

Some Memories in the Life of Daniel E. Fraga

The Early Years

I was born on March 5, 1936 in a farmhouse in Lapeer County, Michigan. I was the 12th and youngest child of Valeriano (Tony) & Martina (Martha) Fraga. Our oldest sister, Manuela, died in Mexico in 1918. I had five remaining sisters and five brothers that I grew up with. They were Esperanza (Frances), Erasmo (John), Jose (Joe), Melania (Ellen), Mercedes, Carmen, Manuela (Margie), Paul, Jesse, Martin and me, Daniel. Actually, the three oldest were gone from our home before I was born so I didn't really grow up with them but had plenty of interaction with them as part of the family.

I think I may have solved the mystery of how my older brothers and sisters had both a Mexican and an American name. I had taken both of their names for granted and never thought to ask how they got them. Since in many cases there is no connection between their Mexican name and their American one, and they are now gone, I thought it would remain a mystery. However, in a Facebook exchange with my sister Frances' (Esperanza) daughter Carmen she indicated that her mother once told her that she got her American name (Frances) from her school teacher. My assumption is probably because the teacher either couldn't remember or maybe couldn't spell her Mexican name (Esperanza). If that was the case, then it also makes sense that the others also got their names that way as well since they more than likely were all in the same country school house with one teacher that taught all grades 1 thru 8.

So Erasmo became John, Jose became Joe, (that one was easy since that name was common), and Melania became Ellen. Since there are indications that they weren't treated well in the early years by some of their classmates, they probably readily accepted this as a means to more easily assimilate. My guess is that for the rest of us, the older sisters and brothers probably helped our folks to pick our names so, in most cases, the American & Mexican names were the same or very similar except for the pronunciation; Mercedes, Carmen, Martin & Daniel. However, there were variations; Margie was also called Manuela, the name of our oldest sister that died in Mexico at around age 6. And then there was Paul that may have sprung from Hipolito and Jesse from Jesus (A very common name in Mexico).

I don't remember anything about the place I was born in. We must have moved within a year or two after I was born. During this period our father was working other people's farms on shares so we moved quite often, about every 2 or 3 years. My brothers and sisters recorded recollections will have to provide information concerning some of these early farms. The first place I have a dim recollection of was the Hampshire place, near North Branch. I only have fragmentary memories, including playing with some hand me down toys, one of dad's horses dieing while working in one of the fields, our legendary dog "Bob", and a neighbor's barn burning down across the field from where we lived. We could see the fire and all the men jumped in a vehicle and raced over there to try and save the barn and any livestock in it. They weren't successful in saving the barn. Within a short time a new barn was built there and we moved to that farm. It was called the Butler farm; we sometimes called it the brick house. A brick house was considered something special in those days.

I think we moved from the Hampshire farm to the Butler farm around early 1941. I would have been around four or five years old when we moved. This was the farm where I experienced my most memorable Christmas that I've talked about before where my brother Joe had bought wonderful gifts for everyone and mine was a Red Ryder BB gun, which was my first real Christmas toy. I have a few more memories of this place. This includes our dog Bob going blind, wandering out in the road and getting

hit by a car and died. This was where we lived when my brothers John and Joe were drafted into the Army for World War II. This probably happened sometime in 1942. In my simple child's mind, I thought this was really great and thought of what a great adventure they would have being in the army. It never occurred to me that their lives could be in danger. During this period, with John in the Army and his wife Florence working in a factory in Detroit, their son Johnny came to live with us on the farm from the time he was 1 or 2 years old until John got out of the Army in 1945 and Johnny was around 4 years old. Shortly after Joe went in the Army he came home on furlough to marry Helen. I remember a big party at our house.

I spent a very brief period attending kindergarten in a nearby one room school house but shortly after we were picked up by a school bus and attended the North Branch School from here. I went to elementary school here up to the third grade. I think all of my sisters, with the exception of Frances, graduated from this High School and shortly after graduation they moved into Detroit and got jobs. Paul quit high school when he turned 18 and he joined the Navy in 1945. The war ended soon after his enlistment, there must be a connection.

Sometime in late 1944 or early 1945 we moved again, this time to the Claude Wood farm near Brown city. This was a large farm of about 300 acres and we had about 30 cows to milk. This was the farm where dad finally made enough money to buy a farm of his own. I seem to recall that we moved in the middle of the school year. I was in the third grade and I think Martin was in the seventh grade and we transferred from the North Branch Elementary School to a little one room country school house where all of the grades up to the 8th grade were taught by one teacher. It was called Deanville Elementary. We had to walk a mile to school each day. Most of the time this was actually kind of fun. All the kids that lived on the same road that went to that school would join us as we passed their house and we would visit or play games with them as we walked to school or as we returned home after school. One time after a memorable snow storm, our teacher, Mrs. Bryant, and her husband came by with a large snow sled being pulled by a team of horses and they picked us up and took us to school.

Jesse was in High school when we moved and he finished his last two years at the Brown City High School. This might be a good time to discuss my relationship with my siblings. What you have to realize is that most of my siblings had left home either before I was born or while I was quite young. John and Joe left the farm to work in Detroit and Pontiac before I was born, when they were 14 or 15 years old so this was probably around 1935 or earlier and I was born in 1936. Frances was married and had Isabelle around the same time frame, also before I was born. My other sisters left home soon after High School graduation to find jobs in Detroit. I might add that this was during the WWII era so there were a lot of opportunities at that time for women. Margie was the youngest sister and she was 10 years older than me so I was around 9 years old (around 1945) when my last sister left. Paul quit school in his Junior year in HS to join the Navy in 1945. So you might say that Martin and Jesse were the only siblings that I actually grew up with. Most of the others were, in my mind, these wonderful people that would come and visit us on the farm almost every weekend. We didn't have a phone until we moved to the Norman Rd farm around 1951, so prior to that we never knew who was going to show up each weekend but we knew there would always be someone. These were great times because every weekend was like having a party. For most of the holidays, and especially at Christmas we knew that everybody that could, would be there. This also included the spouses of each sibling. One neat thing was that in the summers when Dad needed help on the farm for such things as hauling hay or harvesting some crop, both brothers and brothers-in-laws would show up and help out. These spouses were immediately folded into the family and became more like brothers and sisters. The thing that I remember was that we always had the greatest affection and respect for each other, and as each family member got married, we

had that same affection and respect for their spouses as well. I do have to add that in the later years the one exception to these feelings was our brother John.

I think that these feelings that we had for one another were the result of a couple of things. One reason was that because we were such a large family we learned early on that we had to rely on one another. Our parents couldn't always be there for us so the older siblings helped take care of the younger ones and they would establish a bond. Those that were close in age also developed a bond of friendship. The other reason was how we were raised by our mother and father. They taught us to respect one another. One way they did this was that they always took the greatest pride in any of our achievements and would keep us all informed of each others accomplishments. This not only made us proud as a family, but also instilled in us the desire to not do anything that would embarrass the family. I might add that we weren't always successful in this regard. Our parents would not tolerate us fighting with one another and of the few times we were physically punished by our father, most of them were for fighting. I have a personal memory that I will recount later. One other characteristic of our parents was they were quite tolerant of some of our misadventures. There was, of course, the famous story of Frances eloping with Nati and their eventual forgiveness that I won't repeat here. Later in this narrative I will recount one of my own dealing with a traffic ticket.

Now I'll get back to our move to the Claude Wood farm. Something happened to me here at the Deenville Elementary School that possibly ended up having the most significant impact on my later life. I of course didn't recognize that at the time, but in retrospect it had a profound influence on the direction that my life took in later years.

First, though, I need to describe the setting. This one room school that Martin and I were attending had a teacher at that time that we all kind of feared. She had a rubber hose that she threatened to whip us with if we misbehaved. Fortunately, or unfortunately, depending on your point of view, we only saw her use it once and it was on her own son.

