

Compadre

By

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My friend Poncho died alone with no one to gauge the strength of his last breath. I knew his time had come but could do little to soothe the passing. I watched weeks go by as his spirit failed for he had told his last story. His bones had become brittle and the breath was weak from the fluid bubbling up in his chest. His weakened heart squeezed with every bit of strength it could muster but the blood refused to flow as it once did. His lungs filled with a gurgling wheeze and there was scarcely any room for air. He no longer had the energy to enjoy his favorite pastime, sharing the stories of his youth with which he had enchanted his friends, family and strangers over the years. His own tale had been told amongst the many little stories he had shared with friends over the remaining days of his life, here in his adopted country, the United States.

In his broken English it was a tale that took him from the mountains of Mexico to the shores of the Ohio River, at the mouth of the Licking draining out of the Kentucky landscape. It was a story of immigration when quotas were seldom a source of page one headlines in the NY Times. It was the story of our neighbor to the south and its people who had migrated to our towns and cities. He was one of the resolute few, who waited for days patiently on the sidewalks of Mexico for his turn to deliver immigration papers at the American Embassy-- source of the golden dream. There he would line up

with hundreds of fellow dreamers sharing the same exciting hopes and aspirations. He believed intensely in that opportunity which drove so many of his countrymen across the border. He had always been a man of the law and would wait his turn patiently in front of the embassy presenting every single document requested of him, no matter how tedious, hoping to make the trip a reality. The effort was laborious and fraught with many setbacks. There were several occasions when after waiting all day to enter the inner sanctum of the embassy there would be a request for another esoteric document he did not possess, despite his careful preparations. These tedious moments would test his patience and bring him to the edge of his limits. To him this represented another day wasted. These lost days meant lost income and he had mouths to feed. His wife and newly born son depended on him and waited patiently at home. He knew that many chose to make their way hidden in trucks nestled among the merchandise flowing back and forth across the porous frontier. Those were the days in the early 50s when security was lax. These adventurous migrants would find their way among the cargo of the merchandise trucks going back and forth across the border praying to "Our Lady of Guadalupe" that a distracted officer of the "Aduana," customs in English, would not make the necessary request to verify passports or papers. These braceros, literally translated as men who worked with their arms, would pull away slowly from the border patrol and the laughter of relief came quickly but was stifled until the distance from the border grew comfortable. Once having accomplished such a feat they became what we now want to call "Illegals," though there is a great debate today suggesting we temper this vocabulary with the terms "Illegal Immigrants" or even "undocumented workers." I

don't think Poncho saw the rationale for all this rhetoric. He could see the difference between right from wrong. These illegal passengers were manual laborers hoping for the quick two or three seasons of work that gave them the powerful dollar to take home to their families in the "Sierra Gorda" of Mexico. The truth was, they were the subjects of tableside tales at home in which they became hometown heroes. Their small hometown economies were fueled by the dollars they could send by means of Western Union.

To understand his story one must realize the history of immigration from Mexico has had its ups and downs affected by a myriad of factors dating back to the War with Mexico in the 1840s. Movements across the border have always reflected the fickle needs of American industry. Many have considered Mexicans a new immigrant group compared to the Irish and Italians, but they have been moving back and forth across the border for almost two centuries. Over this time many generations had become United States citizens living north of the border but with roots still growing south of the Rio Grande.

Throughout his many years of study at the Autonomia of Mexico, the premier professional school in the Federal District, Poncho had become familiar with the ever changing relationship between both countries as they controlled migratory movements. He had read very carefully and was well versed in the many quandaries he was likely to face as he considered his move to the north.

One of the earliest laws to affect immigration between both countries was the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, American industry turned to Mexican immigrants to fulfill the insatiable needs of agriculture in the southwest and later in other regions of our country. In times of plenty it even went as far as requesting the president of Mexico, to send more workers, "we need them." During the turbulent Mexican Revolution between 1910-1920 many escaped to the north away from the violence and tremendous inflation decimating the country. The Mexican migrant worker had become an essential part of the harvest and of cattle ranching in the southwest.

