's mayor. Our mother, who was a Herrejon, was also related in some way to the Calderons. Unfortunately I don't have much information on her side.

In Dad's adolescence he worked on a ranch as a vaquero, what we call a cowboy (Fig. 1) and he used to enjoy participating in rodeos. He had developed quite a skill with a lasso, roping steers and calves from horseback. In later years, as a farmer in Michigan, he used these roping skills to great advantage in catching his and his neighbors' loose cattle. Up in Michigan, farmers were not used to seeing these roping skills and were suitably impressed. They used to call on him for help when they had livestock that had gotten loose. His children were quite proud when he showed off his ability. He had quite a technique for a moving target where he would throw a large loop out in front of the potential target and they would essentially run into it. He sometimes used this technique for catching his children, and later his grandchildren, on some playful weekends on the farm.

This roping skill, however, also cost him his right thumb. At the age of fourteen while working from horseback, he roped a steer and snugged the rope around the saddle horn. Unfortunately, there was a loop in the rope that his right thumb had inadvertently slipped into, and when the steer hit the end of the rope, the force of the loop tightening around his thumb popped it off at the second joint. The loss of his

1 "The Great Rebellion/Mexico 1905 – 1924" by Ramon Ruiz

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thumb never seemed to hinder him in his work. Moreover, when he taught himself to write, he wrote with his thumbless right hand with a rather unique style. He also used the remaining stub as a source of amazement and amusement for his grandchildren. In 1907, not too long after Dad had lost his thumb, his mother died and his thumb was buried with her. His father later remarried and dad apparently had little to do with him after that. At one point in time, it struck me that he never talked about his father. When I asked him about it he just made some general comments about his father not leading a good life after Dad's mother died.

When Dad was 19, he started courting our mother. She was 15 at the time. Her full birth name was Maria Martina Fidencia del Trancito Herrejon. She was known as Martina Herrejon and then as Martha in this country (Fig. 2). They had known each other since they were kids, but they had grown up on different ranches. (He added that he had had other girlfriends prior to this.) They courted for six months. Mother then requested that dad ask her mother, Carmen Santollo de Herrejon, and older brother Pedro for permission to get married (her father, Tiburcio Herrejon, had died when she was seven). They were married six months later on February 18, 1911. She was 16 and he was 19. The Mexican Revolution had already begun in October 1910 with Madera's declaration of rebellion. The results of this war would eventually lead to their decision, eight years later, to sell all of their belongings and head north to America. The most immediate impact of the revolution was that dad lost his job as a vaquero, a job he had worked at for 5 or 6 years at some of the ranches. As a result of the war all the livestock from the ranches he worked on were stolen, so he had to find another way to make a living. He bought three mules and a horse and he then made his living carrying farm produce from Cotzurio to the city (Morelia) to sell. He may have also done some of what was basically subsistence farming as part of a village commune that was common in parts of Mexico.

This war was described (Ruiz) as more of a rebellion than a revolution since it did not result in any great social or economic reform, but was more a question of wealthy landowners, owners of haciendas, and the middle class wanting a voice in the government that had evolved into a dictatorship in Diaz's later years in power. "The peon, who supplied the labor, scratched out a paltry existence, whether living in a free village or on hacienda land, was the forgotten man of Mexico."² Of the early leaders, only Emiliano Zapata was motivated by the need for social or land reform and he was assassinated in 1919. The assassin was rewarded by the Carranza government (President of Mexico at the time).

As the civil war dragged on year after year with various factions fighting each other, the country was in a great turmoil and it began to get harder and harder to make a living by taking and selling their produce to markets beyond Cotzurio. The countryside was overrun by a combination of lawless gangs and undisciplined

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revolutionaries. "Most soldiers were recruited, not for the cause, but because they could make more money. In many cases they were against the peasant and were protecting the interests of the haciendas (haciendas were large estates, sometimes a collection of ranches). The soldiers labeled constitutionalists had turned into the scourge of the people and of the land, robbing cattle and draft animals at will, burning and sacking the homes of the poor, killing... and converting thievery into a major industry."³ This revolution ran from 1910 to 1920 and during this time it's been estimated that something like two million lives were lost. Valeriano's life was threatened three times during this period and in the context of the times, these threats constituted real danger.

The mildest threat was when his mother-in-law died and he was bringing a casket back from Morelia for her on one of his mules. On the road back he had an encounter with someone who wanted the poncho he was wearing. Valeriano said "No," he wasn't giving it up. The bandit got next to him and stuck something in his ribs, but dad grabbed his arm and twisted it, and the would-be bandit backed off and told dad to go on, to be on his way. Apparently, he either didn't have a weapon, or chose not to use it.

The other two threats were somewhat more serious. The first one was when five men jumped him. They got ahold of him and one of them said, "Lo vamos a colgar", ("We're going to hang you"). He was quite frightened because there was a tall tree nearby and other farmers had been hung in the past. One of the other men, however, said no, but he wanted dad to tell them where they could find some horses to steal. Dad told them there were some in "el monte" (the mountains/hills) but he told them that they couldn't enter from where they were, even though they actually could. He told them they would have to double back by the ranch. He took them that way because he was hoping his brothers would be there to help him. When he got there, however, none of them were there and he didn't know what to do. Luckily, when they were leaving the ranch, the prospective horse thieves spotted a large, expensive looking house up on the hill. They asked him who lived there. He told them Juan Chavez, but what he didn't tell them was that the owner wasn't home and that he actually lived in Morelia. They thought this place looked like an opportunity to steal some money, so three of them left for the ranch. They left two kids to guard him that he thought might only be in their early teens. They were apparently only armed with nothing more than knives or machetes, if that. He started thinking of how to escape. He started picking up some stones and pretended like he was tossing them around. Suddenly, with some large rocks in his hands he turned towards the kids guarding him, hollered a curse at them, and threatened them with the rocks. The two kids took off running. He hid by some cactus for a while, but the others didn't return. This event happened when dad was around 26 years old. This would have been sometime in 1917.

The most serious threat, and the one that finally convinced him to leave, was sometime later, probably in early 1919 before February and when he was still 27. A group of revolutionaries threatened him and a group of farmers that, if they took any more of their produce to the city, (Morelia), they would be hung. This was no idle threat since,

3 "The Great Rebellion/Mexico 1905 - 1924" by Ramon Ruiz

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as I mentioned preciously, some farmers had already been hung. When I asked dad why they didn't want them taking the produce to the city, he said so they could steal it.⁴ In addition to the threats from unlawful gangs and the revolutionaries, they had also suffered through a period of personal tragedies. Within months, not only did Martina's mother die, as previously mentioned, but one of Valeriano's brothers, Alejandro, died in 1917 and his sister Elodia died in 1918. And even more tragically, they lost their first-born child, "Manuela," who died in 1918 at the age of seven from pneumonia after a bout with the measles. Some of these deaths may have been the result of the 1918 influenza pandemic. With this combination of personal tragedies and the threats of hanging, Valeriano decided to sell their livestock (3 mules, 1 mare, and 3 cows) to finance their trip to the "Promised Land." He indicated that none of his rich relatives would help him except for his brother-in-law Samuel Chavez, his sister Zenaida's husband, and that is why he was always held him in such high regard. This trip began in February 1919. It included, not only he and his wife Martina, but also their two remaining children. Esperanza (Frances), who had been born in November 1914 so she was 4 years old and Erasmo (John) who was born in May 1917, so he was not yet 2 years old. So in February 1919 they began their journey to the north that dad was to describe as "the worst suffering in their lives".

Although the revolution in Mexico created a situation that prompted a mass exodus to the U.S., I still think that the decision to cut your roots with your family and friends, and their supportive infrastructure to start this journey into the unknown, with a wife and two small children, took a great deal of courage, initiative, and self-confidence. Remember, this was 1919, an era prior to easy and rapid communication or transportation for the vast majority of people. The airplane had been invented only 13 years earlier and the automobile and the telephone were in their infancy. But these were the decisions all the early immigrants faced, whether they were crossing an ocean or crossing a river.