I always liked school, I guess because I always liked learning something new. However, I never felt any special bond with this particular teacher so I was completely surprised when at the end of the fourth grade (by the way, her last year to teach there) she double promoted me from the 4th to the 6th grade, with the condition that I study two text books over the summer and pass a test on them at the beginning of the next year. I had all of the best intentions, but as the summer wore on and I was busy working or playing, I saw less and less of these text books until I just reconciled myself to the fact that I might not start out in the 6th grade. Well as the new school year began, we had a new teacher who automatically put me in the 6th grade. This was fine until she wanted people from each class to go up to the blackboard to demonstrate what they knew. Well one of the text books I was supposed to have read was on 5th grade math and one of the things that I was supposed to have learned was how to do long division. When we were up at the blackboard she gave us a long division problem to do and it soon became evident that I didn't know how to do long division. So this sweet teacher, I believe her name was Mrs. Flora Bryant, told me that she was aware of my situation and if I would stay after school a few nights she would work with me. She took the time to quickly teach me the principles involved and I was able to satisfy her that I could do 6th grade work so I remained in that class.

Now I need to discuss why this had such an impact on my life. Because of this promotion I graduated from High School in 1953. I was just barely 17. I spent the summer working for a previous employer of my brother Joe that had an asphalt construction company. When Fall came I tried to follow in Jesse's footsteps and I enrolled in the Walsh Institute of Accounting. However, I determined after one semester that accounting was not for me. In the middle of taking the first semester final exams we had a weekend break. I decided to go to the farm for the weekend and I never went back to school. Unfortunately, I didn't have a plan B.

I hung around the farm for a couple of months and finally realized that I had to do something. The Korean War was still technically going on but there was a cease fire and they were conducting peace negotiations. There was still a draft, so most of us felt that within a couple of years we would be called up. So one day near my 18th birthday as we were driving through Lapeer, the county seat, I decided to go to the draft board in the county Court House and volunteer for the draft. I thought I would get this issue out of the way and maybe figure out what I was going to do with my life. Volunteering for the draft meant that I didn't have to wait to be drafted, which might take a couple of years. My name was moved up and I was drafted within two months.

The reason this became significant was that I went in the Army on May 12, 1954. The Korean Peace negotiations were completed soon after this and in January 1955 the government eliminated the GI Bill. So by lucky happenstance I was eligible for the GI bill benefits for College. Without the GI Bill I never could have afforded to go to college. This means, I never would have gotten my degree in Aeronautical Engineering and I never would have gone to work in R & D at Wright-Patterson AFB and wouldn't have experienced the wonderful life I've had. If I had not been double promoted, and my life had taken the same trajectory, by the time I went in the Army there would have been no GI Bill and therefore no college degree.

An interesting side note is that I probably would not have the wife and family I have now if it wasn't for this timing. I will explain. Back when I was a senior in High School, since I was a "big time" varsity football player, after one of the games with the neighboring school of Almont I asked one of their cheerleader for a date. The cheerleader's name was Jean Milan and we had a couple of dates, but nothing really clicked romantically. However, one night when I picked her up for a date her younger sister Joan Milan was there with her pretty little friend Helen Tank. I thought she was quite pretty and nice but she was only a freshman and I was a senior so I didn't think too much about it (even though, as I later found out, our ages were only 2 and a half years apart). However, after I got out of the Army on April 27, 1956 and shortly after that I was walking down one of the streets in my home town of Imlay City when who should drive by, honk their horn at me and stop but Joan and Helen. They offered to give me a ride which I immediately accepted. I was quite taken with little Helen Tank. She was a senior about to graduate from High School so I figured she was now fair game so I asked her if she would go on a date with me. She agreed and the rest is history. Here again, if we follow the alternate timeline, this encounter never would have happened because I would have still been in the army at that time.

This might be a good time to back track and talk about the relationships I had with Martin and Jesse, the two brothers that I actually grew up with. I'll start with Martin. Martin was 4 years older than me and closest to my age. I might add here that my Sister Frances's three oldest children Isabelle, Richard and David were much closer to my age (Isabelle 1 year older, Richard the same age, and David 2 years younger) and that I did a lot of "growing up" with them as well. In fact, these kids, as well as Michael in later years, spent a lot of time on the farm in the summers. In turn I would spend at least a week with them in Detroit as well. This was when, in our teen years, they taught this poor country bumpkin some of the cool big city ways.

But let's get back to Martin. Since he was closest to my age we generally got along but, we also had our usual brotherly bickering in our early years. One of the things that I remember was when he was in his early 'teens I found out that he was smoking cigarettes. Since I was always looking for an advantage and a way to get some power over him I figured I could use this. So, whenever we found ourselves in some sort of disagreement I would threaten to tell our parents that he smoked. To my delight this worked for awhile but then one day he said, "I don't care, go ahead and tell them" and suddenly all my power was gone.

Another incident with Martin had to do with Dad, fighting and punishment. I think most of the stories I have heard from my siblings that when they were physically punished by Dad they thought they had it coming. This incident was no exception. When we were doing our chores and milking the cows one evening at the Claude Wood farm we kept arguing and picking on one another and Dad kept telling us to stop, which we didn't. Finally, he had enough and he grabbed a hold of us and broke us up and sent me to the house with warning that when he was done with the chores he was going to give me a good whipping. I went up to the house and I was terrified. Whippings had sometimes been threatened but I had never been the recipient of one, nor had I actually seen one. As I waited, I imagined the worst and I momentarily toyed with the idea of putting a magazine in the seat of my pants, but I figured if it was found, I might end up in an even worse predicament. So, eventually Dad came in to the house, he took off his belt and he whacked me a couple of times in the rear end. I marveled at how it was nowhere near as bad as I had imagined. However, he had made his point that he didn't want us fighting and that when he said something, he meant it.

I don't want it to sound as if Martin and I didn't get along; these were just a couple of juvenile encounters. In fact, Martin and I worked together sometimes in the summers on some farms in the area and we earned a little money. I had saved the grand sum of \$25. I put it in the bank for a while but then I had a great opportunity. Our brother-in-law Ambrose Assessor had an old 1927 Plymouth that he was storing in one of the buildings at the Claude Wood farm while he was in the Army in WW II and for a couple of years after the war was over. Sometime around 1948 he wanted to get rid of it so I offered him the \$25 I had saved and he took it. I was probably around 12 or 13 at the time and hadn't yet learned to drive, but I thought it was great to actually own a car.

This car came into play a little later with Martin. Martin used this car to take us to work on some of the farms in the summer and some other times when he needed it. Martin quit school in the 10th grade and around the same time he had a falling out with Dad for some forgotten reason, so he wanted to leave the farm. Well, he took my 1927 Plymouth and drove to Flint and got a job in a factory. He eventually paid me \$25 for it and traded it for another car. Sometime around 1950 Martin joined the Air Force and he ended up in Korea. I think he was a meat cutter and cook. When he got out of the Air Force we became the best of friends and he introduced me to what was then called "Black" music. These were radio stations that we would get on the car radio late at night. It was great because I was introduced to Rock and Roll before it was Rock and Roll. In fact when Elvis Presley burst upon the scene, my reaction was, "what's the big deal", he's just imitating the music you could hear on the "Black" stations. Johnny Fraga also credited Martin with starting him on his musical career because of the music the Martin exposed him to.

I need to tell one more Martin story. As I had mentioned before, when Martin got out of the Air Force we started hanging out together. One night in late 1953 or early 1954 we went to a house party over by Brown City. We knew most of the people there because Martin had gone to the Brown City High School until he quit after his sophomore year and I had attended Brown City HS my freshman and sophomore years before we moved to the Norman Rd farm and I transferred to Imlay City HS. During the evening we both started dancing with a cute little gal whose name was Marilyn Sohn. I had cut in on Martin dancing with her and shortly after the dance Martin came up to me and told me that a friend of mine, whose name I forget, was outside looking for me. I went outside looking for him and asked the people out there if they had seen him. They indicated that they didn't think he was at the party. When I finally went back in, there was Martin dancing up close and personal with Marilyn. It finally dawned on me that something special was going on here and I had best just get out of the way. About a year later Martin and Marilyn were married. I had gone in the Army in the interim and so I was unable to attend their wedding.