The 1924 Immigration Act, created a maze of artificial quotas, which hinged on racial characteristics. Using the census of 1890, quotas favored immigrants from Northern Europe. Asians were totally excluded, while Eastern Europeans and Russians (more specifically Jews) were severely limited. At this time, immigrants from Mexico and Latin America were exempt in order to keep the supply of cheap labor flowing and so satisfying the voracious appetite of southwestern agribusiness. During this era, it was not uncommon for entire villages to be emptied of all capable men as they travelled north for the season of easy pickings in the fields of the southwest.

In 1924 the first official border patrol was put into effect and the term "illegal alien" was born, which was then used to denote those who did not make the courtesy stop for their papers at the border. Due to the poor organization of the immigration offices at that time, the papers required to prove citizenship were often not given or went

missing. Many newly made citizens were still considered foreigners and essentially not welcome in many areas of Anglo society. Mexicans who lived in the US were influenced by this and often chose to retain their Mexican citizenship rather than try to fit in as new second-rate citizens.

The Great Depression made the situation worse for Mexicans working in the United States. Unemployment skyrocketed from 4.2% to 25%. Americans lost their jobs, homes and sometimes their families. The pressure was on and President Hoover quickly used Mexican immigration as a scapegoat to divert criticism from his policies. Americans without work saw Mexicans as a reason for their predicament and soon groups such as the American Federation of Labor and the National Club of America were clamoring to deport Mexicans back across the border. It did not matter that many of these were United States citizens who could not find their papers. During that time with the beefed up border patrol over 500,000 were deported many leaving families behind.

During the World Wars, Mexicans were again on the wanted list, as many Americans were called to arms. It seemed whenever the United States found a reason to close the door on Mexican immigration; an historic event would force them to reopen it. Labor was needed to replace the workers sent to the front. In 1942 as the United States headed to war, the "Bracero Treaty" was signed which reopened the floodgates to Mexican workers. At the end of World War II when Americans returned from the front,

these same workers lost their jobs. By 1947 the Emergency Farm Labor Service worked on eliminating the Mexican labor force that had been helping to maintain agriculture.

In 1952 the McCarran Walter Immigration Act limited total annual immigration to one-sixth of one percent of the population of the continental United States in 1920, or 175,455. In 1954, the wonderfully coined "Operation Wetback" forced the return of thousands of illegal immigrants to Mexico. Mexicans still joke about this ingenious designation. For those of us who have crossed the Rio Bravo or Rio Grande you would know there is often no more than a dry cracked river bed with little if any water to wet your back. Between 1944 and 1954, coined "the Decade of the Wetback", the number of illegal immigrants coming from Mexico increased exponentially. At that time a million workers crossed the Rio Grande illegally. The United States Border Patrol became increasingly active and with the help of municipal authorities increased the process of seizing illegal aliens and often sending them back by ship. This became the preferred route as they could be transported much farther away from the border and thus make it more difficult for them to return. The Immigration Naturalization Service claims to have removed as many as 1,300,000 illegals in that time. The term "wetback" has remained in the lexicon and was even used by Cesar Chavez in a burst of frustration as he dealt with the undocumented strikebreakers brought over by employers anxious to break the farm labor unions of the 1970s.

In 1953 my friend Poncho created his plans using the information gleaned from his many studies. He was well aware of the long chaotic history of immigration to the United States. The McCarran Walter Immigration Act had made the situation even more difficult for those desiring entrance to the United States. He understood his tenuous situation well and did not believe the old "bracero" path was the right way for him. He had very specific goals defined for himself and those he brought with him. He knew he could not act like the many "illegals" who lay hidden on the trucks trying to squeeze past the border patrols. He would follow the law as it was written.