4 This corresponds to the quote on the previous page.

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II. CROSSING THE BORDER

Dad apparently used the money raised from selling their livestock and from his brother-in-law Samuel Chavez, to purchase train fare from Morelia to Nuevo Laredo (Mexican side of Laredo, Texas border) a trip of approximately 700 miles. Dad's nephew, Pancho, and apparently someone from his family also made the trip with them. They initially wanted to cross the border legally, but because they couldn't speak, let alone read or write in English, and because of the high cost to enter, they had to find another alternative. The cost was \$8.00 per adult - \$16.00 for dad and mother (remember, this was a significant amount of money in this era when wages were often 50 cents to \$1.00 a day). They had only a few dollars left from their initial finances. They didn't know what they were going to do. When their money ran out, dad indicated you couldn't even earn a nickel in this area, apparently flooded with other people trying to make the crossing. They had met and befriended a fellow, also named Pancho, that was in this same predicament. The poor guy, dad says, "...didn't have a cent to his name". Dad liked him, and they shared what little food they had with him. It is interesting to note that no matter how little they had, they never hesitated to share it. They would later end up being recipients of this same type of generosity. I think it was Woody Guthrie who once observed in his travels during the Depression, that the poor never hesitated to share what little they had, it was the rich who always seemed afraid to help the starving and homeless - (apparently they didn't want to ruin anyone's initiative).

While mother was down by the river washing John's diapers, dad, his new friend, and his nephew were sitting around talking and wondering what they were going to do, when this lady approached them and asked them if they wanted to get to the other side. They of course said yes, and asked how much it would cost. She replied that it was two pesos per person. They agreed to pay (dad paying for his new friend as well) and she told them where to meet her that afternoon. When they arrived at the rendezvous point, a place where the water wasn't so deep, it was full of people also wanting to cross. Dad indicated that it was their good fortune to meet up with some people from mother's village that had already been across two or three times. They had been caught and sent back. But they knew where to go when they crossed the river so they wouldn't get caught. They told dad and mother's group to follow them.

When it started getting dark, they all entered the Rio Grande River "like ducks" as Dad described it. Dad's friend carried Frances, on his back, Dad carried John and mother carried a small bundle of clothes. Somehow, during the crossing, whether it was the current or whatever, she lost their bundle of clothes. When they reached the other side, they started running along a barbed wire fence line until they found a hole to go through. Mother's dress got caught in the barbed wire. Dad told her to tear it and leave it so they wouldn't get left behind. Their socks got full of burrs, but they were in such a hurry to avoid getting caught by the border patrol that they put their shoes on, burrs and all, and kept running. They were running through brambles and bushes and mother's clothes were badly torn, she indicated that her feet were swollen beyond endurance, but they had to keep going all night. They had wanted to stop and rest

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earlier, but the young man that they had encountered, that had been here before, told them no, they were too close to the border, they had to keep going further so the border patrol wouldn't find them. So they kept going and eventually ran into some other immigrants like themselves. As a group, they continued walking until they found a wooded area where they could hide out for the night.

It is interesting to note that in retelling this portion, rather than dwelling on the hardships, dad was rejoicing in how, "My good Lord has been helping me all my life". He felt that in critical moments of despair, good fortune had come his way. He was referring to the woman showing up when they were almost out of money in Nuevo Laredo, meeting up with those that had been across before to help lead the way, various other incidents in their trip through Texas, and later, when they ran into the man that sent them to Michigan.

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III. TEXAS & THE JOURNEY TO SAN ANTONIO

As they waited in the woods the next day after crossing the Rio Grande river, a cold wind started to pick up, and a cold, driving rain started to fall. They had no shelter, no heavy clothing, and the clothing they wore was somewhat tattered. They were quite miserable. There were three or four women in this group and they began to cry. It was very cold (Dad called it a blizzard, but more than likely it was just a snow storm, something they probably hadn't experienced much in their part of Mexico). Finally, dad looked around and found a pile of dry brush and sticks. He was able to get a fire started in the rain which helped them keep warm for a while. But the fire eventually burned out. So they decided to follow the train tracks. After following the tracks for a ways they found a train trestle. They all decided to huddle under the trestle and spend the night there. They had some degree of shelter from the rain but the trains kept rattling over them all night. When it got light they left and started following the train tracks north.

After walking part of the day they saw the light from a depot in the distance. When they arrived there, a Tejano who had seen them approaching had prepared a big fire so they could get warm. He told them that if they had enough money they should buy their train tickets here, since from here they were far enough away from the border that they wouldn't be sent back to Mexico (I am not sure how far out of Laredo this was, my guess would be around 15-20 miles). No one had enough money for tickets so they kept on walking. Their destination was San Antonio, Texas which is about 150 miles from Laredo (Fig. 3). That night, one of their traveling companions who had a little money went into town and bought some bread for them to eat. They set up a fire outside of town and all gathered around the fire to sleep for the night. When morning came they got up and started walking north toward San Antonio again.

You may wonder why they were headed for San Antonio. During this period, Mexican immigration, legal or otherwise, was welcomed by the American farming and business communities. World War I had just ended and the American farming industry was beginning to feel the effects of the industrial build-up. Parts of the country had a manpower shortage (at least cheap labor seemed to be in short supply). Farm industries such as the sugar beet industry had field representatives at various locations to recruit labor and apparently San Antonio was one of these locations.

So, as they continued their journey they came to the little town of *Encinal*, about 40 miles north of Laredo. It had been cold and wet most of the way and as a consequence, Erasmo/John had gotten sick by the time they arrived there. I don't think it was anything serious, probably the flu or teething, but an indication of dad's feeling of despair and helplessness was that he got to thinking that his little 2 year old son could be dying, and there was little he could do. You have to remember that this was 1919, prior to any social legislation that came out of the Roosevelt era and there were no government agencies to turn to. Everything was pretty much on a pay-as-you-go basis and people had to find a way to muddle through on their own, or from whatever individual charity that was offered.

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Having nowhere else to turn, dad started to pray to God for help. A little while later the sun came out, it warmed up, and baby John immediately started feeling better, and things didn't look quite so bleak. I guess for dad this was one of the prayers that God decided to answer that day.

They kept on walking, past Encinal on their way to the next little town of Cotulla. On their way, as they were walking by one home, a kindly Tejano⁵ couple that lived along the road sent their little girl out to invite them in. The couple shared some tea and cornbread with them, and the gentleman suggested to dad that he should leave his wife and children with them while he went ahead and found work. When Dad had enough money to send for them, this gentleman said he would take care of getting them to the depot and on a train to join up with Dad. However, there was no way that mother was going to stay behind. She was determined to keep the family together and stay with Dad, so they thanked these generous, thoughtful people and continued on their way. As they approached the city of Cotulla (about 25 miles from the last town of Encinal), they ran into another Tejano who was talking to an American, but when he saw them approaching, he came over to ask them about news regarding the revolution in Mexico. This Tejano told them that the American needed some help mending fences and that they could sleep in his barn. So they worked on the fences a few days and made around \$2.00 or \$3.00. They were paid something like \$.50 to \$1.00 a day. This Tejano also told them there would be some people through later looking for people to go to work in Oklahoma. This information turned out to be false, but it led to the separation of this poor, motley band. Dad asked the two Panchos (his new friend and his nephew)⁶ if they wanted to wait to see if the Oklahoma rumor was true. Dad and his family decided to continue on to San Antonio. When the two Panchos realized that the Oklahoma job was not going to materialize they sent a couple boys running to try and catch up with dad so they could join back up.

