

The Ancestral History of Venita Gomez  
By Jonathan Cordero

The story of Venita Gomez is a really the story of Mexican migrant labor in the United States. Since the mid-1800s Mexicans migrated along the El Camino Real de Tierra Ardeno to the United States to work on ranches and farms, to labor in mines and oil fields, and to build roads and railroads. In fact, the two branches of her family—the Cruz family and Juan Gomez—began their lives here in the United States as migrant workers and eventually settled in Santa Barbara. Little information is available for Venita's father Juan Gomez, so the following ancestry of Venita Gomez focuses upon the maternal line—Longina Cruz's family.

In 1830 Antonio Cruz and Cipriana Lopez were living at San Isidro, Guanajuato, Mexico. Antonio Cruz was most likely a vaquero at the small cattle ranch, San Isidro, which was in an isolated area southwest of Ocampo. Their first child, Pablo de Jesus, was born in 1831 and baptized at San Isidro de Ocampo. Jose Abraham Cruz, Venita Gomez's great-great grandfather, was baptized 17 March 1833 at San Isidro de Ocampo. San Isidro was the site where people went for baptisms and other religious services. By all estimates, San Isidro was a small village of less than 100 people. By 1835, Antonio and Cipriana had moved to Ojuelos, Jalisco, Mexico, which was about 25 or 30 miles north of San Isidro.

On November 7, 1857 Jose Abraham Cruz from married Maria Romualda Montejano. They had ten children of whom at least seven survived, including Ysidro (Venita Gomez's grandfather), brothers Juan, Francisco, Nicolas, and sisters Juliana and Marciana. In the 1890s the Cruz sons began to migrate to the United States. In the early 1890s Juan and his wife, Martiana Escobedo, immigrated with three children to the United States. By 1900 they had three more children, and Juan was working as a day laborer in Kern County. Francisco and his wife, Bersabe Flores, were living south of the Guadalupe River in Texas. Francisco was a farmer, and he could read and write, and speak English. Nicolas remained with his parents in Jalisco.

Differing immigration dates on the censuses indicate that the Ysidro Cruz family probably migrated back and forth between Mexico and Texas as opportunities for work fluctuated. The June 22, 1900 Census from Deming, New Mexico lists the family as follows: Parents Ysidro and Regina with daughter Petra, son Margarito, and daughter Lonjina. The family is living (most likely in one of a row of small shacks) at 318 West Railroad Avenue just a few feet from the tracks of the Southern Pacific Railroad. No other Cruz families are listed on the census in Deming. Ysidro is working as a laborer in the railroad section and is unable to read or write or speak English. Petra is working as a servant. Margarito and Lonjina attend a school nearby. By the end of that year, the Cruz family had made its way to California. John Cruz was born in California in 1900. Another daughter, Priscila, died in 1902 at Santa Barbara.

By 1902 the Ysidro Cruz family was living in Santa Barbara at 235 East Valerio, and by 1904 the rest of the Cruz clan was living in Santa Barbara. Parents Abraham and Romualda were living at 235 East Canon Perdido with son Nicolas. Ysidro and Regina were living in the rear of 913 ½ Garden Street with Petra, Margarito, Longina, and John. Juan and Martiana are living in the front house at 913 Garden with several children. Francisco and Bersabe are living at the corner of Carrillo and Laguna. The families

moved around the Santa Barbara eastside quite a bit in the following years. The men worked as laborers for the Johnston Fruit Company, for Santa Barbara Paving and G. Company, and for the Southern Pacific Railroad. Francisco was the only exception; he worked as a grocer. The women were homemakers and laundresses. By 1910, Juan was widowed and had moved to Los Angeles to work for the Southern Pacific Railroad at what is now the Naud Junction in downtown Los Angeles. They lived at 775 ½ San Fernando Street just a few blocks from the station. Parents Abraham and Romualda and brother Nicolas lived in the front residence at 775 San Fernando. Since Juan's wife had passed earlier in the year, I assume that the grandparents moved with Juan to help care for his seven children. Juan, son Francisco, and brother Nicolas all worked for the railroad.

