

# Contents

|  |      |
|--|------|
| List of Photographs                                | ix   |
| Foreword   | xi   |
| Preface  | xiii |
| Abbreviated Family Tree                            | xvi  |
| Prologue   | 1    |
| 1 Escape, 1854–1920                                | 4    |
| 2 Jose’s Foothold, 1921–1940                       | 15   |
| 3 Ernie’s Promise, 1941–1957                       | 30   |
| 4 Sanctuary in Ohio, 1958–1961                     | 47   |
| 5 New Heights, 1961–1964                           | 60   |
| 6 Recruit, 1964–1971                               | 75   |
| 7 Gateway to the Senate, 1971–1977                 | 91   |
| 8 Making the Grade, 1977–1979                      | 113  |
| 9 World Emissary, 1980–1984                        | 123  |
| 10 Sergeant in Peace, Captain in War,<br>1985–2000 | 137  |



viii Contents

11 Return to War, 2001–2004 153

12 The Road Home, 2005–2014 169

13 Reflections, 2015 183

Epilogue: East Los Angeles, April 2016 190

Index 193



University Press of Kansas

# Photographs

- Pedro Garcia with Othello, ca. 1915 102  
Children of Pedro and Merced Garcia, ca. 1920 102  
Jose Garcia's World War I registration card, 1918 102  
Rosa Garcia, holding a child, and Jose Garcia, ca. 1915 103  
Palm Sunday dust storm, 1935 103  
Jose Garcia topping sugar beets, ca. 1935 104  
Jose Garcia's headstone 104  
Obituary for Jose Garcia, February 1938 105  
Rosa Garcia with sons, ca. 1945 105  
Family of Felipe Garcia, ca. 1954 106  
Rosario Ayala with daughters Luisa and Catalina, ca. 1928 106  
Ernie Garcia, US Marine, 1966 106  
Felipe Garcia's home on Santa Fe Street 107  
Finnup Park entrance after the June flood, 1965 107  
Rosa Garcia and granddaughter Olga at Fourth Street home,  
May 1962 108  
Ernie Garcia with Senator Robert Dole 108  
Ernie Garcia with Pope John Paul II 109  
Ernie Garcia escorting President Ronald Reagan, February 1986 109  
Ernie Garcia, Senate sergeant at arms, at the Capitol building 110  
Ernie Garcia escorting President Miguel de la Madrid of Mexico 111  
Ernie Garcia in Iraq, 2004 111  
Ernie Garcia, US Marine, June 2006 112  
Ernie Garcia's marine retirement ceremony, 2006 112



University Press of Kansas

# Foreword

Following Ernie Garcia's studies at the University of Kansas in the late 1970s, he pursued a career in Washington, DC, where he would become a member of my Senate staff. It was then that his childhood friend and college roommate, Randy Bowling, encouraged him to write about his developing career. Thirty years later, Ernie's cousin, Dennis Garcia, approached Ernie with the idea of organizing those notes and memorializing his life's experiences. Ernie agreed, and the process of writing this book began soon thereafter.

This book is the story of Ernie's family's migration to the United States to escape the hardships of Mexico, including possible capture by national military forces during the Mexican Revolution of 1910. The family's story also includes the trials and tribulations incurred upon their arrival in the United States. Though no longer pursued as enemies of the Mexican government, Ernie's family still endured poverty, poor living conditions, and limited educational opportunities. The family members eventually made their way to Kansas, where they struggled to support themselves through difficult and demanding field labor.

The book also details the events and experiences of Ernie's immediate family in Kansas, including the untimely death of his father as well as the challenges and consequences of ethnic discrimination. Despite the obstacles facing him, Ernie became a young man whose character and personality would pave the way for success beyond his wildest dreams.

Many of Ernie's aspirations were tied to the University of Kansas. As a young boy, he listened to radio broadcasts of Jayhawk basketball with his father. Ernie ultimately played basketball in high school and went on to attend KU. Later, when Ernie came to work with me in the US Capitol, he took advantage of the opportunities afforded him there—and developed into a capable and knowledgeable Senate staff professional. His successes continued in Washington long after he left my office.

In the mid-1980s, Ernie achieved another of his many goals by becoming an officer in the United States Marine Corps. Even after retirement from the corps, Ernie remained a protector and public servant when he went on to serve as superintendent of the Kansas Highway Patrol.

Ernie's story is a compelling tale of a talented and highly motivated member of an immigrant family here in the United States—a family that came to Kansas with a determination to become self-sufficient and, ultimately, one whose children and grandchildren would proudly serve the people of Kansas and our nation.

*Senator Robert Dole*  
October 2016



University Press of Kansas

# Preface

The life of Ernest E. Garcia validates the continuing viability of the American dream. The road that Ernie, as he is affectionately nicknamed, and his family traveled is a compelling tale that needs to be told. An examination of the family history reveals that the origin of Ernie's story lies in family experiences before his birth. The first two chapters of this book detail the migration of Ernie's great-grandfather Pedro and grandfather Jose from Mexico to Kansas. His grandparents Jose and Rosa Garcia entered the United States in 1917 at El Paso, Texas. They and their six sons, two of whom were born in Mexico, eventually settled in Garden City, Kansas. By 1951 their sons had fathered more than half of their forty-four grandchildren who reached adulthood.

