

**Natividad Valdez (b.6-16-1906)**  
Husband of Esperanza Fraga (b. 11-05-1914)

Background Story – Page 1

Natividad Valdez was born in 1906 in Tangancicuaro, Michoacan, Mexico, the second eldest of twelve siblings, to Jesus Verduco Valdez and Isabel Alvizu Valdez. The Valdez family were farmers and Natividad, who would later always be known as Nati, was born during a time when the family was very poor and during immense conflict and turmoil in Mexico.

Nati's mother's parents died very young, so his mother, Isabel, brought her youngest brother, Luis, who was not quite a teen yet, to live with her and her family. Nati was raised side by side with his Uncle Luis. Nati was smart and wanted to learn, but music was what he loved and he was fascinated by musical instruments. During his school age years when it took money to attend school, Nati would save whatever he could from that money until he had enough to purchase a violin he'd had his eye on and wanted more than anything else.

As the years passed, Nati and Luis, both musically talented, loved percussion instruments. They learned to play the guitar, the violin, the mandolin, they enjoyed the harmonica, maracas and claves. Growing up together, they dreamed about leaving Mexico to travel, especially to the United States, where they would one day make their fortune. When the opportunity came, they left Mexico and eventually found their way to the United States. Once in the states, they found work wherever they could as laborers and farm hands hoping to save enough money to start a new life. However, it wasn't long before the Depression came and as time went on good jobs were becoming scarce. Nati and Luis, worked hard and were willing to work long hours just for room and board, but in these times, there were no jobs to be found. They soon realized this was not the life they had dreamed about, still, they were determined to stay and knew they would have to find a way to survive.

Nati knew Luis had two brothers in the states, his Uncle Jesus, and his Uncle Antonio. Jesus was living in Chicago, and Antonio, in southwest Detroit. Through the strong support and encouragement they received from Antonio, (Uncle Tony) and his wife, Maria, (Aunt Mary), they ended up coming to Detroit.

A few years earlier, Uncle Tony and Aunt Mary had made good friends with a couple they met while working in Flint, Michigan. The couple, Valeriano and Martina Fraga, were from Michoacan, Mexico. Uncle Tony asked Valeriano if his brother and nephew could work at the farm where they were now living and working. Uncle Tony told Valeriano that Luis and Nati would work only for room and board (and cigarettes), and Valeriano agreed.

As all these events occurred and developed (happily) by chance, Natividad Valdez would meet Esperanza Fraga, the second eldest daughter of Valeriano and Martina Fraga. Nati and Esperanza (Frances) would fall in love and eventually marry.

(This chapter of Nati's life is well known in the Fraga Family. It is a beautiful story of love and heartache, but in the end a story of joy and acceptance, of enduring strength and family love.)

## **Natividad Valdez / Fraga Website (Pages 2-3)**

In 1935 Nati and Esperanza (Frances) had settled in Detroit where their first daughter, Isabelle was born. By 1938, they had two sons, Richard born in 1936 and David, in 1938. The only good paying job Nati had found to support his family was at the slaughter houses along Michigan Avenue, and the work there was brutal. Even though Nati worked in overalls, he would still come home exhausted with his clothes bloody and reeking of strong awful odor that would many times make Frances sick as she did her best to wash them in the basement's cement sinks. Nati had come to realize that the dreams he once had were now gone and the only thing that mattered was the love of his wife and his children, and the responsibility he felt to provide for them.

By 1940 when his fourth child Vera had arrived, Nati knew he had to find work that paid better wages so he could take care of his growing family. With the help once again of his Uncle Tony, (his mother's brother), Nati was able to apply for a job at Ford Motor Co., but Nati and Frances had to come up with \$50, a lot of money in those days, to secure a place in line to be hired for work on Ford's Assembly Line. Once hired, Nati found out that though the work was different, in many ways it was just as brutal as the slaughter houses, but the money was good and Nati relied on his wife Frances to use the money wisely to keep a roof over their heads, provide clothing and keep food on the table. During these early years at Ford Motor Co., they moved several times as their family continued to grow with the addition of Michael in 1942, Delores in 1943, Victoria (Vicky) in 1945 and Mary Ellen in 1946.