Poncho now well versed in the complex history of migration waited patiently at the embassy day after day until he could plead his case. He had carefully prepared his paperwork to present to the authorities. He was more than willing to follow the rules laid out by the US Immigration Service. The visa, when it finally arrived after almost a year of waiting, was a glorious dream, heaven sent, for him and his loved ones. This was his ticket to the United States and the medical institutions where he would acquire the skills he needed to be a professional in the field of Internal Medicine. His belief in a future was based also on a trust in a system that relied on its laws and the promise of justice.

The day finally came when he was able to travel to the United States. Initially he travelled alone leaving his family behind. His goal was the heart of the Midwest, finally arriving in Cincinnati, home to previous migrations. Over the last 200 years there had

been an influx of Irish, Germans, African Americans, Jews and Appalachians. He joined a sizeable group of Hispanic immigrants looking for a better life. He found himself with Cubans, Colombians, Puerto Ricans, Venezuelans and many others forming their own little communities in the greater Cincinnati area.

Of some interest to this story of immigration is that of the Joseph Louis Fox Flach who was born in Cincinnati of German immigrants and emigrated to Mexico, residing in Irapuato, a neighbor to Salamanca where Poncho was born. Both families lived in the same area and came to know Lazaro Cardenas, the then president of Mexico. After two generations his great grandson Vicente Fox Quesada was elected to the Presidency of Mexico. He and his wife continue to enjoy a relationship with Cincinnati Children's Hospital and make frequent trips to Cincinnati. The history of immigration appears to work in both directions.

Once in Cincinnati he knew he could continue his education in the field of Internal Medicine. He had the fortune of attending "Cincinnati General Hospital" and "Jewish Hospital" where he had the opportunity to work with the likes of Noble Fowler, MD, Harvey Knowles, MD, Ed Gall, MD and Richard Vilter, MD, all titans in the field of medicine. Here he finished years of education in Internal Medicine with distinction. Upon finishing his studies, he was pursued for his professional services by a hospital in a small rural community in Portland, Indiana. Here he was welcomed into a small town in the heart of the Midwest where he created a new life for himself and his family. Of course he was the only Hispanic physician in the area and was always recognized as the

foreign other, as much as he tried to blend in. His broken English and dark skin did not help his cause though many loved him for this quality that made him unique. He was esteemed by this small farming community. With his hard work, life was good and rewarded him with a comfortable home, which he shared with his wife and three children.

One of the qualities that so endeared him to those he came to know was his ability to tell the tales of his childhood and years as a young man. He loved to share his stories describing how he made his way from Mexico into this American world. His frequent tales took his audiences to his youth in the mountains of the Sierra Gorda of Mexico. It was a world, we who have lived in an industrialized society such as ours, would not comprehend. People would listen despite his thick accent with interest and respect, as he entertained them with his chronicles of adventure. When placed in front of an audience with whom to share his tales he was in his element. He loved to tell a tale. Poncho worked hard and over the years his children matured, married and moved away. His wife grew old like him. They were blessed with grandchildren, which they adored passionately. The time evaporated and eventually as he grew older his world began to unravel. First his heart suffered one of those sudden shocks requiring surgeries and many other interventions by young physicians with the latest advanced training, first in Indianapolis and later Cincinnati. Following this his bowels tied up in spasms of pain caused by diverticulitis. Over time he saw specialists who gave excellent care. He did not always feel better but was always reassured by their compassion. In 2006 as he prepared for hip surgery an unexpected crisis destroyed his remaining

peace. He was struck by a critical cardiac event and simultaneously the realization he had a highly advanced bowel cancer that his gastroenterologist had failed to diagnose. He realized quickly (possibly before all others) how little time was left. He remained in the hospital for weeks under the care of many specialists, all of which focused on their own specialties and he suffered the consequences of "medicine by committee."