The remaining chapters detail Ernie's life over the course of six decades. It is a story filled with an extraordinary array of rich and unique experiences and successes in his government and military careers. But along the way there were many difficult challenges. He overcame those hardships and took advantage of the opportunities created by the hard work of his parents and immigrant grandparents.

This book relies on the oral histories provided by Ernie and many family members who recounted precious stories told to them by parents and grandparents and generously shared their family photographs. Additionally, many of Ernie's friends recalled with delight their school days together. Many places and events in Garden City were observed firsthand. When possible, information was gleaned from official documents such as military, census, immigration, and property records, as well as birth, marriage, and death certificates. An abbreviated family tree is included just before the prologue for reference. Historical events were researched to provide context for the path the family traveled.

Ernie's story and family history over the last 150 years are a part of American history—as are the histories of every family in America. Each family's experience includes fascinating and compelling events that beg for discovery

and should be shared with others. The more everyone knows the experiences of others, the more we can understand and appreciate one another. In that way, Americans will have a kinship that is a hallmark of a strong society and nation.

My thanks go to Ernie and to family and friends who shared their experiences. My thanks also go to the University Press of Kansas and its staff for their support and guidance. Thanks also go to Amy Sherman for her assistance in the development of the manuscript. Last but not least, thanks to the many who supported this project, especially Celeste and Elizabeth.