Now I would like to spend a little time talking about my relationship with Jesse. Martin was never very sports minded but Jesse and I shared a big interest in sports. Jesse taught me all the basics of throwing and catching a baseball and football and we would spend a lot of time playing catch with each other. Jesse was a star in high school in all three major sports, baseball, football and basketball. Unfortunately, I never got to see him play in High school. On a dairy farm we had our chores to do and the cows always came first. I don't think Dad or Mother ever got to see him play either, but occasionally we would read about him in the local paper. Throughout my High School years I tried to compare myself to Jesse. Unfortunately I usually came up short but there were a lot of parallels. Jesse and I were the only males in the family that finished High School. Jesse had to switch high schools from his sophomore to junior year and so did I. Jesse was in the junior and senior plays and so was I, however, he had the lead roles and I had supporting roles. I saw him in a play in his senior year when I was about 12 years old and the biggest impression that I had was that they actually got to kiss the girls in the play. Jesse was the senior class president and I was the president of our junior class. Jesse played in all three high school sports and so did I, but Jesse was a star player and the only sport I excelled at, where I was a starter, was football. I was a starter my junior and senior years at Imlay City HS. I sat the bench in basketball and got in some of the games in baseball. After high school I mused how the penalties for my curfew infractions, of which there were many, were dealt with in each sport. In basketball where I wasn't very good, I was kicked off the team. In baseball, where I was at least mediocre, I had a two week suspension. In football, where I was pretty good, and in fact was voted as co-captain in my senior year, I had to run laps. By the way, I think that Jesse was also Captain of his football team.

As a side note, I need to relate another football experience with Jesse and how I broke his jaw. When I was around 15 or 16 and Jesse was around 21 or 22 and working in Detroit, he was visiting us at the Norman Rd farm and he decided to go with me when we went down the lane to get the cows. As we walked down the lane we were tossing a football back and forth and talking about football. Since I was now a starter I might have wanted to see who was the better tackler or running back. Somehow we decided to take turns trying to pretend we were a running back and get a running start and try break the other guys tackle. I may have gone first and got tackled and then Jess ran and he broke through my tackle. Well, when it became my turn to run again I was bound and determined not to get tackled so I came at him hard with my knees pumping hard. We hit hard and then I noticed that his grip relaxed and I ran on through his tackle. I was quite jubilant and then I turned around and looked and Jess was hunched over and he then mumbled, "I think you broke my jaw." Apparently my knee had hit his jaw when we collided and sure enough it was broken. He spent the next several weeks with his jaw wired and on a liquid diet. I wasn't sure about my emotions here. I was kind of proud that he hadn't tackled me, but I did feel bad about his broken jaw.

I need to get back to explain why it was that I was always getting caught breaking curfew in my Senior year in the Imlay City High School. We were a small school in a small town so we only had one coach for all three sports. This coach, whose name was Lyle Powers, was one of the most memorable teachers that I had and I will have to write a little more about him later. Coach Powers was only 28 or 29 at the time. He was a veteran of World War II and unmarried. Coach Powers was socially active and it being a small town we kept running into one another when we were out being sociable. One of the places that everybody went to was the local Legion Hall on Saturday night where they had a band and dances on most weekends. Being a small town this is where everybody showed up eventually on a Saturday night to have a good time and maybe picking a girl up. If it wasn't there, it was the local all night "Hi-Speed" truck stop and restaurant that everybody went to after any event. So, it appears inevitable that if we were both looking for a good time, our paths would cross.

I need to get back to the Claude Wood farm, because there was another significant event that happened that I think influenced my thoughts as I grew up. I think it was in 1948 when I was 12 that I was lucky enough to go on a trip to Mexico. It's hard to believe today that there were six of us, with luggage, in a single car, a 1947 Chevy that Joe drove from Michigan to Mexico and back. The six of us were Joe, who drove the whole trip, his wife Helen, Dad and Mother, Margie and me. It was a great trip, and considering the close quarters, we didn't seem to get on each others nerves too much. We sang Mexican songs like "Maria Bonita", "Juan Charascado?", "Ay Jalisco" and others I don't remember as well as some popular American songs. We got to meet and stay with relatives in Mexico City and in Morelia and we tried to get near a volcano that had recently formed, but we got stuck in the grey sand or ash before we could reach it. We also got to visit the little village of Cotzurio that our parents came from. This was all great, but what remained the most memorable part of the trip for me was when we traveled through the South and I was introduced to segregation. When I saw all of those "Whites Only" and "Colored" signs on drinking fountains and bathrooms and whatever else they were on, I couldn't believe that this could happen in America. I had actually believed all that stuff about "Land of the free" and "equality". My feeble protest was to drink from the colored fountains as if this meant anything. When we got back and our teacher in our one room school house asked me to tell the class about our trip, I included the part about the South and asked her how was this possible in our country and she replied that that was just the way things were and nothing could be done about it.

I may have been a little more sensitive to this because of our family's history with discrimination; however, I don't mean to imply that I was anymore enlightened about racist's ideas than anyone else. I was a product of our times. Back then I was just as uninformed as everyone else. We had no Blacks living anywhere near us and the way they were depicted in the movies and the radio made us believe that maybe they were inferior. I think segregation just struck me as being un-American. To show how out of touch I was, in my senior year in one of my classes I used the term that was commonly used by just about everybody I knew of "nigger" in some descriptive sense. I have to give my teacher, Eddie Hansen, credit. He told me "Don't use that term, its derogatory". I was so dumb that I said "That's what I thought they were called", and he said no, they are called Negroes. I had kind of believed that "Negro" and "Nigger" were interchangeable. I looked them up in the dictionary and learned their difference.

I think this incident did help make me a little more sensitive so that when I was in the Army I actually got to know some Black guys and realized that they were pretty normal people like the rest of us. When I was stationed in Arkansas and in Texas the buses all had signs for coloreds to sit in the rear. I thought I was making a statement by choosing to sit in the rear. I didn't realize that this didn't prove anything since "Whites" could sit wherever they wanted; it was the "Coloreds" that couldn't sit where they wanted.

The Military had been integrated by President Truman in, I think, 1948. However, there was still a lot of bigotry in the Army. My first overt encounter was when I arrived in our barracks in Nuremberg, Germany in 1955. A young soldier who had been there for awhile was giving us the lowdown. He was apparently from a Southern state, but I forget which one, but he let us know how horrible it was that some German girls were dating some of our Black soldiers. He then went on to say that would never happen back home and described how when a mixed race couple stopped at their gas station, how they took them out of their car and beat them. I proceeded to say to him something like, if two people choose to be together, what business is it of yours to intervene. His only response was "You must be a Yankee". The other incident could have been a little more serious. I was only stationed in Nuremberg for a couple of months and then I was stationed in an Army Base in a village called Bad Kreuznach. While there I got to be friends with a Black guy

because we shared a taste in music and in several of the black singers like Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughn and, in addition with what was called progressive or modern jazz. We listened to each others records and sometimes hung out together on base and off. I shared a room with 3 other white guys. One night after I had gone to bed, the lights were suddenly turned on and my three roommates were hovering over me in bed and one of them started talking saying things like “We’ve seen you walking with your Nigger friend”. I responded by saying something like, why did they think they had the right to tell me who I could associate with. In the meantime I was also eyeing an entrenching tool that was nearby in case I might have to use it. But we just traded insults and then it was over. The surprising thing was that the major instigator was not from the South, he was from upstate New York. After this incident, he asked to be changed to another room and his wish was granted.

