

Joseph Robert Fraga

Submitted by a collaboration of surviving children Elaina, Carole, Linda, Joseph II, Kimberly and James

Note: We already have their basic dates & stats from the Family Tree/Directory

Early years -

Dad was born in 1920. He was the first child of Martina and Valeriano to be born in the United States. We do not know much of his early childhood. We know Dad grew up being very poor and being Mexican, there was a lot of discrimination. When Dad was in school (one-room school house), the Mexicans were blamed for spreading head lice when it was some other child from a different nationality. Dad was very troubled by any discrimination. He knew it was the character of the person that matter. Respect the person, respect the family name. Dad modeled his life based on these principals.

Dad quit school in 8th grade to help his dad on the farm. Working with his, father, Dad became good with the horses and with farming. He loved the farm and caring for the animals. These skills would be used later in life.

Occasionally, we would hear Dad talk about them speeding their cars down the back roads. We also heard that Dad was quite the "ladies man" and had his share of girlfriends. He loved to dance (and was quite good at it, even into his 80's)

According to our Mom, she thought Dad's older brother, John, was the most handsome of the Fraga men and Dad was into his cars and himself.

Being one of the older children, Dad worked to help provide for his family, his parents and his siblings. He would always make sure his sisters had dresses to wear for their school dances. Dad would always make sure all the chores on the farm were done, even if he had to do another's siblings chores for one reason or another.

Always giving and always thinking of others first. That would be his mantra his entire life. Such a selfless soul was Dad.

Adult years – facts, stories/anecdotes for the time they were on their own. Including military, early jobs, marriage, later jobs/careers.



Courtship:

Dad met our Mom, Helen Miller through his sisters, Carmen and Mercedes since she went to high school with them. Mom and Mercedes were the best of friends. One day, when Mom was at the Fraga homestead, playing jacks with her friends, she caught the eye of Dad.

Dad would take his sisters and Mom to dances and one day just asked her out for a date. They hit it off immediately and would spend their dates dancing the night away, Both Mom and Dad knew in their hearts that they were meant for each other, soul mates.



A New Life Together:

World War II was looming in the background as the courtship continued. Dad was able to get a deferment from the draft to help on the farm, but was eventually drafted. Mom and Dad married in May 1942 shortly after Dad was drafted. They had their first child, Joe An in 1943, but Dad was off to war prior to Joe An's birth and would not see his new daughter and beautiful bride for three years, 1945, when the war ended.

Dad was drafted into the Army as part of the Corp of Engineers. Part of his basic training was a full-gear march through the Mohave Desert. If the soldiers made it, they were shipped to the Pacific theater, if not, they were sent to the European theater. His tour was in the South Pacific where he spent a lot of time in Guam, New Guinea, and the Philippines building roads and airfields shortly after the Americans gained control of the islands. The job not only had to deal with the extreme heat and humidity of these jungle islands, there were also Japanese snipers still lurking in the jungles. Dad did not talk much about it, but there was a story where their group was being shot at by snipers and Dad took control with a machine gun mounted on a nearby jeep. Dad's army buddies said that Dad was true and faithful to his beloved wife throughout the war. Dad also finished his high school education while in the service.

When Dad returned home from the service, the family lived with Dad's sister, Francis and her husband, Nate, until they could save enough money to buy their first home. Dad worked various odd jobs, including taxi driver in the city of Pontiac and asphalt paving in the Detroit area.

Dad finally, through hard work, got his apprenticeship as an electrician, and thus began the family trade. This was one of Dad's personal best and proudest achievements for it allowed him the financial stability to provide for his family. As an electrician, Dad helped build lower Michigan's industrial base. He worked on hospitals, assembly plants, and other manufacturing complexes from Detroit to Pontiac to Flint to Saginaw to Midland.

Throughout the years, the family grew to eight. Dad had built three homes for his family over the years (Warren, Lake Orion, Lapeer) and was always a wonderful provider.

Faith and Family:

Dad loved his children dearly and made sure he provided for them. Dad would always take his children on vacation, whether it was a weekend at Cedar Point, a week-long expedition up north with daily stops, a day at Bob-Lo Island or Edgewater Park, a vacation to Washington D.C. or New York City and New England, Dad made sure his children enjoyed childhood, had clothes on their back, had food on the table, or had a vehicle to drive. When we were young children, Dad bought a horse and some ponies. The ponies were for us to learn how to ride and learn how to take care of animals. It was also Dad giving himself a little gift, for he loved horses.