University Press of Kansas

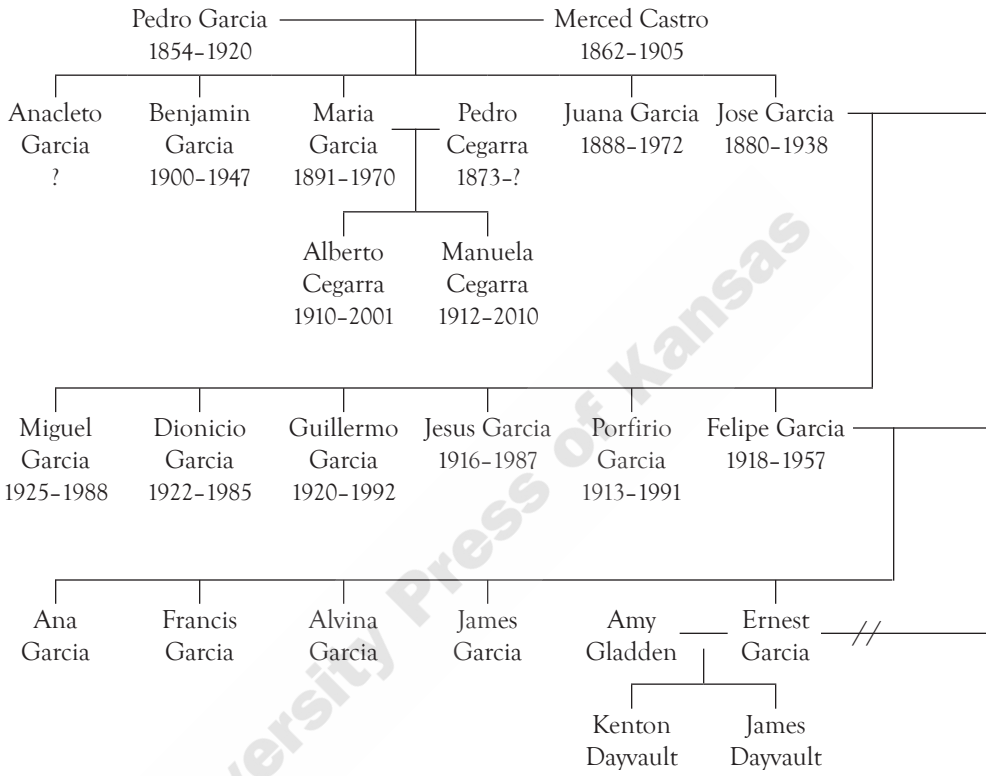


Marine,  
Public Servant,  
Kansan

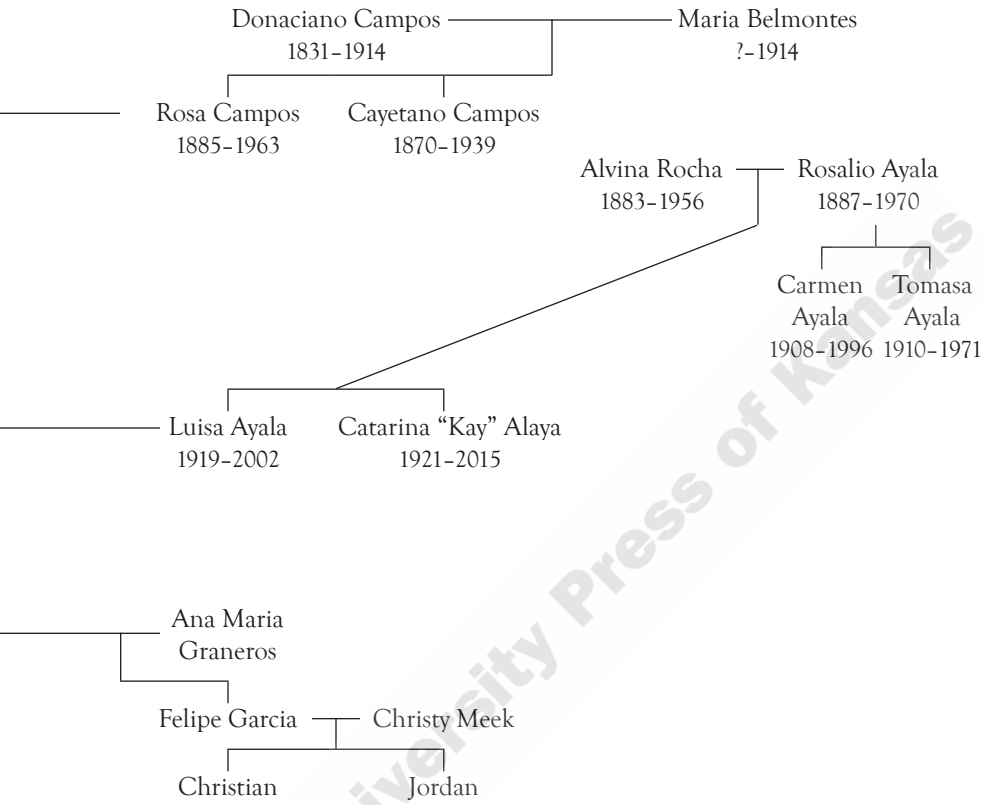


University Press of Kansas

### Ernest Garcia Abbreviated Family Tree



University Press of Kansas



University Press of Kansas



University Press of Kansas

# Prologue

Francisco Vasquez de Coronado, a Spanish nobleman, set out from Mexico in 1540 to find the fabled cities of gold. Thirty horsemen, foot soldiers, guides and a Franciscan Friar, Juan de Padilla, who wrote a diary, accompanied Coronado.

On June 29, 1541, after much hardship, the group crossed the Arkansas River (called the St. Peter & St. Paul River) near present day Fort Dodge, Kansas. Father Juan de Padilla held a mass of thanksgiving on the nearby hills, the first Christian service held in the interior of the continent, predating the landing of the Pilgrims almost 100 years.

*—Coronado Cross Monument, Ford County Historical Society, Dodge City, Kansas*

On March 23, 1957, the third night of spring, a howling blizzard swept across the southwestern plains of Kansas. Travelers were stranded on the highways and taken to shelters after their rescue. Residents were told to remain indoors. Sixty-mile-per-hour winds roared into Garden City, shaking and rattling the doors and windows of the wood-framed homes in the Mexican barrio on Santa Fe Street. The families within could measure the storm's intensity only by the density of the snowflakes as they flew horizontally through the illumination of a single porch light and by the rising snow drifts outside their doors.

In their home on Santa Fe Street, Felipe Garcia assured his sons, Ernie and Jim, that they were safe from the wind and snow. He tried to keep their attention on the radio broadcast of the national basketball championship final between the University of Kansas and the University of North Carolina. With ten-year-old Ernie on his lap and Jim, two years older, sitting next to

2 *Prologue*

him, Felipe was ready to lead them into a night of cheering for the Jayhawks. However, any exuberant physical outbursts of cheers had to be avoided, as Felipe suffered from heart disease and was in a weakened state.

Though Felipe was born in El Paso, Texas, in 1918, he was raised in Kansas from the age of two. He was a sports fan and had developed a passion for KU basketball. Anticipating a repeat of KU's 1952 national championship season, he and the boys had closely followed the 1957 Jayhawk season. Their hopes were spiked by the addition of Wilt Chamberlain to the varsity team. In his debut, Chamberlain scored fifty-two points and grabbed thirty-one rebounds, and he went on to dominate play during the regular season. To reach the championship final, KU had survived the regional games in Dallas the week before. The Jayhawks not only prevailed on the scoreboard but also overcame the racial slurs and coins hurled at them by the fans supporting Southern Methodist University and Oklahoma City University. With their contentious wins in Dallas, the Jayhawks advanced to the final round in Kansas City, Missouri.

The final game against North Carolina was hard fought, intense, and stressful. In the Garcia home, hope and despair rose and fell with each shot made or missed. Each team had opportunities to win the game with a basket at the end of regulation play and overtime. By the time the game went into a third overtime, the snowy tempest in Garden City had left nearly two feet of snow and drifts reaching five to six feet high. The electricity in homes flickered during the storm, resulting in moments of darkness and garbled radio broadcasts. Some homes completely lost power.