I recall one of those blustery days of May when the chills of winter had not yet loosened its icy grip. He held sway over several hospital personnel who had each happened to just stop by for a quick check of his progress. They were quickly sucked into the lingering audience created by his engaging tales. I walked into the room and relaxed my back against the wall giving him the best of my attention despite my busy schedule. The tale I enjoyed that morning was enlightening. His was the story of a young man born into a wealthy family of privilege, owning land and real estate in the colonial city of Salamanca, Guanajuato in Mexico. This has always been one of the truly beautiful provincial areas in the Bajio beside the Sierra Madre Oriental in the heart of Mexico. Guanajuato, the capital, was a city created out of the silver scraped from the mountains with the skin, muscle and bone of the native Indians of this land. The Chichimeca and Otomi had earlier been subjugated and almost made extinct by the new Spanish Conquistadores and finally put to good use in the silver mines of Guanajuato. Here existed one of the largest mines in Latin America named the "Valenciana." At its apex it was responsible for two-thirds of the world's silver production. The land left over that was not mined for silver, fortunately was part of the Bajio, a rich agriculture paradise,

which is now some of the most productive of Mexico. His father was an industrious young man who made his fortune in the raising of prize-winning hogs that came to be so numerous he claimed they sent a full train car to market in Mexico City once a week. In addition, he ventured into other business endeavors in which he excelled. He soon had amassed a wealth that allowed him to buy houses in Guanajuato and also in Queretaro, another beautiful colonial city nearby. Poncho grew up in a spacious home in the heart of Guanajuato and excelled in school. He shared his youth with numerous sisters and one brother. His mother was very devoted to him as he was the oldest son. She had dreams he would be educated some day at the Autonomia Universidad of Mexico City and become a professional. She also shared with him her love of the Roman Catholic religion long revered among her family. She had always made time for the many devotions required of her by the church. On a daily basis she was known to attend the local church two or three times a day.

Unfortunately, this idyllic life style was not to last, for Mexico was in turmoil still recoiling from the Mexican Revolution that had devastated the countryside between the years of 1910 and 1920. Much of the revolution resulted from the demise of the 35 yearlong regime of Porfirio Diaz and a failure to prepare for the transfer of power. There were many sides claiming the right to power and most looked for reform in response to the many years of the reactionary reign of Diaz. Many still believed he was not all bad for Mexico as he gave the country years of stability and prosperity. Unfortunately, prosperity was mostly shared by the ruling classes rather than the poor.

Doña Pomposa, Poncho's mother, was a staunch supporter of Porfirio and she fondly remembered him to her dying days as the man who made the trains run on time and beautified the city parks.

By the year of 1924 the infamous Plutarco Elias Calles took over the presidency of Mexico. Calles had grown up in poverty, a son of an alcoholic father. He was left an orphan at a very young age and was raised by his uncle, a schoolteacher and atheist. He was greatly influenced by him and developed a strong anti-clerical position in regards to the Catholic Church. He was also affected by the liberal principals flowing from Europe. This background would prove disastrous for the many families like Poncho's whose loyalty to the Roman Catholic Church had never wavered.

The church in Mexico had an awkward relationship since its arrival with the triumphant conquistadores who subjugated the Indian natives. The crown of Spain and the church had arrived as partners to the new world each with its own agenda. The Church remained under the care and support of the crown, an arrangement known then as the "Real Patronato." This was a body of concessions the monarchs of Spain obtained directly from the pope shortly before discovering the new world. The king was given control over all Church activities except clerical discipline and doctrine and in return the king became protector of the Roman Catholic Church in America. Eventually this "protection" became the underlying cause of all conflicts between Church and state. This great enterprise was also an extension of the recent re-conquest of Iberia that still fueled Spanish ambition internationally. The Church remained committed to the

winning of souls for God whereas the crown and the conquistadores were more inclined to reach out for wealth. This became a partnership lasting for almost 300 years. Throughout this time the church remained as the sole source of education, social welfare and medical care. Priests comforted the dying, buried the dead and said masses for the repose of the departed souls. The Church became active in economic life, introducing industries and new agricultural techniques. Over time it gathered unto itself a fortune in land and money as pious offerings were handed over by the faithful looking for favors with God that at one point in 1535 the crown limited how much usable land could be passed on to the church. The church fortunately became a shield for the Indians as it tried to curb the excesses of the new ruling class. Today critics of the colonial church believe it also gave the natives a false image of a better world in the afterlife and so helped keep them under the thumbs of their masters. During the time of Napoleon's occupation of Spain in the early 1800s the situation in Mexico had deteriorated. With the support of native priests such as Miguel Hidalgo and Morelos the Independence movement took control and in 1810 sought liberty from Spain, which eventually after many years of sacrifice was accomplished. The question that was left unanswered was that of the "Real Patronato." Would the relationship between government and church still exist in the new era? This would create a schism affecting most of Mexico including Poncho's hometown of Guanajuato.