Dad made sure his children had Christ in their lives. The family attended church every Sunday, celebrated the holidays (Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, etc.) with thanks to God and Jesus for the blessings bestowed upon him and his family. Dad made sure his children had a Catholic education by sending each one of us through the parochial school system.

Faith was always first priority. Dad would get down on his knees and pray every night, even on the eve of his death. We would fill a pew in church every Sunday. Mom would watch over us as Dad ushered. Dad was a member of the Knights of Columbus and would constantly be helping out at all the church functions. He would occasionally volunteer his children to help and even volunteered his wife to teach catechism.

Dad instilled his work ethic into his kids, whether we liked it or not. No matter how many kids were in the house, there was always a daily list of chores to do. At first, it was just the girls, but as the boys got older, they were assigned the outside chores and the girls were assigned the inside chores. Dad was strict with the chores but he was also fair. While we did not realize it at the time, all the chores and hard, manual work we had to do was to show us to take pride in our work and that hard work builds character in a person.

Dad was also tough on us. If any of us got into trouble, we would get a severe scolding and a grounding. If the trouble was really bad, we would get a spanking with either his hand, belt, or riding crop. That was discipline to teach us right from wrong, it was not abuse. We all learned what we did was wrong and why it was wrong. As we became teenagers, Mom and Dad would stay up until we got home or until we called and said where we were at a friend's home and were spending the night. Dad was always looking over and protecting his children.

Life After Work:

Dad retired in 1982 and spent the next 28 years enjoying life as a gentleman farmer until his death in 2010 from lung cancer caused by exposure to asbestos while working as an electrician. Dad never quit working his entire life. Dad grew alfalfa for hay and would sell it to the local horse owners for pennies on the dollar. He loved being outside and had his trusty dog, Suzie, with him all the time. Dad was always on his tractor when we came to visit him in Lapeer. We guess that this was Dad's peace, being outside, being one with nature, and being in touch with God's beautiful creations on a personal basis.

Tragedies:

In August 1978 we lost our beloved brother Val (named after our patriarch, Valeriano) in a car accident. Val had just graduated high school in June, had bought his first car with Dad's help and had landed his dream job as a fitness instructor at a Vic Tanny gym. We were all crushed by this tragic event, but Dad took it the hardest.

Dad blamed himself for this because Dad never told Val he loved him. Dad loved Val, and each and every one of his children, he just did not express it openly. This tragedy changed Dad and our entire family. As a family we became closer and Dad learned how to openly express his love for each one of us. It is through faith that we all got through this and became a close-knit family. This faith that both Mom and Dad instilled in us would be key for each one of us the rest of our lives,

In the early 1980's, Dad's first-born, Joe An fell ill with a ruptured appendix. The medical procedure failed to cleanse all of the infection out of Joe An's system and her kidneys failed. Dad was about to lose another child, but his faith and prayers did not let that happen. Through the grace of God, Dad's baby girl, Kimberly was able to donate a kidney.

Joe An's body accepted this gift and she lived off this new kidney for another thirteen years until the new kidney began to wear out and started failing.

In 1996 Dad's baby, James donated his kidney to his sister. This allowed Joe An two more years of life and gave Dad more time to shower his love on his first-born child. Joe An died in 1998. Dad was hurt, as any parent would be, but Dad was at peace because he knew God will take care of her and that he would someday see her again.

Another tragic event tested Dad's faith. In 1994, Mom fell into a diabetic coma. Mom was rushed to the hospital and was in ICU for several days. Dad was vigilant and stayed by his beloved Helen's side every moment he could. Dad was in constant prayer and put his faith in God's hands. Mom eventually pulled out of this. This scare made Dad realize how precious his beloved Helen was. He opened his heart and his affections even more to the love of his life.

Any other information you'd like to list - accomplishments, items of note, special stories....

Selflessness:

Dad was one of the most selfless and generous people we know. He was always putting other people first. He cared for his parents in their elder years when they moved to Detroit. Dad would go see his parents every day after work. Dad was always helping someone, whether it was his brothers and sisters, his friends, or his dedication to church through the Ushers and Knights of Columbus.

When Dad was a supervisor at John Miller Electric, he had to lay-off a couple of workers. He hated to do this and felt terrible. Dad ended up giving the two workers money from his own savings so that the workers could feed their families until they found other employment.



Superman:

In his retirement years, Dad liked to go to the casino. Dad and Mom would take bus trips up to Mount Pleasant. They would catch the bus at the major shopping mall in Flint.

One year, as Mom and Dad were waiting for the bus to arrive, a couple of young hoodlums came up to the car and tried to carjack Mom and Dad. Dad, taking no guff from the punks, threw a couple of punches at them, put the car in gear, and sped off, taking one of the punks with him. Dad was 84 years old when this happened. Don't mess with a Vet!. His children ended up buying him a Superman t-shirt which he wore proudly.