Back in Kansas City, KU missed its last shot, and North Carolina won the championship 52-51. The Garcias were deeply disappointed, having come so close to winning. With a father's wisdom, Felipe assured his boys that the Jayhawks would have a chance the following year. As the lights in the house continued to flicker, he suggested to his sons in a tone of calm determination that the team needed to work harder to win another championship.

As with most people, only a select few moments of Ernie's childhood, those with extreme and intense emotions, were secured in his mind and available for recall during his lifetime. Among Ernie's precious few memories of Felipe were the events on the night of the blizzard of 1957. It was a night unlike any other in his young life, bursting with apprehension, tension, and excitement.

Nearly thirty years after that snowy night in southwestern Kansas, a shiny black presidential state car, adorned with diplomatic flags, slowed to a stop at the steps of the Senate entrance to the US Capitol building. A member of the Secret Service dutifully opened the door for President Ronald Reagan. With a cheerful “Hello, Ernie,” the president greeted the waiting Senate sergeant at arms, who responded, “Welcome, Mr. President.”

Ernie Garcia led the president and his entourage through the Capitol building to the House chamber, where the president was to deliver the 1986 State of the Union address. Moments after the House doorkeeper, James Malloy, announced the arrival of the president, Ernie slowly led President Reagan down to the House speaker’s podium. Legislators and government officials, men with gray hair in dark suits and a few women in red dresses, rushed to the end of their rows to see—or be seen with—the president. As they walked down the aisle, Ernie’s focus on the business of moving the president along was frequently broken with a smile as he noted the president’s enthusiastic admirers. When the president handed copies of his speech to the vice president and the speaker of the House, Ernie took a seat to the president’s right.

As Ernie listened he could not avoid stepping back and thinking about his presence in the House chamber at that moment. He was thrilled to be in the presence of the Congress, the president, and the justices of the Supreme Court of the United States—the heart of the most powerful government on earth. He was appreciative of the good fortune that enabled him to lead the president to the podium. He wished that his father, Felipe, was alive to see his role in the evening’s events.

At the conclusion of the address, in the midst of seemingly endless applause, Ernie led the president and a procession of legislative leaders out of the House chamber and back to the Senate entrance. With his duties completed, Ernie was amazed that a young man from Garden City had accompanied the president, albeit for just a short walk. In the years to come, his amazement would continue to grow as he began learning the road that his family had taken and that had led him to the House chamber. It was an improbable journey filled with hardships, forged by perseverance and the events of Mexican and American history.

# 1

## Escape

1854–1920

Pedro Garcia, Ernie's paternal great-grandfather, was raised in poverty on the same *hacienda* where he was born in 1854 in the state of Zacatecas in central Mexico. Most haciendas at that time consisted of a large tract of land, sometimes twenty thousand acres or more, give or take a few thousand. They were usually owned by a single wealthy owner and serviced by a number of laborers—the *campesinos*. For many campesinos, living and dying occurred on the hacienda. Their work days were long and difficult, beginning at sunrise and ending at sunset. They used many tools made of heavy iron and steel, and the misuse of those tools easily resulted in serious injury. The animals were frequently bad tempered and dangerous. Summer working conditions were hot, dry, and dusty. Winter days and nights were cold and just as miserable.

The *hacendados*, the landowners, paid Pedro and the other campesinos little for their labor and ranching skills. The minimal compensation trapped and tied them to the hacienda. For the campesinos, accumulating financial savings or any other wealth was virtually impossible. They were forced to choose low pay and survival on the hacienda or a slow death in the gold and silver mines of Mexico. All the while, their labor enriched the enormous ranching and mining estates of the wealthy hacendados.

In 1877 when Pedro was twenty-two years old, he married Merced Castro. She was fourteen years old. Pedro, Merced, and their children who survived birth—four sons and four daughters—were in the 90 percent of Mexico's 15 million people who did not own land or wealth and were poorly educated. The remaining 10 percent, the elite class, including the hacendados,



held all the wealth of Mexico. Pedro's family and his determination to escape the near-slave existence on the hacienda were his only resources. Such an escape from this subsistence living in Mexico was rare. It required an opportunity, good fortune, or an act of divine providence.

Pedro came to believe that his pathway out of poverty was the railroad in Torreón. In the 1800s railways had become, literally, vehicles for accumulating wealth in both the United States and Mexico. A railroad was built connecting El Paso-Juárez and the city of Torreón in the state of Coahuila by the 1880s. Torreón was roughly the halfway point between Juárez and Mexico City. To the north of Torreón were the states of Durango and Chihuahua. To the south was the state of Zacatecas. From its inception, the railroad in Torreón was the essential means for transporting people and goods from Mexico's interior to its northern border. The construction and maintenance required enormous amounts of brute physical labor. The railroad barons and the hacendados were not above raiding each other's workforces and taking each other's labor with the allure of higher pay. By 1905 Pedro and his oldest son, Jose, were determined to take advantage of this competition for cheap labor.