This might be a good time to address some questions regarding any prejudice that our family may have encountered. By the time that I came along there wasn’t much, if any; overt prejudice directed at us because of our family’s solid reputation based on the character of our parents and my siblings and the tolerance of the farmers that were our neighbors and classmates. The only overt prejudice that I encountered was when we moved from the Claude Wood farm near Brown City to the farm on Norman Rd near Imlay City. We were in a new neighborhood. During the summer of my transition from my sophomore year in the Brown City High School to my junior year at the Imlay City High School I was lucky enough to meet a girl in the new neighborhood and we started to date. I was pretty smitten and I thought everything was moving along quite nicely. However, shortly after school started she broke up with me and when I asked her why she said it was because her parents didn’t want her dating a Mexican. I was angry and quite heartbroken and I felt quite helpless. However, we did remain friends throughout the rest of High School and after.

There was one other example of the prejudices that were evident. After we were married, Helen recounted to me what one of her old classmates had said to one of her friends when they found out that we were getting married. Her classmate said, “She should think of the Children”. Apparently he thought her marrying me would create some awful crossbreed or something. I have to say that there was never an issue with any of Helen’s family.

Even though I encountered no other overt prejudice, there have been various subtle aspects to it. Since it was no secret that our family was Mexican when we met new people we often heard the comment “You don’t look Mexican” It often sounded to me like that was supposed to be a compliment so I usually ended up using one of two responses. One was “What’s a Mexican supposed to look like?” or “That’s because you’re thinking in stereotypes”. One other experience I had was when I was working at Wright-Patterson. I was talking to a couple of my fellow workers about being Mexican and one asked if I spoke Spanish. I replied that I did, where upon the other worker, said, rather derisively, “You don’t speak Spanish, you speak Mexican.” I had to inform him that there was no such language as Mexican just as there is no such language as American and then I asked him what language he spoke.

Another experience that I sometimes ran in to was when some people found out that you’re Mexican they become obsessive about it. Most people will make the occasional good natured joke and make comments when it’s relevant, but there always seem to be a few that it appears the only thing they can see about you is the fact that you are Mexican and they are either constantly trying to make lame ethnic jokes or making comments about your ethnicity. It typically puts you in the spot of not wanting to make too big a thing out of it, because you are proud of your heritage, but you wonder why it’s such a big thing to this person. One of the people that sometimes played golf with us was like this and one day he asked “You’re not pure Mexican are you?” My response was that my parents came from Mexico, but that I didn’t know what a pure Mexican is anymore than I know what a pure American is. I added that a

Mexican was a combination of the indigenous native Indians and the Spanish people that they intermarried with and that the Spanish were a combination of various Europeans and the Moors (or Arabs) that they had intermarried with. So, as you can see prejudice continues to linger and it is currently being pumped up again under the guise of attacks on illegal aliens.

I think I have wandered way off message, so I think I will return to the Claude Wood farm. I mentioned earlier about how we often feared the worst from Dad when we screwed up but he would generally turn out to be quite tolerant. I have a story to tell of one of my screw ups. It had to do with me getting a traffic ticket when I was 15 years old. But first I have to provide some background. In the farming community it wasn't unusual for boys to be driving cars before they had a driver's license at 16. I think some of my brothers were actually driving from around age 12. You have to remember that most farm boys were driving tractors at a very young age, and it wasn't a big jump to then drive the usual farm pick-up out in the fields when necessary, and finally a car on the road. So the fact that I was driving a car at 14 was not that unusual.

However, I was probably 15 when I was driving a girl home from a school dance at Brown City HS and I decided to show off by squealing the tires as I accelerated the car across Main St. As luck would have it, I didn't see the local policeman that was parked in his car near the intersection and he immediately pulled me over. When he asked for my driver's license I of course had to tell him that I didn't have one. He then wrote me a ticket and told me to show at the local Justice of the Peace the following week and to bring my father. I was in complete agony at the thought of having to tell my father and I kept putting it off all week. I might add here that the usual routine on a dairy farm was to get up very early each morning and go to the barn and help dad do the chores and milk the cows and then go to the house and wash up, change clothes, eat breakfast and then go outside and wait for the school bus. In the evenings it was get home from school, change clothes, grab a snack and then go out to the barn and help dad again and when finished go to the house for supper. So there was no shortage of opportunities and each day I would think that I would tell him at one of those opportunities. However, I always chickened out until the day I was supposed to appear in court. That morning I was standing outside on the porch waiting for the school bus. I finally realized that this was my last chance to tell him before the bus arrived. Dad was in the kitchen eating breakfast. I rushed into the house, went up to him and blurted out what I had done. He was quite calm and merely asked me for the details. The bus came so I didn't have to stay and dwell on it.

I wasn't afraid to tell him because I feared any punishment, it was just the thought that I had let him down. That evening while we were doing the chores and milking the cows, it became evident that we weren't going to be done in time for Dad to accompany me to the court. I had to go without him and since I was running late, like a fool, I just drove right up and parked in front of the Justice of the Peace office. It was just a small building just off the street. As luck would have it, the police officer and the Justice of the Peace were arriving at the same time. I told them that my father was milking the cows and couldn't make it. When they asked what I was there for and I told them, they just shook their heads. They rescheduled our court date for the following week and set a time that dad could make. When we showed up the following week they lectured dad about letting me drive without a license and then fined him for letting me drive without a license.

I was surprised that he didn't seem all that upset. What he said was we have to get you a learners permit or something so that you can drive. This led to another interesting development. Since I was only 15 and not legally old enough to get a drivers license, he took me to the Lapeer County Courthouse to see if I could get a learners permit. They had me take the written test, which I passed and then a Policeman took me out for a driving test. I was doing all right until I had to make a left hand turn at a traffic light in traffic. Something I had never done before so I didn't know who had the right of way or

when to go. I found myself stuck in the middle of the intersection with cars all around. I finally asked the policeman giving me the test if I should turn and he said something like, you might just as well, you're just tying up traffic here. I thought I had blown the test but apparently not, because when we got back the next thing I knew a clerk was typing something up and she asked me what my birthday was and all I said was March 5th. When she was done she handed me a driver's license. She had assumed I was 16 and typed in 1935 instead of 1936. My dad and I decided that we would just keep our mouths shut. Especially when we later learned that there were no such things as learner's permits before you were 16. This driver's license did come in handy for getting into bars when I got out of the Army at age 20.

I need to get on with our move from the Claude Wood farm to the farm that dad bought on Norman Rd. I think I covered a lot of this pretty well in my "[Michoacan to Michigan](#)" narrative so I'll try and not cover that material here. However, I want to emphasize that prior to moving to the Norman Rd farm we had no telephone, no running water in the house and no indoor bathrooms. We had to carry buckets of water from the milk house where we had a pump, to the house and we used outdoor toilets. The Norman Rd farm didn't have any of these amenities either when Dad bought the place, but before we moved in, my brothers and brothers-in-law did a tremendous job of laying water pipe from the pump by the barn to get water in the house and in building an indoor bathroom with tub & shower. Prior to this we may have bathed about once a week by using a metal tub.

I think we moved to this farm in the spring of 1951, when I was 15. Since I was the only child at home at the time this will be mostly about me. We moved in the middle of the last semester of my sophomore year at Brown City. To finish the semester dad let me drive the family car to school. I think it was a 1949 Chevy. I had to drive about 15 miles each way to school. It was rare for a kid to have a car at school in those days so I thought I was kind of cool.