However, when dad and family left Cotulla, an American picked them up in his truck and gave them a ride to the next town of Dilley, another 15 miles closer to San Antonio, so they were unable to reconnect. When they arrived in Dilley, they got jobs working in the spinach fields. Dad recounted, with some amusement, how he thought he was going to make a lot of money on this job because he could work quite fast. So he started filling the bushel baskets with the spinach stalks. The American owner came by, took a look and immediately sent his Mexican foreman over. He began to dump all of the spinach out of the baskets. Dad hadn't realized that they had wanted them to strip the dead leaves and stems off. Once they showed him what they wanted, work was slower, but they were still able to make a little money. During this time, however, dad came down with a severe case of diarrhea (maybe it was the water) that restricted his ability to work, since he spent a good deal of time in the bushes. They were able to make a few dollars here, but the work finally ran out. Apparently, when they first arrived in Dilley, they were put up one night in what had either been a pig

5 The distinction between a Tejano (which literally means Texan) and an American, apparently is that the term Tejano is used to distinguish a Mexican-American native to Texas from an Anglo-American. Typically a Tejano is someone whose ancestor's were living in Texas before it was a state or even a Republic. As has sometimes been stated, Tejanos were "foreigners in their own land".

6 Apparently one of the Panchos was traveling with his father and the other one with his wife.

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shed or chicken coop. When they woke the next morning, dad started complaining about itching and so did mother. When they looked, they found that they were covered with lice. They then looked around and they said you could see them crawling in a line on the walls and in the dirt. They had to boil their clothes to clean them. After that, they decided to sleep in the fields.⁷

They moved on to the town of Pearsall (about 50 or so miles from San Antonio) where they used some of the money they had earned to buy mother a dress, the one she had was severely torn and tattered. Dad also bought himself a black shirt, a hat, and some shoes. The juaraches (Mexican shoes) he was wearing were completely worn out. In Pearsall he had a choice of working in the onion fields or of clearing some land. This meant cutting down and digging out an acre of mesquite tree stumps all by hand, piling it up, and burning it. He made the choice to clear the land. It turned out to be a bad choice. First of all, he indicates that he was too dumb to know any better, so he got stuck with the worst acre and it was back-breaking work, cutting down the trees, digging out the stumps and piling them up. The others finished with their acre well before dad was done and they left without saying a word. He labored on alone for a couple more days to complete the job for a total of a week. When dad went to collect his pay, the American landowner told him that Dad owed him 50 cents. The American claimed that dad had spent more than he had earned, but he was going to be a good guy and not charge him. The landowner had provided them food for the week Dad worked clearing the acre, and claimed the cost of this food was 50 cents more than what he owed Dad. The pay for clearing the acre was \$11.00, so his claim meant that dad and the family had eaten \$11.50 worth of his food, this in a day when families must have gotten by on well under \$1.00 a day on food (since that was a typical daily wage in Texas at that time). Dad indicated that this farmer had charged three or four times what the food was worth. This was his first experience in being exploited by some unconscionable low-life in this country and there was nothing he could do about it. That was part of the load he had to bear as an illegal alien, with no legal rights in this country.

So there he was in a rather desperate situation, they didn't have a cent, didn't have a job, they had nowhere to stay, and nothing to eat. Fortunately, they ran into another Mexican who lived on a nearby ranch whose boss had given him a cow for milk for a child about John's age. However, he didn't know how to milk it and he told dad if he would milk the cow he could have some of the milk for Frances and John. His wife also let mother use their kitchen and showed her how to fix some johnnycakes. This fellow told dad not to worry, that he could talk to his patron (boss) that night about a job. Dad got to clear another acre of land for the Mexican's patron but this only took two or three days and he earned \$7.00.

7 On my tape there was something mother did not want dad to talk about. I couldn't figure out what it was until I listened to Martin's tape and this incident was mentioned. Her aversion to speak of this takes on significance when you realize how much Mother emphasized cleanliness. There was a later incident in Michigan that the girls (Mercede, Carmen, and Marge) referred to in their tape where there was an outbreak of lice at one of the schools and someone (the family suspected Ray Shaw) said they ought to check those dirty Mexicans. Health officials checked them out and gave them a clean bill of health, but can you imagine how much this must have hurt Mother?

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Dad, however had taken on some kind of illness in Mexico.⁸ Whatever it was, it struck him hard. When it hit him he would shake uncontrollably and Mother would sit on top of him and couldn't contain him. Then fever and chills would hit him and he would sleep for hours and hours. The few dollars they had just made were eaten up while he was too sick to work. Finally, when he got feeling better the Mexican he was staying with told him about some other Mexicans nearby that were working some land for an American and they were going to throw a dance. He wanted to know if dad and mother wanted to go. He said to mom, "Vamonos." ("Lets go.") They went to the dance. Dad thought these people throwing the dance were really good people. Mother spent the night dancing with some of them, and dad spent the night in the kitchen with the old timers answering questions about Mexico and the Revolution. The people that worked the land asked dad if he was looking for work. He of course said yes. He showed up the next morning and worked for them hoeing cotton for 6 days \$1.00 per day plus meals. At the end of the week they were going into Pearsall and dad asked for a lift (they traveled in two wagons pulled by teams of mules). They agreed to take them and told dad to meet them at 2:00 in the morning. They were about 15 miles from Pearsall. They arrived around daybreak. Dad thanked them and they parted company.

Mother bought some oranges when they arrived in Pearsall and when dad ate one, the sickness he had hit him again. And there he was on the sidewalk asleep from the fever. He says now, "Just think, if a policeman had come by, he would have sent us back to Mexico". He didn't know how long he had slept, until mother woke him up to tell him the train was coming. He said he got up and was walking like he was drunk but he got to the depot and was able to buy the tickets to San Antonio. When he got into the train, he immediately sat down and fell back asleep. Mother woke him when the train started to approach San Antonio. She told him there were some things in the air that looked like birds, but she didn't know what they were. This was the first time either of them had seen an airplane.

⁸ Frances described it as malaria. There were swamps between Cotzurio and Morelia where he might have contracted it. He would suffer from fever and chills. Dad didn't think it was malaria, he thought it was nerves from all the stress that he had been under.

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IV. ON TO MICHIGAN

When they arrived in San Antonio they only had \$7.00. They didn't know what to do. If they rented a place to sleep, they wouldn't have any money for food. If they ate, they wouldn't have any money to rent a place to sleep. They started walking down a street when they encountered a Mexican who asked them if they wanted to go to Michigan. Dad thought the guy had said Michoacan and he said "yes!" After all the suffering, hardships, and uncertainty they had endured for the last three months, he was ready to go back to his beloved Michoacan. This man gave them his business card and told them where his office was located, just down the street, and told them to give the card to his secretary. (Dad still remembers this man's name, over 50 years later. It was Jose Garcia.) They went to the office. There were two other families there that had previously been to Michigan and they were going back. They asked dad if he too was going to Michigan. Dad responded that he had no idea where he was going. They told him not to worry, Michigan was really far away, but farmers paid much better there. In Michigan, they paid \$3.00 per day versus Texas where it was only \$1.00 per day. They apparently waited for several days in San Antonio for the beet company to finish their recruiting and send them to Michigan. Their money ran out. Frances and John were hungry and they didn't have anything to eat. The other people waiting were also out of money and food and they would go out scrounging and they would find bananas and oranges in the trash. They gave some to dad and his family but they told dad to come with them to gather them, so they also went rummaging through the trash to get something to eat. Soon after, though, the sugar beet company started to provide them some food; sardines, cans of beets, bread, but due to Dad's stomach-related problems he had a hard time eating this food. The day came to board the train and head to Michigan. They literally did not have a cent to their name. Dad said when they traveled from San Antonio, Texas to Saginaw, Michigan he didn't have a nickel in his pocket.

This might be a good place for me to expound on how important the element of chance can play in our destiny. As I mentioned earlier how Dad had said, "My good Lord has been helping me all my life" and referenced the labor recruiter for the sugar beet farms in Michigan. The reason that was significant was that they typically recruited from mid-March to May. If Dad and family had arrived in San Antonio a month or 2 earlier or later in the year, the recruiter wouldn't have been recruiting and he and family may have been stuck in Texas where the opportunities available for a Mexican American family in that era would not have been very good. Prejudices towards Mexican Americans in Texas at that time was much more severe than it was in Michigan.