Now twenty-five years old, Jose had married Rosa Campos. Rosa's older brother, Cayetano Campos, confirmed Pedro's belief when he reported from Torreón that he had found work on the railroad. In February 1905, before the family could depart the hacienda, Merced passed away from kidney failure. Nonetheless, sometime later in the year, Pedro risked the meager security of the hacienda and traveled with his children to Torreón. Once there both Pedro and Jose found work with the railroad. The Garcia family appeared to be on its way to a level of stability. But that stability quickly unraveled.

In Torreón the calls for revolution against the Mexican government were becoming louder and louder. If revolution were to erupt, Torreón, then a hub of commerce, would emerge as a strategic prize for any army able to seize and hold the city. Francisco Madero, who led the call for revolution, had been born into one of Mexico's wealthiest families. Though he was a mild-mannered intellectual and stood only five foot two, he was a giant in his advocacy for land reform and social justice for Mexico's poor.

After decades of failure to improve the conditions of the campesinos, the revolt against the Mexican government did indeed arise across the country in November 1910. Madero's best-known supporter in northern Mexico

6 Chapter 1

was a campesino with the *nom de guerre* of Pancho Villa. Even before the outbreak of revolution, Villa and his militia of irregulars had begun seizing property from wealthy hacendados by force. Separate and independent counterrevolutions, local resistance movements, and military coups soon followed the outbreak of the revolution. The people of Mexico were among the first of millions worldwide to experience the killing engines of the twentieth century—poverty and warfare. As in many countries at war, Mexico's railroads were transformed into essential weapons of warfare, and Torreón's was no exception. It became vital to the transport of men and artillery.

During the course of the Mexican Revolution, politicians, generals, and outlaw militias engaged in a mad scramble for power. They aligned themselves, betrayed one another, and then executed their former allies and their rivals in their attempts to take the reins of power. Within three years Villa himself had twice taken each of the cities of Juárez, Chihuahua, and Torreón, had been taken prisoner and condemned to death, had escaped to El Paso, and then later returned to the state of Chihuahua, where he was appointed its governor.

With no end to the fighting and killing in sight by 1914, the revolution's promise of land and liberty remained unfulfilled. Both the rebel and government forces remained threats to the members of Pedro's family still living in Torreón and to those who had fled to Juárez. Both armies continued to conscript boys and young men for battle. They also took without compensation the few livestock and grain stores held by the campesinos. The only safety was to continue to move north to Juárez and into El Paso.

In 1905 when Pedro's youngest son, Benjamin, was five years old, he was sent to El Paso to be raised by his oldest sister Juana and her husband. In 1913 at age fifty-nine, already having lived twice the average lifespan of his countrymen, Pedro fled the chaos of his native land. He joined Juana and Benjamin in El Paso.

Juana lived in a small apartment in an adobe tenement on Leon Street in the Mexican barrio of Chihuahuita on the city's southwest side, adjacent to the Rio Grande. The barrio was El Paso's poorest and included the red light district on Overland Street. The first stop for many poor Mexican immigrants fleeing the poverty and warfare of Mexico was the Chihuahuita barrio. The City of El Paso directed few, if any, resources to the barrio. It was essentially without law enforcement and other government services. An infamous bordello operated there, and an apartment a few blocks down

the street once served as a hideout for Villa's brother, Hipólito. Despite the proximity to the border and an occasional bullet straying into the El Paso side during the battles over Juárez, the barrio served as a safe haven for Pedro and his children.

At the time, El Paso residents, newspaper reporters, and photographers took positions on the international bridge or the Rio Grande's bank to observe the fighting on the other side in Juárez. After one particular skirmish, a white man approached Pedro, who was seated in front of the screen door to his apartment. The man carried a small, handheld, box-like device with a circular lens attached to the end of bellows that expanded and contracted like an accordion. The man said his name was Alexander, and in Spanish he asked Pedro if he would allow his photograph to be taken. The reporter then pointed the lens at Pedro and extended an open hand toward Pedro, then swept it toward Juárez. The reporter explained that Pedro was part of the historical events occurring on the border. Pedro nodded in agreement.

When the photographer stepped back and peered through his lens, he saw a man in a long-sleeve, collarless white shirt buttoned to the top and what can best be described as khaki-colored pants. His shoes were worn and dusty. His clothing did not obscure his sturdy build and thick torso. Pedro's facial features—for example, the heavy white stubble covering his cheeks and chin—and light coloring were clearly European without any noticeable native Central American traits. His plain, dark wide-brimmed hat hid any hair he might have had on his head. Pedro's brow was slightly furrowed, and his face was worn but without wrinkles. His expression was one of firmness and determination with a gaze that was clear and focused.

Just as the photographer was ready, Pedro called to his dog. Othello, a pooch of medium size and unrecognizable breed with a large head and a curly, thick white coat, responded and sat next to him. Apparently, Alexander thought better of asking Pedro to keep the dog out of the photograph. Or perhaps Alexander thought the dog was part of the history as well. With his large hand Pedro steadied Othello by holding the scruff of his neck. Maria, another of Pedro's daughters who had fled to El Paso, was inside the apartment. With her new infant daughter, Manuela, in her arms, Maria went to the screen door to see who was speaking with her father. Alexander pressed the plunger on the hand grip and captured the moment.