Our new farm was only 80 acres and we only milked 10 or 12 cows, so Dad could handle most of the work and I knew that money was going to be tight so when summer came I would help with the cows in the morning and in the evening, but during the day I would work at what we called "muck" farms. I did this each summer until I graduated from High School. These were farms with fields of real rich black soil that were used to raise vegetables to sell and they needed a lot of hand labor to plant and thin the crops in spring and summer, and harvest them in fall. Much of it was done by migrant workers so you might say I was going back to our roots in this country. I got paid fifty cents an hour and I think the final year I worked one of these jobs it was for seventy five cents an hour. I saved a lot of what I earned and used it to buy "cool" clothes for school and to pay for my books at school. Dad gave me a little money whenever he could but I knew he didn't have much at that time to give.

The "cool" clothes I was referring to were clothes that my nephew Richard Valdez advised me on. Richard was 4 months younger than me but he lived in Detroit and knew all about what was in and what was out. So with Richard's tutelage, when I finally entered Imlay City High School, I was on the cutting edge of teenage fashion with my long ducktail haircut, my pegged pants, my turned up collar and my Levi's. Levi's, as a fashion statement, were something new at that time and some schools wouldn't let you wear them or any other denim pants. Nobody worth their salt would think of wearing anything other than Levi's.

I was starting out in a new school in my junior year. Because I wanted to play football I got to go to my new school of Imlay City two weeks before school started to get in shape and try out for the team. This turned out to be very fortunate for me because I only knew two students there. One was a girl I had met at my summer job and the other was a friend of hers she introduced me to that I was dating. This is the one I mentioned earlier that quit dating me because I was Mexican.

Since nobody knew me or what I could do when I was trying out for the football team, I was mostly just standing around watching when they scrimmaged. Then one day during a scrimmage work

out the assistant coach Pete Pelong(?) called me over and put me in as middle linebacker. The star of the team was a Senior Quarterback by the name of Doug Maison. He was one of the biggest players on our team at about 6 ft and 180 pounds. I was around average size for our football team at about 5' 10" and around 155 pounds. I think the Quarterback saw a new guy to test, so he called a quarterback draw. I saw the hole open and I nailed him at the line of scrimmage for no gain. The assistant coach was suddenly by my side with his arm around me praising the play and coaching me. After that play got me noticed I was able to get into the scrimmages and make the team as a starter. This was the era of playing both ways, so I played linebacker on defense and played right guard on offense. I was overjoyed, since at Brown City I had been one of the scrubs that was hardly noticed and here at Imlay City, which was a larger and better school and I had made the team. Some further background on Doug Maison. At the time he was playing for us his Uncle Al Dorrow who had played at Imlay City a couple of years earlier was currently the Quarterback at Michigan State and later played in the NFL for the Buffalo Bills. Doug went on to play Quarterback at a small college in Michigan and played on a televised minor bowl game that he starred in and got a lot of attention but I don't remember anything happening as far as a career.

The other reason that making the football team was fortunate was that I made some friends with some of my teammates so that when school finally started I was no longer a stranger. A couple of funny things happened when school started. We had a great English teacher called Clarence Roland and with his good looks, well groomed hair and moustache and sharp suits he looked like a movie star. At one of our first English classes he started asking questions dealing with our reading assignment and I would raise my hand and answer the question. I did this a couple of times and then I would wait for somebody else to raise their hand and when nobody would I again raise my hand and answer the question. After class one of my new football friends said "What are you, some kind of brain or something?" I hadn't thought that I had done anything unusual, I had merely read the assignment and I thought the answers were obvious.

Our history teacher was also our football, basketball and baseball Coach. His name was Lyle Powers. He was a wonderful man and great teacher of whom I will talk more about later, but first a story. In one of his history classes we had a written test where the answer to the question was "The Sedition Act". Not knowing any better I answered with "The Seduction Act" and when I got no credit for it, I raised my hand and complained that it sounded pretty close and that I should get some credit for it. He kind of grinned and said no and when I insisted that the word was something close to the answer, he told me to look it up in the dictionary. So then I looked it up and found out what seduction meant. You might consider this the extent of our sex education in school at that time.

I need to digress and talk a little more about Coach Powers. He was 28 or 29 when I was one of his students. We knew that he was a World War II vet that had served in the Pacific. When we were in the locker room and when he wore shorts we could see that the calves of his legs were all scarred up. I don't remember why some of us, as a group, were with him one night in the woods around a camp fire. While there we got brave enough to ask him about his legs and he described how it was the effect of a grenade that went off near him. As we got our courage up we asked him if he ever killed anyone. We didn't get the bravado answer we teenagers expected. He answered basically that in the heat of battle with everyone's firing you don't really know but he did describe one incident. He was on patrol going through some tall grass when all of a sudden there was a Japanese soldier directly in front of him. They both saw each other at about the same time but Coach Powers reacted first and shot and killed him. When he went over to look at the body he realized that the soldier he had just killed was just a young boy and that if he had been an instant slower it could have just as easily been him that was dead instead of the young Japanese soldier. I think that was one of the first exposures that we had that war was not

this glamorous, heroic thing we saw in the movies. There is more I could talk about this man but I need to get back to the mainstream.

I have one other Imlay City HS story. This was a period before SAT's and ACT's. In our senior year they had us take IQ tests to use for counseling regarding what we should pursue after High School. When they got the results back, they had us sit in a class room and one by one we would be called out in the hall and we would sit in a chair and our teacher would go over the results of our test. When my turn came up he gave me my average total score which I believe was something like 128 and then the analytical part which was something like 136 and he told me that I should do well in some things I can't remember and in Engineering. I didn't even know what Engineering was but somehow it stuck in my mind. He then gave me the other part of my score which, I think, was something like 119. He then told me not to get a big head about my scores and that they were private and I shouldn't talk with the other kids about them. These numbers meant nothing to me so I didn't know what he meant about getting a big head. When I got back in the classroom, of course, everyone's asking, "What was your score?" At first I followed the teacher's instructions but then when everyone started giving their scores I gave mine. It turned out that mine and my good friend Jack Spaulding's scores were the highest in the class. This gave me quite a boost of confidence. It also helped, when after graduation, when I was getting information to enroll in Walsh Institute of accounting I went to the High School Principal to get my class standing. He told that I was seventh in a class of around 63 and then he said that I could have been first if I had tried a little harder. These two incidences gave me the confidence that I could do all right in college.

The earlier teacher's suggestion of engineering came into play when I was in the Army and one of my buddies, Donald Mayhew I think, talked me into taking a night course with him. I selected first year college algebra and when I was asked what was my goal or major I mentioned Engineering but I still didn't have clue what Engineering was. As time went on in the Army I actually began formulating a plan to pursue Engineering. Initially I thought of going to General Motors Technical Institute, which was located in a Detroit suburb, and work as a Mechanical Engineer in the auto industry. However, when I got out of the Army and checked into applying to get into GM Tech I found that my high school education was somewhat lacking in the necessary prerequisites for admission into the Engineering program. When I had attended High School, I had never given any thought to going to college so outside of the hard requirements; the courses I took were kind of haphazard. I had not taken a lot of the science course like physics, biology, chemistry and plane geometry that would have given me a good foundation for Engineering. (A side note: another course I regret not taking was Spanish. I used the faulty logic that I could already speak Spanish so what was the point. As a result I lost a golden opportunity to increase my limited vocabulary and to learn Spanish grammatically). I found out that one of the key prerequisites that I needed in order to enter the Engineering program was plane geometry. I was living at my sister Carmen's house and working in Detroit at the time and I found that I could fulfill the requirement by taking a night school course at the local High School, which I eventually did.