The relationship with the church had been stressed since the days of the 1857 Constitution supported by Benito Juarez and later the 1917 Constitution. Article 3

forbade religious instruction in schools and Article 130 required a strict separation of church and state. On obtaining the presidency in 1926, when Poncho was 5 years old, Calles enacted anticlerical legislation, which unofficially took the name of the "Calles Law." It outlawed religious orders, depriving the Church of property rights and depriving clergy of civil liberties, including their right to trial by jury and the right to vote. Calles violently enforced these laws and soon a massive backlash originated from many states including Guanajuato where Poncho lived with his family. It was in the beginning that Calles authorized the bombing of the much revered statue of "Cristo Rey" resting on Cerro del Cubilete in Guanajuato. On January 1 of 1927 a war cry from devoted Catholics, "Viva Cristo Rey!" rose up. The Cristero War began in earnest and lasted from 1926 to 1929. During the chaos of the crisis, a Roman Catholic insurgent opposing the government's policies on religious matters, assassinated Alvaro Obregon, the new president who had recently succeeded Calles. The Mexican government acted violently persecuting the clergy and massacring all suspected Cristeros and their supporters.

During the early part of the Cristero Rebellion there were spontaneous uprisings but some of the most successful were in the state of Guanajuato. Soon enough, both sides found reason to initiate their offensives in that area. For some time, there was a belief the Cristero cause would survive, as the first two years of rebellion elapsed. By the end of Poncho's seventh year the situation was becoming difficult for those who supported the Cristero cause. The federal troops and the agrarian unions who lined up behind Calles found common cause and had effectively taken the initiative in that area of

Guanajuato and the Sierra Gorda. Poncho's family was left tremendously exposed by this time and was forced to reevaluate their position in Salamanca. Given their circumstances they had to look for safety. One of his sisters who had entered the convent found her way to California where she eventually became principal of a parochial school.

In addition to his fight with the church, Calles chose to make drastic changes in the society of Mexico by announcing major land reform. This was meant to repay the labor unions that had backed him to attain the presidency. He initiated the "Ejido System" in which unused land could be taken and disbursed to the peasants. Fortunately, this was not fully implemented except for the areas where there was unrest such as Guanajuato, home to Poncho's family. Anyone supporting the Cristero cause was not likely to retain their lands. The "Ejido System" became an excuse for outright pillage of real estate.

The war resulted in 90,000 dead on both sides and a truce was eventually negotiated with the assistance of U.S. Ambassador Dwight Morrow in which the Cristeros agreed to lay down their arms. Calles took advantage of this and soon had five hundred Cristero leaders and 5,000 followers summarily shot, often in their homes.

Poncho's mother, Doña Pomposa, became the rock of the family, as Poncho's father was lost during the Cristero uprising in Mexico. She salvaged what she could and moved the family to Queretaro. Poncho never spoke much of his father after this. For the remainder of the conflict they felt safe, as this area was no longer being contested.

Unfortunately, all they left behind in Guanajuato was lost to them. In Queretaro they were able to create a new life for themselves devoid of the terrible bloodshed they had experienced.

In Queretaro Poncho studied earnestly and eventually entered the university and over years acquired a degree in Medicine. His mother kept his several sisters very close to her such that only one was able to marry due to her meddling ways. She insisted they would not suffer her marital misfortune and the best way was to keep them all spinsters. In that she was almost successful.