On their way to Michigan, they stopped in Dallas and picked up more people and among them was a nephew⁹ of mothers and some of his relatives. His name was Leon. Dad approached him and asked for a loan of \$5.00 that he would pay back when they

9 This may not be the right relationship, even though she calls him her *sobrino* (nephew) since she also refers to him as being with "his relatives."

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got work in Michigan. Leon agreed, but he went to the woman Pilar¹⁰ who was holding the money and she wouldn't give it to them (their luck had been better with strangers).

Finally, they arrived in Saginaw, Michigan. As the train was pulling in dad climbed outside the train to have a look and the wind caught a little hat he had bought back in Pearsall and it was gone. Somebody that was traveling with them gave him one of the straw hats they used for shade when they picked beets. The beet company had brought 16 coaches of Mexicans to work in the sugar beet fields. They parked the train at the depot and they all slept there overnight. (After they had been there a couple of hours, the steam was released from the engine which increased the temperature on the train. Dad was not too concerned, but many of the people started clamoring "We're burning up!" Somebody came on board and told them it was just the steam, nobody was burning up.) The next day the translators arrived and the groups were divided up, dad said, like when you buy cattle. These groups went to different farms.¹¹ Dads group included Leon. They went to stay at a farm where the farmer gave them some of his milk for the kids but dad and mother had nothing to eat. Finally, Leon came through and went into town and bought them some bread.

They brought another guy into this group who was a Tejano. Dad indicated that he didn't like this guy at all. He started working in a foundry in Saginaw with this Tejano. Apparently there was some connection the farm organization that brought them up had with the sugar beet farmers and other industries. They may have worked in factories and foundries in the off season to survive. They had to walk five miles to get to work. Dad got sick one day while working in Saginaw and he asked the Tejano to take him to a doctor. The doctor wanted to put dad in the hospital. And the Tejano encouraged dad to go to the hospital. But dad thought, how could he go to the hospital and leave Martina alone with this man that he didn't trust.

When they left the doctor Dad fainted and fell down, but somehow he got back home and told mother he was sick and he laid down. Apparently, due to his lack of a proper diet in these days he had lost weight and his skin was hanging from his body. Mother got scared and took off with Frances to find her nephew Leon so they could go to town and he could help them get something for Dad. But, Dad said, what could they buy for him? Neither of them could speak a word of English. Mother protested during the taping and said the medicines she got¹² helped him. Dad disagreed and said it was the enema. Dad indicates here that he had gone 5 days without eating (it must have been the time frame since they had left the train). Mother mixed some plants with the water. After the enema, he had to go outside (they had no toilets) and the liquid he released was very, very green, the poison, he says, that was in his system. He said he immediately started feeling better.

10 I don't know the relationship, but I think she was Leon's wife.

11 I think they stayed in company-built groups of one-room shacks.

12 I believe she was referring to herbal medicines, not pharmaceutical.

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[Here mother tells the story from her perspective.]

She went walking with Esperanza (Frances) for about 6-7 miles. Not knowing whether they would find dad dead or alive when they returned (she had to leave Erasmo / John, who was only about 2, with Dad). She didn't know where she was going, but eventually she heard voices speaking in Spanish (music to her ears) and came across Leon, her nephew, and his relatives working in a sugar beet field. They asked what was wrong and she told them how sick Dad was. Leon took her to Saginaw so she could buy something to cure dad. She couldn't remember what she bought. When they came back they went by this lady's house (the farmers place I believe) and asked if she had anything to help. This is where they got a hot water bottle and medicine for the enema. In any event, dad got better.

(Here's more of how mother remembers this period)

"When we started working in the beet fields we would get up at 4:00 in the morning. Valeriano would leave with Esperanza / Frances to the fields. I would stay and cook our food, then take it, with Erasmo / John and Jose / Joe to the fields and work. Then I would leave the field early and take the kids home and cook and wash the clothes and wait for your Dad to come home when it was almost dark. Valeriano still had a few spells with the fever so he would lay down with the boys and Esperanza and I would keep working."

But back to this "Tejano" that dad didn't like. Unknown to Dad, this guy started charging food and clothing at the local store (possibly a company store) in Dad's name. He charged \$100 worth of merchandise in Dad's name. This was a small fortune for them, you figure at \$3.00 a day, this was over 6 weeks worth of wages. Considering that work was not that steady through the year, and sometimes he only got \$1.00 a day, this was an even greater percentage of their yearly income. When dad found out, he didn't know what to do. A friend called Lupe who could speak pretty good English told him he would go to the store with him and help him translate with the store owner to try to work it out. When they arrived, the Tejano was in the store. Dad's friend told the store owner what this guy had done. Meanwhile, Dad confronted the Tejano and started cursing him, calling him every filthy name he could think of. Dad was also trying to corner him so he could hit him. The store owner, with typically confused priorities, told Dad's translator, Lupe, to tell dad to quiet down or he would call the police to come and get him. Never mind that dad had been robbed of \$100.00. The store owner, I'm sure, knew he would get his money, so it was no skin off his nose. He was more concerned with order than with justice. Anyway, with Dad's illegal alien status, he could have been sent back to Mexico so there was nothing he could do and he had to back off. Later, dad went looking for this guy, where he lived. The guy hid, but dad found him and abused (*maltratar*) him until he tired of it (he didn't say if he meant physically or verbally).

The bottom line was, Dad was left without the hundred dollars. He had expected to receive \$107.00 for their work and thought they would be able to buy clothes for the kids, mother, and himself that they all badly needed. Instead, he got a check for only \$7.00. He was mad enough to kill the son of a bitch. It seems that taking advantage of others is not limited to any particular ethnic group.

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When they arrived in Michigan, they lived near Saginaw for about a year and earned some money to buy clothes. Dad couldn't stand the work in the foundry. He said he would spit dirt, and when he blew his nose it would be nothing but dirt. During this time they shared a couple of rooms with another couple. However, this couple apparently had a little business on the side. It seemed that they took in a lot of boarders for short periods of time. Dad said he knew what was going on and told mother to stay away from that woman. There was some good that came out of this. The wife of a fellow they had met apparently ran off with one of the clients to live in the wild, exotic land of Ohio. Lorraine, Ohio to be exact. Anyway, the poor fellow that was left behind invited dad and family to share his place, which was near North Branch (Fig. 4).

They spent the next seven years in the North Branch area, working the beet fields spring, summer, and fall. And in the winter dad would either leave the family to work in one of the factories in Saginaw, or work for the local farmers for \$1.00 a day. He spoke of this time as a lost seven years, of doing nothing. When they worked in the sugar beet fields they made only about \$200 for the season. The first thing they would do with the money was to buy clothes for the kids and food for the winter, in case he couldn't get work. During those seven years the family started growing at a rather rapid rate, so keep in mind that during much of these hard times and hard labor that our mother was doing this while pregnant. They arrived in this country around May in 1919, Joe was born in June 1920, Ellen in January 1922, Mercedes in July 1923, Carmen in September 1924, Margie in May 1926, and Paul in August 1927. So about every year and a half or less, our mother was giving birth to a baby, while also working and taking care of them.

During this period there was one memorable Christmas I was told about. As I heard the story, the family was facing a particularly bleak Christmas. Mom and Dad had nothing for the children. Mother had hung up their socks, which had holes in them, and had nothing more than a few peanuts and some candy to put in each and that was it, no other gifts. I don't know if it was Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, but they heard a knock at the door. When they opened it, there stood Santa Claus with a sackful of gifts. One of the farmers they were working for, Charlie Thomas and his wife Myrtle, had gotten dressed up and out of the goodness of their hearts had brought gifts for this poor family. It's like something out of an old Frank Capra movie. I get choked up and teary eyed every time I think about it, and I hadn't even been born yet. (It just happened again)

(Here's more of mother's recollections)

"When we came to this country we suffered so much with sickness and poverty. After Saginaw we were on different farms. One was with Charlie Thomas and his wife Myrtle. She was very nice. She showed me how to do many things. I couldn't understand English but she would show me the items and tell me the names (Remember, mother couldn't read so she had to memorize all of this.) She showed me how to make apple pies. I helped her to can tomatoes." (We also have to marvel how she was able to go grocery shopping through the years without being able to read the labels.)