In the meantime, I found out that the requirements were the same whether I was trying to get into GM Tech or what I considered a real college. I also had begun to rethink whether I really wanted to be a Mechanical Engineer and work in the auto industry. I finally decided that with the GI Bill I could afford to go to Wayne State University while living with Carmen and Willy. After deciding that Mechanical Engineering was not the direction I wanted to go, I went through a process of elimination on the other types of engineering and finally settled on Aeronautical Engineering because I thought it sounded glamorous to work on airplanes. I started College in September 1957, four years after graduating from high school. As I got acquainted with my classmates I found out how limited I was with regard to the field that I had chosen. Most of them had grown up making model planes and reading all about aircraft

throughout their youth. I also found out how different college was from high school. I had always done well in school because I had a good memory and most early education relied primarily on memorizing material. All of a sudden in college I found out that I had to learn to think, memory alone was not enough. Half way through my second semester I found that I was failing in a course called Calculus and Analytical Geometry and doing poorly in another one. I was in a panic. This had never happened to me before. I couldn't fathom failing. I found out some of my classmates were also struggling so that helped a little. I eventually got my act together and got a C in Calculus that I was very happy to get, and I passed all my other courses.

I need to point out how I paid for college. There were no scholarships, no student loans and no credit cards for me at that time. I would work in the summers and save enough money to pay for tuition and books until my GI check would come. The checks didn't start arriving until about a month after classes started. The checks were for 110 dollars a month and I had earned enough for 36 months or four 9 month school years. I should add here that I did get some other help. Sputnik was launched in late 1957 and Congress got worried about there being enough scientist and engineers to compete with the Russians so they passed the National Defense Student Loan act that enabled me to be one of the first recipients of these loans in my junior and senior year. The great thing about these loans was that interest was only 3% and it didn't start until a year after you graduated. In addition, you had 10 years to pay that back

Helen and I were married after my freshman year. We were married on August 30th, 1958. I can't remember whether it was one or two weeks before starting my sophomore year. Our honeymoon consisted of going to the apartment we had rented in Detroit near the campus, and going to such exotic places as the Michigan State Fair and the Royal Oak Zoo. Since Helen was only 19 at the time and we thought that you only had to be 18 to drink in Ohio, we drove all the way to Toledo with the intent of going to a nice restaurant and be able to get some drinks with our meal. It turned out that 18 year olds could only get, what was called, 3.2 beer and only in certain bars.

As a married veteran my GI bill went up to, something like 126 dollars or 132 dollars a month. That was the maximum regardless of the number of dependents. Our idea of splurging was that on rare occasions we would buy a bottle of RC Cola, a pint of ice cream and some peanuts and "gorge" ourselves. We had a memorable low point when I started my junior year in 1959. We had budgeted our money as tightly as we could until the first government check would arrive. It was due a month after classes started which fell on a Saturday. All we had left was a dollar and some loose change and the cupboard was bare. The refrigerator was empty except for some food for our first born, Dean, who was about 6 months old. We waited for the mailman and rushed to the mailbox, but there was no check. I was a bit upset but I thought that it might have been delivered to my parents address in Imlay City. We didn't have a phone and I didn't have enough money for long distance on the pay phone. I did have the coin necessary to make a collect phone call to dad at the farm to see if my check had been sent there. To my relief it had, but now I faced the problem of an empty gas tank in our car and a 50 mile trip to get my check. Luckily, I had a friend at school from Hawaii named George Nakamura that loaned me enough money for gas and we were saved. Unfortunately I lost touch with him over time and I strongly regret that.

Even though Helen and I had some tough times early on, I give her a lot of credit of taking care of us domestically so well with such a meager income. I never thought of this time as being that tough because I could remember the stories dad and mother told us of their journey and I knew we would never face anything near that bad. For one thing I knew I had a great support system with my brothers and sisters that would be there if I really needed them. This wasn't something I would do unless there was no other alternative. The one time I did ask for help was right after I had graduated from college

and we were going to move to Dayton, Ohio where I would start working at Wright Patterson Air Force Base. I needed some money for moving expenses and to see us through until I started receiving a paycheck, remember, this was before I had any credit cards. I went to my brother Paul to ask for a loan to see us through and he never hesitated. He wanted to know how much I needed and he gave it to me. I made a point of paying him back as soon as I could. I have been forever grateful for his help.

Before I leave my college life, I have one more story to tell. Wayne State University had a deemphasized sport program. This means that I don't believe that they gave out football scholarships. I think it was my junior year that the school paper had an invitation for players to join the football team. I thought I had to try this, even though I was out of shape and I had a slight limp from an Achilles heel injury from a serious auto accident I had a couple of years back. So I went out for the football team and got to get back in the game and work out and suit up and before the season was over I actually got to play 1 minute of varsity time in the last game. However, I began to appreciate the problems that athletes have in big time schools if they want to be serious about an education. I found that even in a school where sports were deemphasized, what a huge commitment of time and energy is required to play a sport. I found my grades starting to go downhill during this time and I was often worn out and didn't want to study. So the next year when I was invited to come back to the team, I had to make the decision that I couldn't do it even though I still loved to play. The one good thing that came out of this was that the problem I had with my Achilles heel that was from a car accident that I'll discuss later, went away. The workouts must have broken down the scar tissue and I got rid of my limp.

I've managed to inject my military service without really talking specifically about it. I will try and summarize to save time. I was inducted in the Army on May 12, 1954 and had my basic training at Camp Chaffee in Ft. Smith, Arkansas. The first eight weeks was training in marching and the use of weapons and tactics and basic military stuff and typically is not all that pleasant, but it does get you acclimated. I spent the hottest summer of my life there with temperatures of around 110 degrees F. You take tests during this time and then you are directed to go for further training into a specialty. Mine happened to be to come back to Camp Chaffee for another 8 weeks to train to be a clerk/typist.

When that training was completed I was sent to Ft Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas to work as a clerk in a dispensary. This was a job somewhat like Radar's in MASH, except that this was to treat routine illnesses, not combat stuff. This was a pretty good assignment and it was quite enjoyable, I even got to make a trip down to Laredo and crossed the border into Mexico. However, after I had been there about 8 months, I heard that they were getting ready to send a group from here to Europe. I thought this sounded interesting so I called the Sergeant in charge of this to ask him if I could get on this list. He told me that they were already filled up with my specialty but if I wanted to put my name on a list that I could go on the next overseas assignment. I asked him where that might be and he said it could be anywhere. I said you mean like Korea and he said yes, so I said forget it. Several hours later I got a call from this Sergeant and he asked if I still wanted to go to Europe and I said yes and he said "consider your self en route."

So this turned out great. I got to see Europe at the Army's expense. I was first stationed in Nuremberg, Germany with the 2nd Armored Cavalry. I worked in personnel converting personal records because this whole unit was rotating back to the States. This turned out to be the coldest summer I ever spent. We were wearing field jackets in June. Nuremberg was a very interesting city that still had some bombed out buildings from WW II that hadn't been fixed yet and there was also this huge outdoor complex where Hitler had done some of his big NAZI rallies. While here, I got to travel to the Garmisch area in Bavaria on a three day pass and it was beautiful. However, because this outfit was going back to the States I was only stationed here for 2 or 3 months. I was then sent to the 142nd Armored Signal Corp in the picturesque village of Bad Kreuznach.

This assignment requires a little more elaboration. The purpose of this outfit was to periodically go out on field trips to set up communication equipment so we would be able to pass on messages in case we were attacked by the Russians. I might add that we were about 7 minutes by plane from the nearest Communist border and that it typically took us a couple of hours to move out of camp when we were put on alert.

When I arrived at this location I was given a new assignment. Instead of getting a clerk/typist job I was assigned to a platoon where my job would be to go out with 1 or 2 other guys in a small radio truck and set up voice communications in some remote spot to pass on information if we were invaded. This was kind of neat when we actually got to do it, but outside of these exercises we really didn't have that much to do other than equipment upkeep and spit and polish inspections. The Sergeant running our platoon chose to exercise his power by making it a first class "chicken shit" outfit. In case you are unfamiliar with the term it basically means emphasizing and concentrating on the trivial and petty. I had already come to the conclusion that I really wasn't cut for the Army way of life. I was not one to want to follow orders without knowing why. So there was an inevitable clash.