In Mexico there is no such thing as a draft, as we once knew it. Every young male is required to provide some form of social service or spend time in the armed services for one or two years. Poncho as a new physician was assigned to the Sierra Gorda of Queretaro, which was close to his home. This is a fascinating region centered on the northern third of the State of Queretaro. The area is extremely rugged with steep mountains and deep canyons. The roads are dotted with crosses and small altars as a remembrance of the unlucky travelers, who fell to their untimely deaths. The mountains extend mostly north and south. The east tends to block and collect the moisture originating from the Gulf of Mexico and the west is arid mimicking the Sonoran Desert. It was in the municipality of Pinal de Amoles where Poncho was assigned to provide health service. It is nestled high amongst the clouds and is very similar to the mountains of Colorado. To enter the small town a traveler must pass through the "Gate of Heaven", a pass high up in the clouds, and then descend down the

east face of the mountain where gradually the town of Pinal reveals itself in the blankets of misty fog much like "Brigadoon."

Soon after his arrival as the town physician, this small community quickly accepted him due to his pleasant demeanor and willingness to provide assistance. It was not long before he had many friends and met Matilde who would eventually become his beloved wife. Though he was accepted by the community, there was one member who retained an element of suspicion and distrust. Matilde's sister, Raquel, was a trained midwife who had married Arturo Lopez, a "curandero." In that time and in these isolated areas of the country it was not unusual to find smart loquacious individuals who after reading one or two medical text books set up office to provide medical care. "Curanderos" took care of the common cold, menstrual cramps, arthritis, headaches and whatever they saw fit. These healthcare givers crafted their own potions and poultices much like they once used centuries earlier. Generally, "curanderos" were benign as long as they knew when to refer the real serious illnesses to the nearest city, one full day away by truck or horse. Poncho was eventually able to create an understanding with Arturo and they became tolerable acquaintances. Poncho with his kind manner always treated him with respect. Arturo on the other hand always felt Poncho had been sent to oversee his medical care and found ways to keep his distance. In any case there were few disagreements noticed by the community.

In those days the only way to the municipality of Pinal de Amoles was by using the same roads created by order of the Viceroy of Mexico in the Spanish era. Very little had been done to improve its surface over the three centuries. The roads had been crafted

of heavy cobblestone that worked well for horses. Commerce continued to flow from Pinal to Queretaro, the capital, and back with the speed of a snail. All transport required the use of rugged trucks or mules. Automobiles were still much too delicate to traverse the Sierra without breaking down.

Travel was perilous and required a bodyguard. Over the last century due to the Revolution, the countryside had become a haven for a dangerous and lawless element. Poncho was an avid horseman and would travel with one of his new friends. Arturo Herrera was a government bureaucrat living in Pinal with much time to spare. His family was numerous and affluent having made their money in the mines and controlled much of the commerce in that area. Together they would ride by horseback into the high sierra when Poncho was called for emergencies. Arturo always carried a gun though it was declared illegal to own one by the state. There was always the danger of being found unprotected up in the sierra where law or government did not exist. You never knew what could find you totally exposed in the Sierra. Arturo and Poncho were not willing to take their chances. Over time, Arturo became his close friend and his medical assistant. They would travel on the steep trails in search of small haciendas that had not seen outside visitors for months. Small wooden huts were often used to weather storms and to shelter for the night. The peasants who inhabited these mountains were mostly grateful for the care they provided. It was seldom they had the fortune to see a helpful hand from the government, which both Poncho and Arturo represented. On making their arrival known it was not unusual for an entire family of

three generations to emerge from these small thatched homes and eagerly gather around for any news of the outside world. Even the revolution had a hard time making itself known in these remote areas. These poor campesinos would open their generous arms to them and offer meals of tortillas, frijol and whatever unlucky beast they could butcher and prepare in time. In his stories Poncho always had great things to say about these people of the mountain who had made him so welcome. These gentle campesinos in return would always remember Poncho for the help he gave.