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V. THE TURNING POINT

The most heartwarming story is how dad got started in farming on his own. An old sugar beet farmer Dad was working for by the name of Jim Cargill took a liking to dad. He liked Dad's work and his attitude. One day he asked Dad if he wanted to work a farm. Dad asked how in the world he could get started working a farm when he owned nothing. Jim Cargill said if he was interested, not to worry, he would help. This was probably around 1926. Dad, his brother Felix¹³ (who had joined him from Mexico), and two other Mexican friends decided to get together and rent a farm to work for a year. However, they didn't do well and they lost everything. But Jim Cargill wouldn't let Dad quit. So Dad gave it a try the next year on his own. Mr. Cargill gave Dad a team of horses and \$150.00 (of which dad apparently only got to pay back \$50.00), then he threw in a cow for milk for the kids. And then he got Dad some cows on shares (50/50 split on milk and calves). That's when dad began to gradually get into the farming business and out of the uncertainties of being a transient field laborer. Jim Cargill continued to help by providing more cows on shares, so dad was milking 10 or 12 cows. Jim Cargill would let Dad keep all the milk, all Dad had to do was take care of his calves. He also let Dad use his pasture for his calves. He also let Dad use another team of horses. All in all, Jim Cargill was a very generous and admirable man. Dad described him as a fine and kind gentleman that got him started in farming and that he loved working for him. I wish I knew more about him. Without him, I don't know if dad would have had the opportunity to rise up out of the field hand trap he was in and provide us the much improved (though still poor) life we later enjoyed. He was the man that gave Dad his real start toward a better life. Unfortunately, he died of cancer a few years after helping Dad get started.

With farming, the family generally had enough to eat, although they were still very poor and sometimes they didn't have much money for clothes and other niceties. They would butcher a steer in the fall, and in the spring they would butcher a hog. In addition, they had chickens for eggs and meat, milk from the cows, and of course, mother's garden. Mother always had a garden and Mrs. Charlie Thomas (Myrtle) and other farmers wives taught her how to can, how to make various American dishes, and loaned her their sewing machines so she could make and mend their clothes. Mrs. Thomas also taught mother what little English she picked up. All in all, the farmers wives treated mother quite magnificently.

The family, however, was a long way from being out of the woods. Farming on shares was not an easy way to get ahead. Dad worked hard but would have many expenses and got to keep only half of what he earned. During this period, the rest of the family was born. Jesse in October 1929, Martin in January 1932, and me, Daniel in March 1936. This might be a good place to talk about our names. We all had Mexican and Americannames. However, some like mine and Martin's and some of my sister's like Carmen and Mercedes, were spelled the same in both languages, but pronounced differently. Other's like Joe was easily recognized as Jose. However, for most of the

13 Felix committed suicide by hanging himself in the barn sometime around 1930. I don't know why.

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rest it was a different matter. Jesse, for example, was also called Jesus, however, pronounced in Spanish as “heh-sus”. Paul was called Hipolito, while similar, it’s not a direct translation. Marjorie, or Margie was also called Manuela, the name of our sister that died in Mexico. Ellen was also called Melania although I don’t think there is a direct connection. And then we come to Frances and John whose Mexican names have nothing to do with their American names and I don’t know how the American names were determined. This turned out to be very confusing to me in my youth. I thought the name Erasmo was John in Spanish until I ran into the name of Juan which was obviously a much better fit. With regard to Frances, I thought Esperanza was Frances in Spanish until I kept hearing the word in Spanish songs that I eventually looked it up and found out that Esperanza is Spanish for Hope. I bring this up because I’m not sure what names turned up on the birth certificates of several of my brothers and sisters and also because our mother always called us by our Mexican name.

During my recent Ancestry search I came across a census record for 1930 and one for 1940. They provide some interesting information. First of all some of our first names were butchered, especially Jesse’s (Jesus). In 1930 it was Jusus, in 1940 it was Jeans. I assume our parents were trying to tell them Jesus in broken English. In the 1940 census Ellen was listed as Allen and identified as a son. In the 1940 census Margie was listed as Mariecela and Mercy as Mercedy and I was listed as Donny. Some more interesting information was that in the 1930 census, Dad’s education was listed as none, but on the 1940 census it was indicated that his education was Elementary school, 4th grade. Mom’s was listed as none on both. In light of today’s political atmosphere, there was one other very important entry in the 1930 census. Mother and Dad and Frances and John were listed as aliens. In the 1940 census the race for all of us was listed as Mexican even though there is no such thing as a Mexican race. In today’s climate not only could Dad and Mom have been deported, but Frances and John would be considered DACA or Dreamers with the possibility of being deported as well. I don’t know if the rest of us may have been considered anchor babies.

To get back to our farming life, farming on shares¹⁴ also meant bouncing around from farm to farm, looking for a better opportunity. From about 1926, when Dad started farming, until the time I was born in 1936, the family had lived in about 5 different farms so they were moving to a different farm about every two years. Around the time shortly before I was born Dad was working the Paul Ziegenhardt farm near Marlette. Dad felt he had really made a big mistake getting hooked up with this farm. He called it an ugly farm but I think that had a lot to do with what he thought of the brothers that owned it.

I think an incident that happened there around 1936 that caused him to leave this farm, not only demonstrated what a long way he had come in self-assurance, but also, his fierce loyalty to his family. This incident began one afternoon when Joe was working

¹⁴ This was an informal contract under which a landowner agreed to let a farmer use his land, buildings, and animals for half of the product (milk, grain, animals). Each had to enumerate the assets they brought to the bargain, so that any profit could be properly attributed.

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with dad hauling some hay. He sent Joe to the barn at the Ziegenhardt farm to get some grain for the horses. Joe must have gone with mother. They had been to Marlette getting groceries first. Neither of the Ziegenhardt brothers, who lived there alone, were home. Joe and mother were waiting there for one of them to return before Joe finally decided to get the grain for the horses. It was getting late, around time for mother to get home and make supper. So Joe finally decided to go in the barn and get the grain. When Joe emerged from the barn with the grain, Paul Ziegenhardt had just arrived. Dad got there later with the load of hay and was in the Ziegenhardt kitchen. Paul Ziegenhardt started telling dad that Joe was stealing things. Dad blew his top and said he thought his head would go through the ceiling. His children and his name had been impugned. This was a man of great integrity and family honor meant a lot to him. He called Paul Ziegenhardt some names and told him why Joe had gone into the barn.

Dad told him that Joe and mother had waited over an hour for them. He said, "What did you think, that my wife would stay here waiting for you and I wasn't going to eat?" Dad called him some more names, and he made a point of pointing out to me that he was doing this in this man's house, in his kitchen. To insult someone in their own home he considered a great affront. Dad told him he wouldn't stay in this dirty, good-for-nothing farm. Paul Ziegenhardt told dad if he wanted to stay he could, but Dad told him if he let him keep everything, he wouldn't stay. When he left the kitchen he figured he had really screwed himself this time, he had no place to go. He figured "Tony" was finally finished here.

But fate was with him. Joe had run into the McClements soon after this and they told him they had heard there was a farm for rent that someone named Charlie Hallick had. When Joe arrived and told Dad, he jumped in his car (apparently he had done well enough to purchase a car by this time) and headed for North Branch. Dad hunted Charlie Hallick¹⁵ down and found him in the pool room. Dad told him that when he finished his game, he wanted to talk to him. So when the game was over, Dad told him he had heard Charley had a farm to rent and that he was interested since he had to leave the place he was currently farming. Charley told dad he would let him know by Friday (this was Monday). Dad left, still not knowing what he was going to do. Charlie Hallick let dad know the next day, Tuesday, that it was OK. Dad told him he didn't have any money, but he listed his livestock, 10 cows, a team of horses, and some other items and told him he would mortgage it all to him if he helped him, because he had fought with the Ziegenhardts and had to get out. Charlie Hallick told him to come by the next day and they would sign a contract. Dad felt that his good Lord had looked after him again. They signed the contract and when Paul Ziegenhardt realized what was happening, they were almost completely moved. Their ordeal with the Ziegenhardts, however, wasn't quite over.