In the spring of 1915, Pancho Villa suffered a major defeat at the Battle of Celaya. With the heavy losses there, he rapidly lost his ability to command a fighting force of any significance. There were no assurances that the forces rushing to replace Villa would conscript fewer citizens or provide better security for the people and territories, including Torreón.

When Pedro fled to El Paso, Jose remained behind in Torreón with Rosa. With the revolution's continuing danger and uncertainty, thirty-five-year-old Jose understood that he should flee before the opportunity closed. But he would have to wait until Rosa delivered the child she was carrying. Infant mortality was common at that time in Mexico. Five of Rosa's pregnancies resulted in stillbirth or the death of the child within a year. Her first child to survive was Porfirio, a son born in Torreón in 1913 when she was twenty-nine. Rosa delivered her second son, Jesus, in January 1916. Soon after Jesus was born, Jose gathered the family and the belongings they were able to carry. They boarded a train and set out to join Pedro and the others in El Paso.

Jose had heard from other railroad laborers, including Rosa's brother Cayetano, stories of available work in El Paso. The accounts proved accurate—soon after his arrival, Jose found work at the Galveston Harrisburg and San Antonio Railroad roundhouse. He was hired as a wiper, the lowest-paid laborer. A wiper kept the internal parts of the locomotive engine greased. It was difficult and dirty work done in twelve-hour shifts.

Border crossers like Jose frequently came and went as they pleased via trolley car, on foot, or by wading across the Rio Bravo (as it is known in Mexico) itself. The border crossing was essentially guarded by one or two US inspectors, except when the US cavalry from Fort Bliss in El Paso patrolled the Rio Grande to prevent the revolution from spilling over the border. The revolution did in fact spill into the United States when Villa's militia raided Columbus, New Mexico, in 1916. General John J. "Black Jack" Pershing, the commander at Fort Bliss, and a force of five thousand troops unsuccessfully pursued Villa into northern Mexico.

For Jose the challenge was not crossing the border. It was, instead, acquiring the lawful paperwork to remain and work in the United States. The US Congress at the time was experiencing one of its recurring spells of anxiety over admission of immigrants believed to be "defective." The Immigration Act of 1917 expanded the list of defective immigrants to include those over the age of sixteen who were illiterate. Unable to read or write English flu-

ently, Jose faced yet another obstacle in acquiring the paperwork for lawful admission. After a lengthy battle between Congress and President Woodrow Wilson, the law passed in early February, to be effective May 1, 1917. The railroad companies moved swiftly to avoid the restrictions by convincing the Department of Labor Immigration Service to approve as many railroad work permits as possible before May 1. In the interim, the railroad barons, along with growers and the sugar beet industry in the American Southwest, continued their lobbying efforts to persuade Congress to eliminate the literacy requirement and preserve their source of cheap labor.

Back in El Paso, on March 29, 1917, a clerk at the Department of Labor gave Jose an information card to complete. The card included the following prestamped information: "Race MEXICAN," "TRACK LABORER," "Dest. EL PASO," and "Admitted at EL PASO." Jose provided the information requested, and with that he and his family lawfully entered the United States.

Eight days later, on April 6, the United States entered World War I, placing General Pershing in command of US forces in Europe. The government's demand for soldiers created the need for workers, not only to replace those marched off to war, but also to support the manufacture of materials and supplies necessary for the war effort. By the end of May, the low-cost labor lobbying effort paid dividends. Exceptions were made to the literacy requirements for railroad workers and temporary agricultural workers. Within months, with relative ease, tens of thousands of Mexicans acquired their paperwork and lawfully entered, or remained, in the United States.

By this time another of Pedro's daughters, Guadalupe, was living with her family in San Antonio, Texas. Pedro, Juana and her husband, and Benjamin had joined Guadalupe in San Antonio as Juana's husband looked for better-paying work. But after Jose's arrival in El Paso, they returned, leaving Benjamin, now age sixteen, with Guadalupe in San Antonio. Ultimately, all of Pedro's children entered the United States with the exception of his son, Anacleto, who had stayed behind to join the invincible Villa. Without any detail of the circumstances, Pedro and the family received word that Anacleto had been lost in the revolution.

Pedro's efforts to keep his family safe were nearly a complete success. He had moved them off the hacienda and kept them moving, navigating the events of history and staying a step beyond the clutches of Mexico's revolution and poverty. His effort was an extraordinary accomplishment given his times and circumstances. However, 1918 brought the arrival of an evil more

deadly than the revolution itself, an evil that would threaten the security Pedro had forged for the future success of his family.