Ysidro and Francisco remained in Santa Barbara. In 1910 the Ysidro Cruz family was living at 106 Mason Street. Later that year, on December 3, 1910, John died of typhoid fever at age 10 years and 2 months and was buried at Calvary Cemetery. At that time, Ysidro was working as a laborer (stone work). At some point before or after 1910, Lonjina was made a ward of the Juvenile Court under the supervision of Miss Myra Morgan. In 1909 Lonjina Cruz met Juan Leon Guerrero from Guam Island in the Philippines. Juan Guerrero had most likely come to the United States to work in agriculture as Filipino workers replaced Chinese and Japanese laborers in the fields of California. Abraham J. Guerrero was born to Lonjina and Juan Guerrero on July 7, 1910 in Santa Barbara. A year later on July 8, 1911 Lonjina Cruz and Juan Guerrero were married in Santa Barbara by Jacob G. Shoup, Justice of the Peace, and they were living at 531 Canal (Olive) Street. Later that year, on December 27, 1911 John Leon Jr. was born, and Isabel G. Guerrero was born on January 19, 1914. In 1917 Juan Guerrero was working as a laborer for U.S. Grill located at 811 State Street.

Sometime before mid-year 1914 Lonjina Guerrero met Juan Gomez from Mexico who was working as a day laborer in Santa Barbara. Little information is available for Juan Gomez. In the 1920 Census, Juan Gomez lists Mexico as his place of birth. He immigrated to the United States in 1905 at the age of 15. He was unable to read or write, and he could not speak English.

On April 3, 1915 at 4:00am Carmelita (Venita Angela) Gomez was born to Lonjina Guerrero and Juan Gomez. She was born in the Gomez home on Bond Street with Presentacion Ruiz of 602 East Haley assisting as the midwife. According to the birth certificate, Carmelita's birth was illegitimate. Juanita Sophia was born on December 9, 1917, and Longina was living at 403 Rose Avenue. In March of 1921 Valentino Gomez was born to Lonjina and Juan Gomez. In 1920 the Gomez family (Juan, Lonjina, Venita, and Sophie) were living just a few blocks away from Lonjina's parents and the Guerrero's at 625 East Haley. In addition, there is no indication that Lonjina and Juan Leon were divorced, and there is no record of a marriage between Longina Guerrero (Cruz) and Juan Gomez.

The 1920s were difficult years for the Cruz, Guerrero, and Gomez families. On February 25, 1922 Ysidro Cruz died of pneumonia and was buried at Calvary Cemetery somewhere in the "baptized plot" (on the far west side of the "E" section along the fence). Sometime earlier, between January 1921 and September 1922, Juan Gomez died of tuberculosis. His death record could not be found and his place of burial is unknown. Because of a lack of financial support from both Ysidro Cruz and Juan Gomez, the

Gomez children—Venita, Sophie, and Valentino—were admitted to St. Vincent's orphanage on September 25, 1922 and given probation (i.e., they were placed in boarding homes ) on October 26, 1922. The three Gomez children were admitted to the General Hospital on September 27, 1922 for chronic tonsillitis. Venita was held as pulmonary tuberculosis patient and was dismissed on July 21, 1923 as cured. Last, sometime before 1927, Lonjina Guerrero died of tuberculosis.

Venita was officially admitted to St. Vincent's on August 8, 1923 where she remained until she was discharged on September 12, 1934 to work in the home of Thomas and Mildred Savage of Carpinteria. Sophie was most likely in and out of home placements, although she is listed as residing at St. Vincent's on the 1930 Census. Valentino Gomez was transferred to an all-boys school in Watsonville—St. Francis School of the Missionary Society of the Salesian Congregation.

In 1930 Regina Cruz was living with her grandson, Abraham Guerrero, at 217 ½ East Haley. Occasionally, Regina, now about 70 years old, would visit Venita at St. Vincent's. As stated in Venita's file, "An old grandmother visits them, very rarely, however. She does not speak English." Her son-in-law John Leon Guerrero married Gabina Rodriguez and was living in Monterey County with John Jr. and Isabel. The Guerrero family worked as laborers on a fruit farm in Aromas near Watsonville. John Sr., Gabina, and John Jr. returned to Santa Barbara, while Isabel remained in the area after marrying. On December 10, 1940 Regina Cruz died from pneumonia and was buried at the Goleta Cemetery along the western property line (Section 5 West, Space 54, Division B). Prior to her death she was living at 1340 Laguna Street.

On July 11, 1936 Venita Angela Gomez married Anthony Basil Cordero.