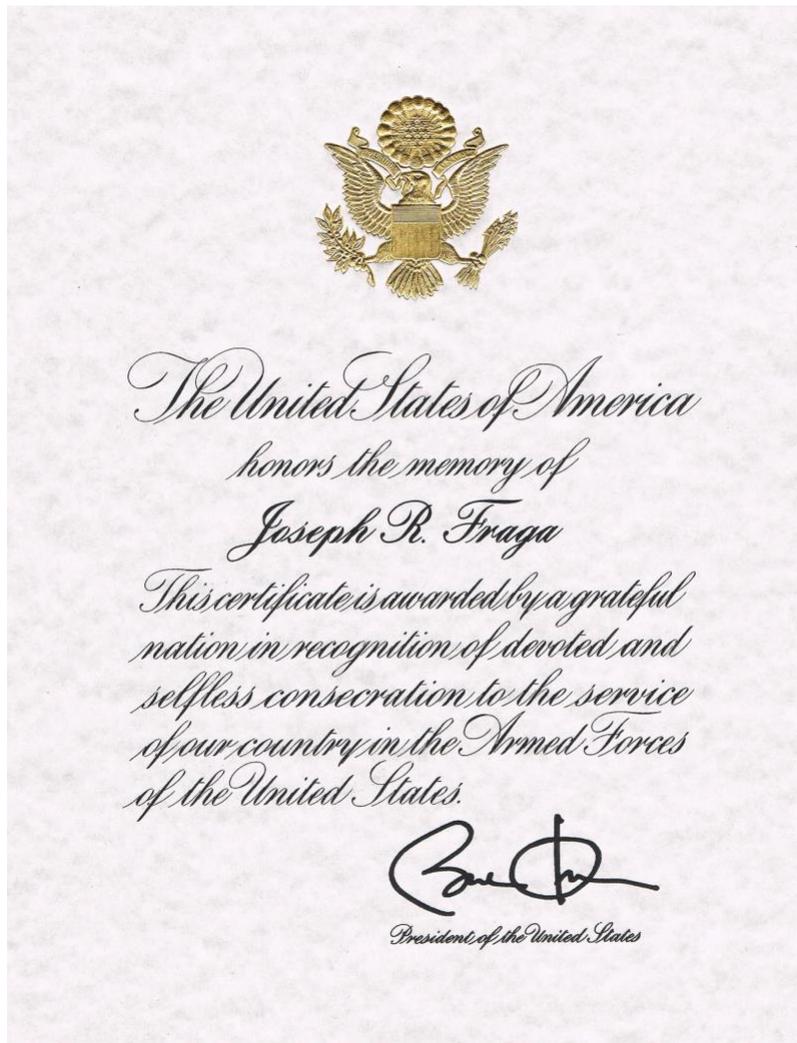


Integrity:

Dad, through his actions, showed us integrity. He always said “be proud to carry the Fraga name”. This meant to be honest and faithful, to work hard and give your best all the time, to treat others with respect. It also meant to be humble because everything you have in life is because of what God bestowed on you and how you live your life. “To give is to receive” is how Dad lived his life.

The Greatest Generation:

Dad was part of greatest generation that lived. He served our country with pride and dignity and lived the American Dream. His service has been sincerely appreciated and recognized.



Dad has a very special spot in the recently constructed Veterans Tribute of Oakland Township Memorial Park. (5236 Adams Road, Oakland Township, Mi.) His brick is located in section A1, the first person dedicated at the memorial (Thank you, Linda and Phil Hickey!)



Faith and an Epiphany:

“Dad had faith that could move mountains” (Linda).

“His faith was beyond words and his devotion to the Blessed Mother was without question. Dad’s honesty and integrity were beyond reproach.”(Elaina)

“Daddy walked the talk of a true Christian man and was a mentor to many!”
(Kimberly)

Dad liked to hunt and would go out every season. Rarely would he get a deer, but he just like to be outside. One year, on the farm in Lapeer, Dad was romping through his land and saw a deer. He had his gun aimed at the deer and was ready to shoot when the Blessed Mother appeared to him. She did not say anything, she was just there to let Dad know he was in Her Son’s graces. Dad had a feeling of peace overwhelm him, put his gun down, reflected on the moment, prayed and went back to the house, never to hunt again. This event put Dad’s mind and soul at ease because he knew his time was near. Dad did not pass for some years after this event but we could tell he was at peace with life.