Dad sent Joe to get Paul Ziegenhardt so they could divide the grain and beans they had to share. When Paul Ziegenhardt showed up he asked, "Are you moving?" Dad assured him they were, and they were almost finished. He asked Dad where he was

15 Charlie Hallick and Paul Ziegenhardt didn't care for each other, something to do with horses.

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going and Dad told him, presumably getting much satisfaction from telling him he was moving into a farm belonging to one of Ziegenhardt's enemies. After they had divided the grain and beans, Paul Ziegenhardt then claimed that Dad owed him a bunch of money. Dad told him that he knew where they were going to live, for Paul Ziegenhardt to get his books/accounts together and bring them to him so they could compare it to Dad's books, and then they could determine who owed whom. Dad told him, whenever he would pay Paul Ziegenhardt some money, he never wanted to give Dad a receipt. In addition, Dad had done a lot of work for him, he had traded him parts from his car, he had given him hay and Paul Ziegenhardt would never take these things into account or provide him a receipt. Dad told him he had all of this written down in his "book".

Later, when Dad was moving his cattle and horses from Paul Ziegenhardt's farm, Paul Ziegenhardt sent the new guy that was going to take Dad's place, over to Dad to ask if Paul Ziegenhardt could borrow Dad's "book" to compare it against his. Dad told him to tell Paul to, "kiss my ass, I wasn't born yesterday". If Paul Ziegenhardt wanted to see Dad's "book" he knew where Dad lived, to come and see him there. Dad confides here that he really didn't have this account book. In fact, he says, "I didn't even know how to write". But Dad then went on, this is 30 or 40 years later, to recite from memory, item by item, what he had paid and traded with Paul Ziegenhardt. In fact, he figured that Paul Ziegenhardt owed him money. Mother added at this point that Joe used to work until midnight for them for 50 cents a day, as well. Working until midnight for the Ziegenhardts was no exaggeration. I can remember, as a kid, when we went to the movies in Marlette, when we would return home late at night, we would pass the Ziegenhardt farm, and every time, the lights would be on in the barn where they were working. It wasn't that they were exceptionally hard working, they just worked to a weird schedule, especially for dairy farmers.

This battle, however, still wasn't over. In fact, Dad heard that one of Paul Ziegenhardt's helpers was saying to a friend of Dad's that Dad was going to be left in the streets, that Paul Ziegenhardt was going to take everything that Dad had. Dad's friend told him (the helper) not to worry about Tony, Tony could take care of himself. This guy that had bad-mouthed Dad later ran into Dad in a bar in Marlette and apologized. Dad told him he had a big mouth.

Dad started doing well at this new place, he had some good crops (sugar beets and beans), and he was milking quite a few cows. The word got back to Paul Ziegenhardt and he sent a bill collector (from Lapeer) to Dad to collect the money he allegedly owed him. Dad started recounting the payments and other transactions and asked the bill collector if Paul had mentioned those. The bill collector said no. So Dad trotted out his trusty "account book" bluff again, and told the bill collector he had all this written down in this book he had in the house but he wasn't showing it to anyone. This guy said he would go back and see Paul Ziegenhardt, and that was the end of it, he never heard about this problem again.

The reason for dwelling so long on this story is not only because Dad recounted it in such detail and with such pleasure, but also because it seemed to symbolize a turning

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point in attitudes. He no longer perceived himself, nor was he perceived, as a victim or as an outsider. He had attained a sufficient sense of security and self-respect that he would not allow his own or his children's integrity to be questioned, or for any of them to be taken advantage of. He had battled one of the natives and he had won. One of the nice things about living in the country was that, although farmers weren't immune to racial and ethnic stereotypes, most of them tended to judge individuals by how hard they worked, their character, and their integrity. And Dad always won their respect on these counts. Because of this, most of the kids after Frances and John faced little, if any, overt prejudice in the farming communities where the Fragas were known. In fact, from this point on, things started going rather smoothly. We were still renting on shares and moving every couple of years to a better situation. In the spring of 1945, we achieved some stability when we moved to the Claude Wood farm near Brown City. By this time only Jesse, Martin and me were the only ones still living at home. It was a big farm, of over 200 acres and around 30 cows to milk which allowed dad to start saving enough money to realize his lifelong dream to own a farm of his own. We lived there until the spring of 1951.

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VI. FULFILLING THE DREAM

To digress here for a moment, although the emphasis in this account has been on Dad, there is no attempt to diminish mother's role. She suffered the same, if not greater, hardships. She worked just as hard, if not harder, raising eleven children. She had the same language barrier as dad, and I'm sure she suffered through disappointments and had many misgivings. Dad, however, was the primary source of information, so most of the story is naturally going to be from his perspective, but in the context of their time and their culture, Dad was the provider and the decision maker. In fact, mother didn't always agree with what Dad decided to do. She apparently didn't object to the move from Mexico, and Dad gave her a lot of credit for how she endured their hardships without complaining, but Dad pointed out¹⁶ that she was against his decision to switch to farming on shares in this country, and she was definitely against his decision to buy the farm on Norman Road¹⁷. I remember this quite well myself since I witnessed some of it.

Dad had seen an ad for this 80 acre dairy farm about 8 miles Northeast of Imlay City. So he, Mother, Martin and I drove over to check it out. This was in February or March of 1950. It was cold out and when we got there and mother saw the house, she didn't even want to get out of the car. She didn't like the looks of the place at all. You couldn't really blame her, the house was old and weather beaten. The porches were falling down and there was no indoor plumbing, but Dad's first priority was the soil. He and Martin went to check the fields as I waited with mother in the car. Dad took a rod with him and would scrape the snow off the soil, dig it up, and run it through his hands. "This is good soil," he told Martin. He later took Joe out to show him the place and Joe told him if he wanted to buy it, he would help him, and Joe did provide considerable financial assistance. To a lesser degree so did Paul and Ellen's/Melania's husband Ambrose Assessor. Mother was not happy at the time of the decision but what she had failed to realize was that if the house had been in good shape, the farm never would have been priced where they could afford it. Dad based his decision, not on the condition of the buildings (which weren't going to help him make a living), but on the condition of the soil. He knew that with hard work this land was capable of providing them everything they needed. Dad really loved this farm. With it, he was able to remodel the house, pay off all his outstanding debts, and pay off the farm. For the first time in his life, he owned his own land and it would provide a comfortable life for he and his wife. With regard to the house, with the help of their family, (by this time, not only the sons and daughters, but the sons-in-law and daughters-in-law, as well) the house was suitably remodeled, including indoor plumbing. For the next 25 years, it became the family homestead (Fig. 5, 6, & 7). It was here that all the families of all the eleven children would congregate on the major holidays, as well as on most weekends. Many fond memories were generated here for all the family, but especially for most of the 64 grandchildren.

16 During the taping, mother was in the room and didn't disagree.

17 Again, mother was in the room and didn't disagree.

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VII. REFLECTIONS

One thing I can't emphasize enough was how impressed I was, as the youngest child, with how all the son-in-laws and daughter-in-laws, from various and diverse ethnic backgrounds, so thoroughly assimilated themselves into a real sense of family for all of us. They were there to help remodel the house, they were there to help with the farming on weekends, such as haying, and they would often come from Detroit on a regular basis just to visit.

Being one of eleven children, I've always enjoyed the fact that I came from this large family and enjoyed many benefits from these relationships. I have to give credit to our parents who somehow raised us with this great sense of family, "la familia," and of caring for one another. They raised eleven children under extremely difficult circumstances and yet I don't recall them ever thinking of us as any kind of great burden, but rather, as a sense of enjoyment, pride, and accomplishment. They always accepted their responsibility toward us when we were growing up, and never bemoaned their fate at having all these mouths to feed.