By 1947 Nati and Frances had been renting the lower flat at 3730 18<sup>th</sup> and sadly in that year their twin daughters, Grace and Marie, died two days after their birth. These were hard times for them, and they had grown weary and tired of moving and renting, but again as fate would have it, there was a fire in this house that destroyed parts of the area to the basement, the back entry to the house, and the stairs that led to the upper flat. Thankfully, no one was hurt and as they tried to figure out what they were going to do, they came up with an idea. During the years of moving from one labor job to another, Nati had learned skills he knew he could now use to repair the damaged areas in the house. Nati was able to make an offer to the land lady to repair and purchase the house through a land contract. It was in this house that Robert was born in 1949, Christine in 1951, Patricia (Pat) in 1952, and by 1954, the births of Carmen and Connie made 13 ("the Baker's Dozen"). Ramon arrived in 1956, Ralph in 1959 and Annemarie, in 1961.

Throughout these years Nati was getting up at 3:30 every morning in order to take two buses to his job at the Ford Rouge to start by 6am and work 10 hours each day. Workers on the Assembly Line stood hours on cement floors with few breaks to go to the bathroom and only a short break to eat their lunch. Nati would look forward to the lunch Frances would make for him every night to take with him each morning. And when coming back home on those two buses, he would look forward to a cold beer and a good dinner with his wife and family.

During these years of struggle and hard work, their son Michael died from an accident at the young age of 22. Michael was a bright, talented young man, his loss was devastating. Only love and the support of their families saw them through the years of grief and sorrow.

Nati and Frances kept their families close, family always came first. Nati loved Frances' Fraga family, as she loved his Valdez family. Nati and Frances were both the second eldest of twelve siblings, and whenever any of Frances' siblings needed a place to stay in the city no matter their reason, they were always welcomed. Nati and Frances never hesitated opening their home or sharing whatever they had with either of their families. Nati would tell his grown children how proud he was when his uncles came to visit and how he and Frances

were so excited and both eager to help Nati's brother and sister as they struggled through immigration to bring their families to the United States.

Whenever Nati and Frances thought of having fun it would always mean getting together with family, playing music both families loved, dancing, playing cards, drinking Tequila and of course, high balls for the women, and always plenty of food on the table that everyone helped with and all shared and enjoyed together.

In 1967, Nati and his family left 18<sup>th</sup> Street and moved to Flanders on the east side of Detroit. There they raised the last of their eight children still at home. In 1968 the UAW had negotiated a contract with Ford, with a 30-and-Out plan for men like Nati to retire early. Nati had been working on the line for 28 years with a record of never missing one day and was given an Award for his service. With the new contract, he was also able to buy two years of credited service to make the 30 years required to retire at his age of 62. Too many men had died working on those lines before they ever reached the retirement age of 65. Nati was able to enjoy 17 years of retirement before his death in 1983.

In Nati's years of retirement he taught himself the skill of reupholstering furniture, and he did it in the basement of their new home, where he had the first ever real "Man Cave". Family and dear friends who came to visit Nati and Frances always enjoyed hospitality and good food. When some saw Nati's work, they were impressed and would ask him to redo a chair or a couch, he always said yes and took very little for the work, and Frances kept Nati on track by keeping a record of everything he was doing. This was work that challenged Nati, and work he enjoyed and could do in his own good time with all the breaks he needed or wanted.

Nati and Frances grew closer than ever during these years and Nati was able to enjoy wonderful new and different relationships with his grown children and his grandchildren too. Family had always meant everything to Nati. While living in their first home on 18<sup>th</sup> Street, Nati would often say that if his mother, who was still living at that time in Mexico, was able to visit him and see his home and family, she would say her son was a very Rich Man, and for all the years that followed, Nati was heard many times saying "Yes, I am a Rich Man".

Fraga Family Website/Nati's Story – Anna&ME/ March 2022