

## **Remembering My Sister Ellen (aka Melania)**

My sister Ellen was born on January 11, 1922. She was the first daughter and second child born in this country to our parents. Her brother Joe (Jose), born on June 6, 1920 was their first child born in this country. Her older sister Frances (Esperanza) and older brother John (Erasmus) were born in Mexico. I wasn't born until March 5, 1936, 14 years after Ellen's birth, so I have no memories of her early years. What I do have is some of the stories from some of her younger brother's (Paul, Jesse & Martin) and sisters (Mercy, Carmen & Margie). I want to relate some of the important role that Ellen played for our family and our parents.

Ellen was kind of quiet and shy, much like her only child, Cathy. She was the first in our family to go to High School (North Branch HS) and first to graduate. During most of her high school years she was also our Dad's main farm helper. During this period our father would work different dairy farms on shares. This meant that he and his family could live on someone's farm while he worked it and shared half of what was produced, which included milk, calves & crops. It also meant that every few years that he would have a better opportunity and we would move to a different farm. The oldest sons, John & Joe, who were his main helpers, quit school after the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and soon after that, at around age 15, they would leave the farm and go to work in the cities, i.e. Detroit, Pontiac to support themselves, and in Joe's case to financially help Dad as well. It was around this time that the oldest daughter, Frances (Esperanza) was married (1935). That meant that, when they left, Ellen was the oldest child left to help Dad on the farm work that needed to be done. This would include such things as milking the cows, feeding the livestock, cleaning the stables, hauling the hay, working the fields, harvesting the crops and assorted other duties. My best guess is that Ellen may have been Dad's key helper on the farms from when she was around 13 years old, when John & Joe probably left, to until she was about 17. I base this on Paul and Jesse telling the story that they went to Dad and told him that Ellen shouldn't have to do this work anymore since they were now old enough to do it. My guess is that they might have done this when Paul was around 12 and Jesse around 10 years old.

Soon after High School graduation, Ellen was the first of the daughters to leave the farm to work in the city. She got an office job in Detroit with a Mexican run accounting firm that did taxes and insurance work. There's probably a lot of interesting story here that, unfortunately I do not know. However, I do know that with her working in this office she acquired the knowledge and experience to guide our parents with some very important help. Dad didn't get to own his own farm until around 1951 when he was 60

years old. It's doubtful that he had been paying any taxes before then and Social Security was still in its infancy. Ellen started doing their taxes for them so they would be eligible for Social Security and this was very important. Before Social Security was available people typically worked as long as they could and then, if they were fortunate, some family member would take care of them. Because of the Social Security that Ellen had arranged for them to receive, Dad was able to stop farming when he was around 70 to 75 years old and live another 15 years in retirement. Even though he sold the farm around this time, they were able to make an arrangement that they could continue to live there for the rest of their lives. They lived there without having to farm for about 10 years, but as they became older some of the family helped them move to Detroit so they could more easily be looked after. Dad lived about another 5 years there, but mother, only lived a couple more.

Ellen went to work and live in Detroit shortly after High School graduation, which was probably around 1940 or a little later. Because of where she was living, she met her husband to be Ambrose Assessor through his family. He was serving in the Army during WWII and when it ended and he got out, they were married on Aug 31, 1946. Their daughter and only child, Cathy, was born a year later. Amb was a wonderful man who was very helpful to our parents. Unfortunately, he died unexpectedly in 1974 at the age of 59. He did not live long enough to qualify for a pension, so Ellen had to reenter the workforce to support herself for several years. She died unexpectedly on Sep, 24, 1998 while she was in the hospital undergoing some heart surgery.

## ADDENDUM

I think I may have solved the mystery of how my older brothers and sisters got their American names. 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 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 by some of their classmates, they probably readily accepted this as a means

to 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 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).

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