Experts in medicine and history have debated the origin of the 1918–1919 flu pandemic, but many would agree that the first wave of the flu in the United States was observed in January 1918 in Haskell County, Kansas, in the southwest corner of the state. The county seat, Sublette, was just thirty-three miles south of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe railroad main line that connected El Paso, Kansas City, and Chicago. Within two months of the Haskell County reports, more than five hundred soldiers at Fort Riley, Kansas, in the center of the state, were hospitalized. Some of the men had reported from Haskell County. There was speculation that the flu suffered by the soldiers originated in Europe and that the afflicted soldiers brought it with them when they returned from the Great War. Regardless, in August 1918 a more virulent strain appeared across the globe, including the United States. Estimates are that in the first twenty-four weeks the flu killed 25 million people. Some historians believe perhaps 50 to 100 million people died in the worldwide pandemic.

The flu arrived in El Paso in September 1918. With its fluid international border, the railway center, and nearby Fort Bliss, the city became fertile ground for the flu—the number of people traveling through the city enabled the virus to spread easily and quickly. The flu struck the Chihuahuita barrio with a fury. No medical facilities or personnel served the barrio, and quickly dozens of people died. The number of illnesses and deaths in El Paso began to decline by the end of the year, but by then more than six hundred people had perished, a majority from El Paso's south side, including the barrio. Jose, Rosa, their two boys, and a newborn, Felipe, were living in the barrio during this time. Unlike most flu pandemics, this strain did not strike hard at the very young or old. By a random biological stroke, the boys were left untouched.

In response to the loss of manpower due to war casualties and the flu pandemic, the local draft board in El Paso began to register legal immigrants—Jose had fled the revolution only to again be within reach of an army in need of soldiers. He did not want to jeopardize his place in his new country, so he duly registered for military service in World War I in September 1918. It was unlikely that Jose would be summoned to serve, as thirty-eight-year-olds were not prized candidates for army recruits. But in any case, within a month of Jose's registration, the war began to draw to a close. Germany's

allies collapsed, and the Allied forces were approaching the German homeland. For the good of Europe, the United States, and Jose, the armistice of November 11, 1918, ended any chance of Jose's service.

On February 3, 1920, Edward Stearn, a census taker, bravely made his way through the Chihuahuita barrio, completing his duties. At 915 Chihuahua Street he recorded Jose, Rosa, and their three sons. The next day, at 912 Leon Street, Stearn duly recorded Pedro and his new wife, Julia, as residents of the United States. But by this time Pedro was in declining health. The flu pandemic began to subside in early 1919, but Pedro and many others were left weakened to respiratory illnesses. As the year progressed, it became apparent that Pedro was gravely ill. Tuberculosis was the culprit. On February 9, 1920, Jose was able to convince Dr. Ira J. Bush to attend to Pedro at his home on Leon Street. Bush, then in his mid-fifties, had moved to El Paso from Louisiana for his health. He had tended to the wounded of the battles that raged in Juárez and Chihuahua. He sympathized with the rebels and is said to have assisted in the theft of a cannon for use by the revolutionaries. Bush advised Jose that Pedro was on his deathbed and that nothing could be done to save him.

The next day Rosa delivered her fourth surviving son, Guillermo. Jose's great joy in cradling his new son was tempered by the great sadness of his final embrace of his father. Pedro's determined journey of survival ended two days later on the evening of February 12. He was laid to rest in the dry, rocky desert ground of Concordia Catholic Cemetery on El Paso's east side.

At the time of Pedro's death, Jose had ceased working with the Galveston, Harrisburg and San Antonio Railway. The pressure of a growing family sent him looking for better wages, so he took his labor to the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway, commonly referred to as the Santa Fe, which also operated in El Paso. The Santa Fe was one of the railways built to reach the west coast. It generally followed the old Santa Fe Trail, extending from Topeka in northeast Kansas to the southwestern corner of the state and into Colorado. Construction began in 1860. In 1862, in pursuit of a transcontinental railway system, the US Congress passed the Pacific Railroad Act, which granted nearly 4 million acres in public lands to the State of Kansas for handouts to railways. The state and railroads divided the lands between themselves. Both were free to sell the lands for homesteading or for profit.

The incentive for railroad construction was the increase in value of their lands once the railways were completed. The Santa Fe reached Colorado in the early 1870s and eventually reached the Pacific Coast to the west and El Paso to the south in 1881.

At the Santa Fe, Jose worked for better wages, servicing the locomotives in the Santa Fe roundhouse. However, the need for his labor fluctuated, and on some days he did not work. This recurring shortfall in pay was soon dramatically remedied. From time to time the Santa Fe gathered its men in the railyard of the roundhouse. Crew leaders then announced that men were needed to work at different locations on the railway that stretched from California to Chicago. On one such occasion, crew leaders called for men to work in California and Kansas. A friend of Jose's whispered to him that Kansas was the place to go: the work in Kansas was steady, while crews that had gone to California soon found themselves without work. Jose was interested, and with Pedro's passing, he had considered the possibility of leaving El Paso to work in other Santa Fe locations. Rosa did not entirely oppose the move—Cayetano and his daughter's family had gone to Kansas with the Santa Fe to a place called Garden City. On the suggestion of his friend and Cayetano's experience, Jose raised his hand for a Kansas crew.