On one occasion, a call was received by a boy on his burro, who had raced down the mountain as fast as his animal would take him. His father on preparing the dynamite charge for the next day's work in the mine, had caused it to explode in his hand. He had survived the event but his mangled hand was hanging by tendons with shards of bone dangling from the stump. He was in dire need of the help only a trained physician could provide. Arturo and Poncho mounted their trusty horses and followed the young boy into the sierra. After half a day they arrived at a small ranch occupied by a group of mestizos and Indians who inhabited that part of the mountain range. Within a small wooden house with a dirt floor they found a man laying on a kitchen table that served as counter, desk and now operating room table. Poncho immediately started to work trying to remember the skills he had been taught at the University of Mexico. Poncho quickly rid himself of the jitters that had built up as they travelled up the mountain and he evaluated the situation quickly and set to work giving instructions to his trusty aid. He stopped the flow of blood that had already caused a pool to congeal on the floor of

the house. Realizing he would have to remove what was remaining of the poor miner's forearm he prepared quickly. In his doctor's bag he carried his surgical gear and a can of chloroform to use in such situations. Arturo who was but a government bureaucrat would become his anesthetist. He gave him instructions quickly on the art of anesthesia, if that can be done in less than five minutes, and they set to work. Arturo doused a rag with chloroform and placed it over the man's mouth and nose carefully allowing him to breathe in the fumes. Very slowly his patient drifted away into a sleep but coughed viciously for seconds, causing some alarm. Whether he was aspirating his recently eaten tamales they would never know. The man continued to sleep but more importantly did not stop breathing nor did he have a cardiac arrhythmia, a known complication of the use of chloroform. Poncho rapidly and deftly began to take away the useless tissues and sewed up the vessels that continued to ooze blood. He used his silk ties to close up the wounds and began to make the flap to cover the stump. As he strained to concentrate on all that he needed to perform to save this patient, he was suddenly startled by a loud thud that came from the head of the table. Arturo lay strewn on the floor and could barely be aroused. While hovering over the man and the chloroform rag he had inhaled a good deal of the potent anesthetic and now lay on the floor in a stupor. Poncho realized then his difficult situation and worked swiftly to close the stump before his patient could awaken. He was now becoming frantic in his task and probably forgot one or two key features of the closure but the task was completed and his patient was none the wiser. Arturo soon after awakened not realizing how he had fallen asleep on the floor. The wounded patient recovered and he went on to live

an active life with his healed stump. Poncho was to be remembered by that family for decades and was asked to be godfather to many of their children, sealing their new relationship as compadres. Such was his first surgical experience in the Sierra Gorda of Queretaro. He recalled other situations involving many more difficult problems they would handle together such as ruptured appendices and other mining injuries. Arturo and Poncho became a great medical/surgical team as they travelled back and forth along the Sierra. For the rest of their lives they remained great compadres, as Arturo became godfather of Poncho's child. By being named his "compadre" he created a bond of brotherhood between them. In his older days when Poncho travelled the Sierra he would often encounter many sons and daughters of compadres who continued to remember him for his work and kind ways.

At the end of Poncho's life, I came to spend much time with him often seeing him 2 to 3 times a day in the hospital as he lay dying. His manner was calm and resolved. He seemed to reach out wanting to share all he could before the sands of time drained completely from him. In his broken English he continued to make friends. People seemed to want to hear, not just out of politeness. He spoke frankly of religion often mentioning "Our Lady of Guadalupe", patron saint of Mexico. He spoke of his death as if it did not matter. He spoke of football soccer anticipating the World Cup with great respect for the German team. He spoke of his wife whom he must leave in the hands of his family. Above all he spoke of the blessing he enjoyed on coming to this land and how he would have not done it any other way. He remembered the long waits at the

embassy in Mexico, but it now all seemed worthwhile. He had great respect for the system that had protected him all these years. I left him that evening, May 15, not knowing it would be the last time I spoke to him. He died that night all alone when his heart would go no further on his journey. I will remember his accent and most of all the stories he shared, which brought us close to a world we would never be able to see. I am certain that even now he has found a new audience with whom he can share his own personal tales of adventure.

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