Our parents, and most of the early immigrants, raised large families, sometimes in great poverty, and yet they seemed able to enjoy their families, and were willing to make great sacrifices for them. Today, in our relative affluence and small family units, there sometimes seems to be an atmosphere where people have become so self-centered, so self-absorbed, that they are unable to accept these responsibilities or willing to make the kind of sacrifice associated with raising children. They are unwilling to accept their natural role in preparing the next generation to make this a better world to live in. Dad said, "No matter how much my wife and I suffered, what makes me so happy is to see all my family are in good shape. They're not rich, but they have good homes to live in and good families. We don't care for us, we suffered, but we suffered for our family."

Some of the inspiration that I derived from my parents was that when I was growing up, no matter how bad I thought things were, it never could be as bad as what my parents had to endure. Therefore, if they made it through their hard time, surely I could find a way to make it through whatever minor obstacles were in my way.

One of the legacies of growing up poor and as a minority in America, is the notion that you continually have to prove yourself, to prove that you are just as good as the "other Americans". This, in itself, is not all bad, since it can be a great motivating force. The assumption that comes along with proving yourself, however, is an implied inferiority, not only with how others perceive you, but how you perceive yourself. This may work to your disadvantage because with this implied inferiority can also come lower expectations. You set lower goals for yourself because, with your background, that's all you should expect. Fortunately for us, our parents were able to instill in us the necessary self-esteem and sense of pride in ourselves and in our family to expect higher achievements. A lot of this came from the sense of family that we had developed. If you failed at something, or did something embarrassing, it wasn't only a reflection on

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you, but also on the whole family this family that our parents had worked so hard to raise. This may occasionally lay a lot of guilt on you, but it also motivates you, much as a team or a military unit motivates the individual not to be the one to let the group down.

I think our parents' primary legacy is summarized in one of the statements Dad made on the tape when he was talking about "my wonderful kids." He says, I taught them to work hard and to respect people. Whatever success we've had I think can be attributed to these values. They taught us these values mostly by example. No one worked harder than they did, whether it was for their family or personal pride. They treated people with the greatest respect, and because of their demonstrated character and integrity, that respect was returned. I think that many people do not realize that respect is a two-way street. They expect to receive it, but they are not always prepared to give it. This, I believe, is a reflection in some of today's society that expects reward without effort, forgiveness without remorse, power without responsibility, and expresses pride without achievement.

One final bit of personal philosophizing. Another lesson that I derived from reflecting on our parents lives is that no one's life is predestined. Everyone's life is full of lessons learned or lost, opportunities acted on or missed. Each life is an accumulation of decisions made or not made and your life is measured as a product of the quality of these decisions. Basically, it's not so much what you say that counts but what you do. I think of our parents lives as a success because of what they did.

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VIII. EPILOG

Martina and Valeriano lived on their farm on 8804 Norman Road near Imlay City, Michigan until the summer of 1976. They actually had sold the farm to a neighbor about 4 years earlier, but had retained the right to live there for their lifetime. The Winter of 1975/76 was a hard one, however, and there was a period where they suffered a severe snow storm that not only had physically cut them off, but the phone lines were down for a few days as well. Sometime during this period Martina suffered a mild stroke. After this experience their children became concerned with their safety since most of them lived at least 50 miles away in the Detroit area.

Paul decided to purchase an additional house in Detroit where Valeriano and Martina could live and have their family members nearby. They moved there in the summer of 1976. Fortunately Frances lived only a block away so she was able to look in on them every day. Initially Paul's son Daniel lived with them for a while and later on, after Martina died, Martin's son Eddie lived with Valeriano. In addition, John moved into the upstairs about a year after they moved there and also helped look after them. With Valeriano and Martina located in Detroit, it became very convenient for their children and grandchildren to visit them often there. They lived there until their deaths.

Martina died at the age of 82 on May 1, 1978 in a hospital in Detroit. She had been physically active and self-sufficient all of her life and remained so until approximately four months before her death. Martina had never learned to read or write and her command of English was severely limited so she had few outside diversions. She never got much out of watching television, but on the farm she always had her garden to keep her busy. All of her life had been devoted to taking care of her house and her family which remained her top priorities when she moved to Detroit. She never considered asking someone else to do what she thought she was physically capable of doing, so sometime around Christmas 1977 she went out and shoveled and swept snow off the sidewalk. Later that day she complained about not feeling well and later was taken to the hospital. She spent the next 4 months in and out of the hospital with her health rapidly deteriorating due to angina and congestive heart failure. When it became apparent that her time was short, most of her children were able to get to the hospital on time to be with her during her final moments.

Valeriano lived on at the same house for another four years until he died on Sep 7, 1982 at the age of 91. Although he had help at times from people like Eddie, John, and Frances, he pretty much took care of himself until the last few months of his life. He suffered from Parkinson's disease and it deteriorated to the point where he had a hard time swallowing. When it became evident that he needed constant care, he was taken to the hospital where he spent an extended period of time. The family agonized over whether to send him to a nursing home, or to hire a full-time nurse and send him home. He expressed a desire to go home so that is where he went. He died within a week of returning home.

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IX. THE STORY CONTINUES

Although this concludes the story of Valeriano and Martina Fraga, it does not conclude the history of their family. Each of their children had successful careers, got married, raised their own families and had their own stories. A short summary of each of their children follows below. For a more detailed presentation of the growth of the family, see the semi-annual family tree provided at the yearly family picnic.

Manuela: born and died in Mexico at the age of 6, Birth – 1912, deceased - 1918

Esperanza (Frances): Born – 11/05/1914, Deceased - 02/04/2001

Married on 02/02/1935 to

Natividad Valdez, Born – 06/16/1906, Deceased - 06/11/1983

Frances was born in Mexico, she was not yet 5 years old when she was brought to this country. In her early years she worked in the fields with her father and mother. She was primarily responsible for teaching dad to read and write. Frances and Nati raised 16 children.

Erasmio (John): Birth - 05/28/1917, Deceased 08/14/2007

Married on 11/11/1940 to

Florence Wilkins, Born – 1913, Deceased - 1963

John was born in Mexico and was not yet 2 years old when he was brought to this country. He had an 8th grade education and went to Detroit to work on his own at around age 15. He served in the Army Corps of Engineers during World War II in both the European and Pacific theaters. On returning home he got into the electrical union and paved the way for brothers Joe, Paul and Martin to join him for successful careers as electricians. John and Florence had 2 children.

Joseph (Jose): Born – 06/06/1920, Deceased – 01/02 2010

Married on 05/12/1942 to

Helen Miller, Born – 02/19/1924

Joe was our parents first child born in this country. He too, had an 8th grade education and went to work on his own in the city around the age of 15. In his early years Joe spent much of his money buying things for his parents and siblings. From farm equipment for Dad, to prom dresses for his sisters and memorable Christmas presents, like a Red Ryder BB gun for his brother Danny. He also provided his parents with financial help, most notably when he helped Dad buy his farm on Norman Rd. Joe also served in the Army Corps of Engineers in the Pacific Theater during WWII. After the war, Joe worked as an electrician. Joe and Helen had 8 children.

Ellen (Melania): Born – 01/11/1922, Deceased - 09/24/1998

Married on 08/31/1946 to

Ambrose Assessor, Born 09/28/1914, Deceased - 07/17/1974

Ellen did the work of a man for many years on the farm until Paul and Jesse got old enough to tell Dad that she shouldn't have to do that anymore, since they were capable

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of doing it. Ellen had to re-enter the work force at age 52 to support herself after her husband of 28 years, Ambrose Assessor, died unexpectedly in 1974. Ellen and Amb had one child.