I think it all started because I chose the wrong friend that already had a bad reputation. His name was Louis Leveck and he was from Rogers City, Michigan. I think that the fact that he was from Michigan was how we got to be friends. The first inclination that I had that something was amiss was when I went with him to sign up for a pass for the upcoming weekend to go into town. There were two kinds of passes. There was a regular pass that got you off the base until I think midnight, and then there was the overnight pass that was harder to get that meant that you didn't need to come back until the next day. One of the flunkies that hung around the platoon office gave me a funny grin and mumbled something like I wasn't going to be going anywhere this weekend. I kind of dismissed it at the time. Later it would take on meaning.

We had a big inspection of the entire company coming up on that Saturday morning that covered our room displays and ourselves and our weapon as we stood outside in formation. The inspection was conducted by the company commander and I was able to go through both parts of the inspection without getting a gig. However, when I went to try and get my pass I was told that I hadn't been approved for one. When I asked why, I was told that I moved when we were standing at parade rest for the inspection. Now first of all, we had been outside in formation for around an hour or more and secondly, anyone familiar with the Army knows that this was a bogus charge, so it appeared that they were trying to teach me a lesson. Louie had also been denied a pass and to add insult to injury, we had to perform 2 hours of additional duty that Saturday as "punishment".

I was a bit irate about the unfairness of it all but this didn't slow down my new best buddy Louie at all. He said don't worry about a pass, when we get done we'll get dressed in civvies, sneak off the base and take the train to the nearby town of Bingen where there were no MP's and we would have a good time. He also told me that he knew where there was a hole in the fence where we could sneak back in later that night. He also advised me, as a precaution, to use the time honored ruse of arranging stuff under the covers in our bed so that when the CQ did bed check it would look like we were in bed.

Well things started out all right as far as catching the train to Bingen which was a nice village and it was full of people having a good time on a Saturday night. Unfortunately, it was also full of Air Force Airmen from, I think, the nearby Air Force Base of either Mainz or Wiesbaden. There may not have been any MP's as Louie had promised, but there was the Air Force equivalent. We had joined some Air Force guys around a table at a bar when the AP's came in and came over to us. They asked us all where we were from. Louie and I told him we were with the Army and what outfit we were with. They informed us all that they hoped we all knew that we needed an overnight pass to be here in Bingen. Louie and I were trying to remain calm and told them that yes we were aware of that. Then one of the

drunken Air Force guys started saying, yeah we've got overnight passes, do you want to see them. Louie and I were getting a little tense, but fortunately the AP's said no but that they would be checking us out later in the night. As soon as they left, the first thing we did was get away from these Air Force guys. Then Louie had this great idea. Bingen was on the Rhine River and we could take the ferry over to the other side to the town of Rudesheim to get away from these AP's and then come back later and catch the train back to Bad Kreuznach. Well, it turned out that Rudesheim was also a great village full of people and they were having a wine festival.

When things started to quiet down a little, maybe around 1:00 am, we thought it might be a good time to go catch the ferry back to Bingen. Well, 'lo and behold we found out that the ferry quit running at around 11:00 pm and it wouldn't start up again till around 7:00 am. I thought, oh boy, I'm really in deep doodoo now. We had to find places to sleep until morning so we were sleeping in waiting rooms and bathrooms. Morning finally came and we caught the ferry and then the train back to Bad Kreuznach. Sure enough Louie did find us a hole in the fence to get back in camp. Now I was hoping that the stuffed bed trick had actually worked for bed check. That hope was soon shattered. The first thing we ran into when we got in the barracks was one of the guys asking us, "Where have you guys been, the CQ has been looking all over for you". The CQ stood for Charge of Quarters and different people would draw this assignment each night. Again I thought it's over, we're in for it now. We went immediately to see the CQ in the Orderly room and he asks, "Where have you guys been? I saw the stuff in your beds and I didn't know what to do." He said if he hadn't heard from us by a certain time when he went off duty; he would have had to turn us in as AWOL. Luckily we had gotten back before that time, so all was right with the world.

Luckily for me, Louie's service time was up shortly after this and he was sent home. However, I was now determined that I had to find a way to get out of this platoon. Our company commander was a Captain that wasn't that bad of a guy but he never seemed to be comfortable or natural in command. He said all the right things but it was like he was playing a part and following a script and not really engaged with the men. However, he made one of the statements that most leaders make and don't often mean. He said that his door was always open and if we had any problems we should come and see him. I thought that I might just take him up on that and see if he would help me get out of this chicken shit platoon. I went to his office and got permission to see him. I decided to take the noble route and not talk about any problems, but to try and make the case that I wasn't working in the specialty (called MOS in the Army) that I had been trained for and that I wasn't very proficient in the communications field and that I could better serve the Army in the MOS I had been trained for. He told me he would look into the matter. I thought this meeting had gone rather well and was looking forward to a new assignment. Instead, a few days later I got a very unpleasant surprise. My dreaded platoon leader informed me that I was going to be sent to a two month school at different Base (I think it was Baumholder) to learn Morse code and other communication associated things.

I asked around about what this school and location was like and I got very unfavorable reviews. I remember the quote that it was called "the asshole of Germany". So it appeared that I had actually made matters worse. However, I wasn't done yet. I asked one of my buddies that worked at Headquarters if he would check and see if there was any regulation or anything else that would help me out of this predicament. When he got back to me he said that the only thing he found was that there was a regulation that said that a person had to have at least 6 months left on his service time when he finished a school before he could go to it. A quick count indicated that I would only have 5 months left. I figured I could use this, especially since our Captain was fond of quoting regulations, even if, as we found out, they often weren't the right ones.

So, I was ready to make my play. I went to the orderly room and asked the First Sergeant for permission to see the Captain. He asked me the purpose and I told him it was about my reassignment to the school at Baumholder. He went in to see the Captain and then he came out and told me to take a seat and wait. It soon became evident that they were playing games with me and they were not going to be very helpful. But I was prepared. After sitting and waiting for over an hour I went to the First sergeant and asked for permission to see the IG. This was the Inspector General office where you could go if you had a complaint about treatment. Theoretically they couldn't refuse you, they had to honor this request. However, this request had the desired effect and I was soon ushered in to see the Captain.

He started out by gruffly telling me that it would be good for me to take this opportunity and go to this school and expand my horizons. He recounted some personal account on how he had expanded his horizons. When I was finally permitted to respond I stated that according to regulation such and such, I was required to have at least six months left in the service and that I would only have 5 months left. I then repeated the part about better serving the Army in the MOS that I had been trained in and then requested that he reassign me where I could do more good. I could tell that my response had gotten his attention because his tone kind of mellowed and after a little while he said he would reassign me. I was reassigned to the motor pool to be the motor pool dispatcher. This was a much better assignment than I had and I was quite satisfied with my victory.

There were a couple more stories to tell here but I need to move on. I just want to add that I took a 3 day pass from here and I went to Paris and went to visit my Nephew Richard who was in the Air Force and was stationed just outside of Paris. I also took some leave time and with a couple of friends (Howard Pruitt & Dewy ?) we got a hop on a military plane to London, England, where we spent a few days and then we caught a military flight to Madrid, Spain. We spent a couple of days there, and then took a train to Valencia. When we got back to Madrid and tried to catch a military flight back to Frankfurt, Germany we found that the planes were grounded due to weather conditions in Germany. They were having one of the worst winter storms in their history. Every morning for 2 or 3 days we would journey to the airport and find out that there were no flights to Frankfurt. We finally had to go to the American embassy to notify our Company that we weren't AWOL and would return to our base as soon as there was a flight out. I was also in the predicament that I had used up all of my leave since I was only a couple of months from my discharge and had taken all of my remaining leave time on this trip. So all in all I would say that I got my money's worth out of my stay in Europe.

I finally want to address the period after I got out of the Army on April 27, 1956 and entering college in Sep 1957. I already describe the part about meeting Helen, so I will just dwell on two issues; work and my big accident.