In the spring of 1920, Jose, Rosa, and their four sons boarded a Santa Fe train bound for Kansas. They, along with other Santa Fe workers and their families, began the trek that would take them north to New Mexico and Colorado before turning east into Kansas. Jose paid no fare for his family to ride in their assigned boxcar, but the Santa Fe would collect its toll for as long as this forty-year-old man could deliver low-cost labor.

The family's journey through New Mexico and Colorado was slow as the train stopped along the way to allow Jose's section crew to perform maintenance on the track. At some locations the duration of the stop was a few days; at others, a few weeks. Along the way, the crew and their families were housed in one-room structures. If no structures were provided, they were housed in tents or boxcars. The women provided the men with meals and cared for the children.

Within a month of Jose's departure from El Paso, he learned the intricacies of building and maintaining a "section"—approximately ten miles of mainline track. His section crew, with pick and shovel, began by building a bed of gravel or crushed stone to support the steel rails and wood ties. The wood ties were ten feet long and weighed two hundred pounds. The steel



rails were approximately ten yards long and weighed one thousand pounds. Two men with tie tongs laid the wood ties in place, and a number of men with heavy rail tongs laid the steel rails on the ties. Crew members—called section hands—then used specially designed sledgehammers to drive spikes into the wood ties to anchor the rails in place. Jose became adept at using a sledgehammer with a curved head. If his swing missed the spike head, the hammer head would strike instead the wood tie, the rail, or the thin metal plate connecting the two. The more accurate Jose's swing, the less energy he wasted. He learned to swing the hammer with accuracy, striking the spike head with maximum force.

The work of section hands was not for physically or mentally weak men. The locomotive was a powerful and imposing beast, standing fifteen feet tall. Its protruding iron teeth narrowed to a point that would kill any man or animal that had the misfortune to be in its path. It ate fire and blew black puffs from its smokestack nostril. Even when standing in place, the beast snorted hot steam from its underbelly. It let out an incredibly loud scream to demand the way be cleared as it prepared to move.

Jose's section crew—most of whom were of Mexican heritage—warned him that hands suffered catastrophic injuries, even death, if they were careless or did not work in unison. Despite their warnings, Jose took comfort in the support his crew provided by speaking in Spanish and offering teasing encouragement if a man tired or faltered.

After nearly three months of moving slowly northward, the train transporting Jose and Rosa turned east. As it rumbled through southeast Colorado and into the plains of southwest Kansas, the Rocky Mountains slowly slipped from sight. From his vantage point, Jose began to see fields thick with rows of short green plants. He saw men, women, and children working with teams of horses in the fields in small groups and in groups as large as thirty. A few of the laborers held long-handled hoes. Many others, including the children, were on their hands and knees. Jose asked his fellow crewmen about the workers and the crop in the fields. They told him the workers were Mexicans, the crop was sugar beets, and the fields and horses were owned by a farmer or a sugar beet company. They added in a tone of empathy that the work was hard, and the pay was poor. Jose felt some gratitude for the small good fortune that at least he and his family were not in the fields.

The Santa Fe train soon arrived at Jose's assigned location: Holcomb, Kansas, a small village in the southwest corner of the state, fifty miles east

of Colorado and seventy miles north of Oklahoma. At Holcomb the Santa Fe Railway ran parallel to the Arkansas River. Between 1803 and 1845, the river had marked the US border with Mexico. The land south of the river was Mexico; north of it was the United States. The town was only five miles west of Garden City, where Rosa's brother Cayetano and his daughter were living. Holcomb's landscape included a small wooden depot and loading dock, a few farmhouses, and miles and miles of mostly flat prairie, and wind—an ever-present wind.

When Jose and his family stepped off the train, they were escorted to a labor camp where new arrivals were sheltered until they were able to find suitable residences. Men with families were under pressure to quickly find housing to keep their children out of the elements. Spring temperatures in Kansas can drop into the forties at night and become even more biting with the constant wind. Some workers and their families resorted to abandoned train cars for shelter. Jose went farmhouse to farmhouse in search of cover from the wind and cold. Within a few days he found a farmer who allowed Jose and his family to stay in the barn. In return Jose agreed to tend to the horses and other livestock also occupying the barn.

After a couple of weeks, the farmer's one-room wood-frame shed with a small window, dirt floor, and a wood stove for cooking and heating became available. The shed, previously occupied by migrant field workers, stood behind the farmer's residence. The Santa Fe's main line was nearby, so every train whistle awoke anyone sleeping within a quarter-mile. The trains that rumbled past caused the shed to vibrate and tremble. Like the work camps on the journey to Kansas, the shed was far less comfortable than the apartment the family had occupied in El Paso, but Jose and Rosa believed that over time they would save for a more comfortable home. Their sacrifice did not diminish their hope that their children would avoid hard labor at a tender age, and that they might attend school, learn English, and know success.