Mercedes: Born – 07/21/1923, Deceased - 09/15/2002

Married on 05/21/1949 to

Joseph Rustoni, born 01/29/1923, Deceased – 01/11/2014

Mercy, along with Carmen and Margie were the first in our family to participate in the mainstream teenage American rituals associated with high school, such as high school bands, cheerleading, proms, dating and graduation. In addition, after graduation they went off to the big city (Detroit) to live together and support themselves before they got married. In this era it was not a common practice for single young women to live alone and support themselves. After Mercy got married she worked at JL Hudson for a number of years and found bargains for many of us. In addition, Mercy was responsible for establishing and organizing the annual Fraga Christmas party. Mercy and Joe had 6 children.

Carmen: Born – 09/02/1924, Deceased – 11/17/12

Married on 06/17/1950 to

William Radjewski, Born – 04/21/1920, Deceased – 11/05/2011

As mentioned above for Mercy, Carmen also experienced the high school activities and after high school lived with her sisters and worked to support themselves. In addition, after Carmen got married, she started her own beauty shop in the basement of their home. Carmen was very politically aware and was ahead of her time when it came to women's rights. Carmen and Willy had 7 children.

Margie (Manuela): Born – 04/03/1926, Deceased - 03/15/2006

Married on 09/16/1950 to

Leonard Radjewski, Born – 01/24/1922, Deceased – 09/25/2013.

Margie, shared the same high school experiences and the self supporting work as Mercy and Carmen. Margie was always joyful and full of fun. She suffered from diabetes in her later year and as a result she lost a leg, but she never lost her sense of humor. Margie and Lenny had 7 children.

Paul (Hipolito): Born – 08/13/1927

Married on 08/27/1949 to

Eleanor Botos, Born - 01/19/1927, Deceased - 06/14/2012

Paul left high school in his junior year near the end of WW II so he could join the Navy before the war was over. After the Navy Paul was an electrician and he worked his way into being the man responsible for the electrical portion of some of the most ambitious factory and other large construction projects in the Detroit Metropolitan area. Paul currently lives in Arizona. Paul and Eleanor had 5 children

Jesse (Jesus): Born – 10/17/1929, Deceased - 11/05/2015

Married on 10/13/1951 to

Pauline Duma, Born - 09/09/1931, Deceased - 01/18/2017

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Jesse was a high school sports star in basketball, baseball, and football and also class president. He was the first son to graduate from high school. After high school he attended the Walsh Institute of Accounting in Detroit. He did not finish there, but he learned enough to become the president of a major car releasing company in Detroit. Jess and Pauline had 8 children

Martin: Born – 01/30/1932, Deceased, 09/27/1996

Married on 02/26/1955 to

Marilyn Sohn, Born – 02/04/1935, Deceased - 01/25/2011

Martin left high school after his sophomore year. He worked in a factory in Flint for a while and then decided to join the Air Force where he served some time in Korea. Martin is credited with introducing his younger relatives (brother, nephews and nieces) to early Rhythm and Blues, a precursor to Rock and Roll. Martin was also a successful electrician. Martin was instrumental in initiating and sustaining the annual Fraga family picnic. Martin and Marilyn had 5 children

Daniel: Born – 03/05/1936

Married on 08/30/1958 to

Helen Tank, Born – 10/26/38

After graduating from high school and an aborted attempt to follow in Jesse's footsteps and attend Walsh Institute of Accounting, Daniel volunteered for the draft. He was drafted into the Army during the latter stages of the Korean conflict. This was fortuitous timing since he was able to get the GI Bill and use it to become the first of the Fraga offspring to get a college degree. It was a B.S. in Aeronautical Engineering that led to a job for a major Air Force Research and Development center at Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio where he worked 31 years until retiring in 1992. Dan and Helen had 3 children and are currently living in Ohio.

While I have mentioned only the Fraga children, those of you that pursue this endeavor will find just as many interesting stories to explore associated with their spouses, as well as their children. I hope that someone from each family will take up the challenge to continue to write the unfinished story of the Martina and Valeriano Fraga family.

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APPENDIX A: The Fraga Children & Spouses

APPENDIX B: The Fraga Grandchildren

These Appendices have been replaced by the current FRAGA FAMILY TREE

APPENDIX C: Figures

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Fig. 1
Valeriano about 17



Fig. 2
Martina about 15

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Fig. 3 The Route to San Antonio

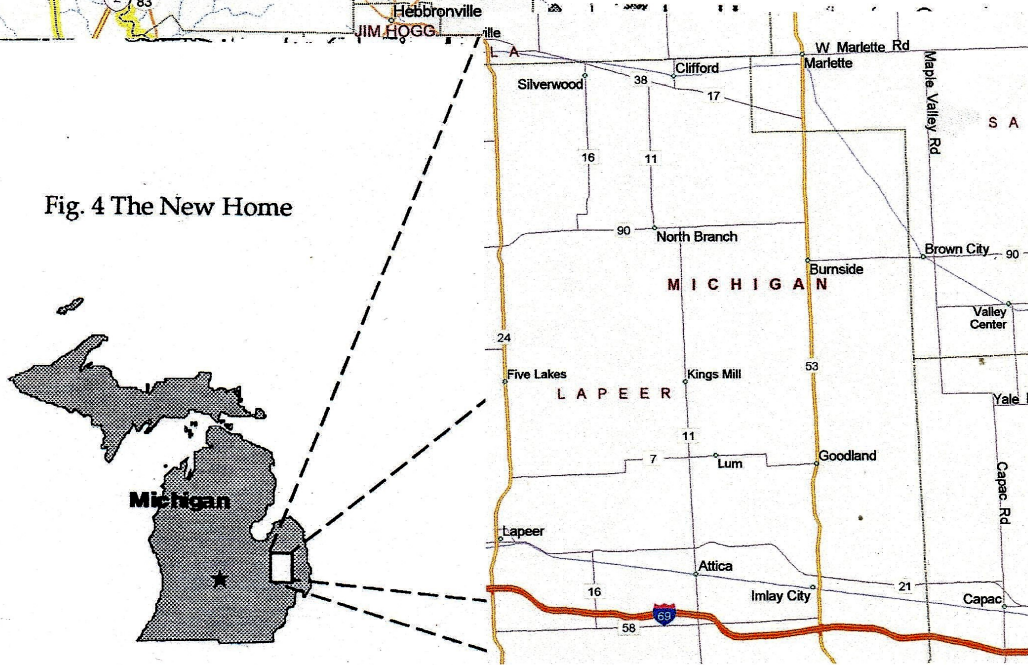


Fig. 4 The New Home

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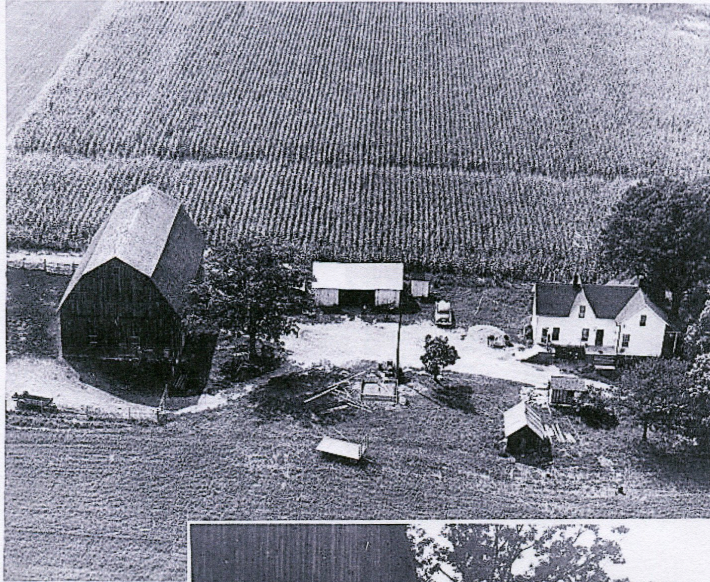


Fig.5
Dad's Farm



Fig. 6
The Barn Yard



Fig. 7
Barn & Weekend Visits

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1971



1994



The Children of Martina & Valeriano Fraga

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Fraga Family Picnic & Paul's 90th Birthday, 2017