When I got out of the Army I thought I would just lie around for a month or so back on the farm and my old high school stomping grounds. After I got the hanging out period done, I thought it would be a simple matter to go to Detroit and look for a job. As it turned out Carmen and Willy were in a good location and they had an extra room I could use so I went to live with them. I found out that finding a job was not going to be as easy as I expected. After a couple of weeks of following want ads to no avail, I think I contacted my brothers to see if the companies they were working for had any labor openings. My brother John got me a job with a construction company he was working with at the time, but after a couple of weeks of working there I had the impression that this wasn't a real job. I had the feeling that I was only working there as a favor to John and that I was only doing make up work. I didn't feel comfortable with this, so on a day off; I went to the unemployment office to see if they had any jobs. The person there made an appointment for me and gave me the name of a company to go see and I, under the false impression that this job was a certainty, quit the construction job. When I found out that they weren't actually hiring anybody, I was too embarrassed to go back to the construction job, so I went

back to the want ads. I experienced another couple of weeks of rejection and out of frustration I started applying for jobs that I didn't really have the stated qualification requirements.

One of those was for a statistical clerk in the Chrysler Marketing Analysis Office. The requirements were for somebody that was good with numbers, that was at least 21 years old and that had some college time. I figured that I could handle the first requirement, but I was only 20 years old at the time and I had no real college experience except for almost one semester at Walsh Institute of Accounting. I decided to apply anyway. I filled out the necessary job application and then a gentleman by the name of Joe Halfmann came out and interviewed me and then he gave me a mathematical type test to take. I took the test and turned it in and left, thinking I probably wouldn't hear from this place. I then went and interviewed for another job that I thought I might have a better chance for.

A day or two later I got a call about coming in to their office for another interview. I was under the impression that I was talking to the second company until I finally realized it was for the statistical clerk job at Chrysler. Joe Halfmann greeted me and then we went into a nice big office and I was interviewed by the big boss. After some talk I was told that they would like to hire me. We hadn't discussed salary yet, so I wasn't sure what I was getting into and I started running through my head, what was the minimum that I would work for. When I asked them what the job paid, it was way over my minimum and it was all I could do remain cool and appear to mull it over and then accept the job. Joe Halfmann turned out to be my immediate supervisor and he later told me that I had scored the highest on the test he gave me and that was why I was selected. Joe was great to work for. This was a good white collar job and it allowed me to make and save enough money to consider going to college. When I decided to quit this job to go to college in August of 1957 Joe Halfmann tried to talk me into continuing to work there and work for a degree at night school. It was tempting but I realized that it would take me forever to get a degree this way and I wasn't sure that I would have the perseverance to stick it out, so I decided to make a clean break and go get my degree. I've never regretted that decision.

I need to provide one last story and that is of my almost fatal accident where I came within a fraction of an inch of not being here to recount any of these tales. It was sometime in the spring or early summer of 1957. One night in Imlay City, I ran into a friend I had made from Almont, after dating Helen, called "Red" Hammond. Red was with another guy from Almont, but, I can't remember who the other guy was. The three of us decided to go to a popular bar in Capac, about 8 miles away. Red was driving his older sister's neat one year old Pontiac Catalina hard top convertible. We decided to leave my car at the Hi-Speed in Imlay city and go in the Catalina. After we had spent some time in the bar we figured it was time to go home. When we got back to where my car was Red said he was too drunk to drive so could I drive the Catalina and take the other guy home. I can't remember now why the other guy couldn't have driven. I decided that I was OK, so I told Red that I would do it. Red climbed in the back seat and fell asleep. The other guy sat in the front seat and directed me to his house in Almont. I now had to return about 8 miles to Imlay City. Red was sleeping in the back seat and, as I later described it, I was sleeping in the front seat. I hadn't fully realized it at the time, but I found that if I'm tired, I have a tendency to fall asleep when I'm driving. About half way back to Imlay City, on M53, I fell asleep and ran into a concrete bridge abutment. I only have flashes of memory of lights flashing and an ambulance and then waking up in the Lapeer County Hospital.

When I woke up Dad and Mother were there at the foot of the bed and they were crying. I didn't find this too unusual, but then Martin came into the room and he was crying and I thought, oh my god, am I dieing? Most of the rest of my brothers and sisters and their spouses were soon there to see me as well. I soon found out that I wasn't dieing but I was in serious shape. This was before cars had crash bags and seat belts and safe interior designs. I had some severe lacerations, a fractured ankle and a fractured jaw. The metal horn ring had broken and gone into my throat. My doctor later told me that if

my carotid artery had been severed I would have died instantly. He then told me that the protective tissue on this artery had been scraped away. He then added that I was the first patient that he had seen with a tourniquet on his neck. One added note about this doctor. I only remember him as Dr. Williams. He not only treated me till I recovered from these injuries, but about two years later he delivered Dean, our first child. We had no insurance at the time and I was in my Freshman year in college. When I went to pay him for the delivery I was handed a note that indicated that all I had to pay for was the office call, there was no charge for the delivery. He said he had been in college and he knew how tough it could be. I still have that note. I never saw this doctor again, but he ended up working near my brother Joe's house and because of our last name Joe got to know him and Joe indicated that whenever he saw the doctor, he inquired about me.

One final note about Red, he was not seriously injured. I don't think he even had to go to hospital. His sister's almost new car however was totaled. I was embarrassed about wrecking her car, but she was as sweet as she could be about it.

This might be as good a place as any to end this for now. There are more tales to tell, but these are the highlights of my early life.

I have a story to tell that doesn't really fit anywhere but I would like to recall it because of how close it came to being a tragedy. It was when we lived at the Claude Wood farm and it was when Martin was still home and we were working in the summer for some farmer. I was probably 12 or 13 and Martin would have been 16 or 17. I forget the details but apparently one of our old neighbor's, Frank Bitel and I think one of his brothers were also working with us. After work one hot summer day we decided to go to one of the gravel pits and go swimming. Martin and I could swim a little but we weren't real good at it. It was basically dog paddling. Somebody had put in a home made diving board at the deep end of the gravel pit. Frank Bitel was about Martin's age. He couldn't swim and wanted to learn. We tried to give him some "lessons" in the shallow part but we weren't having much success. We had always heard the old myth about teaching someone to swim by throwing them in deep water. Well, we didn't throw Frank in, but we encouraged him to jump off the makeshift diving board. The water was probably around 7 or 8 feet deep there. Frank jumped in and immediately panicked, as anyone would that couldn't swim. It was obvious that he was going to drown unless we did something. I jumped in to help him. He was in full panic mode and grabbed me in what could be called a death grip. I struggled to get free but he had gotten a hold of a chain I had around my neck with a religious medal. If he was going to go down apparently so was I. Luckily in our struggle the chain broke and I got free. However, Frank was still in big trouble. I believe Martin was also trying to help Frank without much success. We were in serious danger of having at least one of us drown. At that moment I had a flash of a comic book that I had read about heroes that described how someone was saved in a similar situation by a swimmer holding his breath, going underwater and standing on the bottom and grabbing the feet of the person in distress and putting them on his shoulder. Luckily the water here was only 7 or 8 ft deep so I was able to do this for Frank and stabilize him and then with Martin on the top and me walking on the bottom and with his feet on my shoulders holding him up we got Frank to the bank where the diving board was. Frank promptly got out and laid over the diving board and started spitting up water. I don't know if Frank ever learned how to swim.

You may wonder why at the age of 85 I am now writing down these memories. It is because through the years I have treasured many of these memories of what an interesting and wonderful life that I've had. Unfortunately, I find that as time goes by many of the details are fading and I wanted to record what's left of them before they are totally lost. So, it is primarily for my own benefit that

as time goes on I will be able come here and revisit those times. As a side issue, perhaps there may be some one else in my family that will draw pleasure from them over time.