THE PORT IN THE STORM: MARIO RAMIREZ, HURRICANE BEULAH,

AND THE LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY

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THE PORT IN THE STORM: MARIO RAMIREZ, HURRICANE BEULAH, AND THE LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY

by

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This historical analysis focuses on the Lower Rio Grande Valley, particularly Starr County. It reviewed thousands of pages of archival records, historical news reports, feature profiles, city, state, and federal government documents, interviews, videos, and academic examinations. This thesis borrows biographical, narrative, and borderlands history approaches to portray Dr. Mario E. Ramirez as a man who believed that he could make a difference in many Valley lives. It argues and demonstrates that he successfully and repeatedly realized that belief throughout the fields of medicine, politics, and education.

The thesis examines 1967's Hurricane Beulah as a dramatic example of how Ramirez -- who assumed a leadership role in the medical relief efforts on both sides of the Rio Grande -- utilized his community standing, his professional standing as a South Texas doctor, and his familiarity with a predominantly Mexican-American population to improve his Starr County community. The Beulah relief efforts enhanced his image as a role model, as a legitimate community voice, and as a state and national representative of Valley needs.

Ramirez's political and professional achievements enabled him to guide thousands of Valley residents into medical careers. Many of them returned to the Valley, as he did, to care for their communities. His ambitions also made him a cornerstone of efforts to build and strengthen medical education and health care throughout South Texas.

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INTRODUCTION

On September 5, 1967, a storm emerged far above the Atlantic Ocean. It grew as it approached the Windward Islands, the southern half of a necklace of tropical resorts and European colonies delineating the Caribbean Sea from the Atlantic.[1] Warm moisture and spinning winds coalesced into a tropical storm, and the U.S Weather Bureau named the storm Beulah. The next day experts upgraded Beulah to a hurricane.[2]

Hurricane Beulah moved through the Caribbean region for twelve days. It ravaged Hispaniola, Jamaica, and Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula. The hurricane then spiraled into the Lower Rio Grande Valley, pouring historic amounts of rain into South Texas and northern Mexico. More than one hundred tornadoes ripped apart farmlands, ranches, and roads. Floods swept away bridges and smashed houses. Small towns became islands trapped in rancid inland seas. Beulah, one of the strongest hurricanes in U.S. history, killed dozens of people in the Caribbean, Mexico, and Texas.[3]

Dr. Mario E. Ramirez, a family physician from Roma, Texas, led relief efforts for flooded Valley communities. As he treated Texas residents, thousands of people in northern Mexico seeking shelter and assistance crossed the swollen Rio Grande, doubling or tripling the populations of border towns, including Roma. Ramirez stood at the center of relief efforts as historic as the storm itself. For weeks after the crisis, the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) and officials -- both U.S. and Mexican, civilian and military -- honored Ramirez's creativity and

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[1] International Hydrographic Organization, *Limits of Oceans and Seas*, No. 23, 3rd ed. (Monte Carlo: International Hydrographic Organization, 1953), 14-15, www.iho-ohi.net/iho_pubs/standard/S-23/S23_1953.pdf. See a Google map of the Windward Islands here: https://goo.gl/maps/K9PB5.

[2] John Metz, "45th Anniversary of Hurricane Beulah," *South Texas Weather Journal,* National Weather Service Corpus Christi, TX, Summer 2012, 1, http://www.srh.noaa.gov/images/crp/docs/stwj/STWJSummer12.pdf, (hereafter cited as Metz*, South Texas Weather Journal*).

[3] The unnamed 1938 storm and 1961's Hurricane Carla were bigger. The National Hurricane Center considers the Galveston Hurricane of 1900 to be the last of the nineteenth century instead of the first of the twentieth century.

leadership throughout the two-week ordeal.[4] Forty years later, Ramirez downplayed his role and wrote that in "no way … do I consider myself a hero for what we did during those two weeks."[5]

The Beulah drama was just one chapter of Ramirez's productive life. He knew the people whose lives Beulah disrupted. "Twenty years of medical practice," he wrote in 2007, "and an ancestry that dated back seven generations in the community gave me unique knowledge of my people and our neighbors."[6] As a child he shared their small-town Valley life, and after attending college in Austin and medical school in Tennessee he returned to that life to medically care for "my people and our neighbors." Ramirez used his post-Beulah fame and hard-earned professional reputation to build and strengthen relationships with state and national political leaders. As a Starr County judge, he strengthened the region's infrastructure, including the construction of county hospital. As a senior official at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio (UTHSCSA) in 1996, he led efforts to establish Med-Ed, a program that enabled thousands of Valley students to pursue medical careers and then to join him in caring for their transnational communities.[7] Ramirez's determination and ambition framed a life haunted by a sibling's death, inspired by accomplished ancestors, and strained by constant personal sacrifice.

This thesis focuses on the Lower Rio Grande Valley, particularly Starr County. It is based on a review of thousands of pages of archival records, historical news reports, feature profiles,

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[4] Mario E. Ramirez, "Hurricane Beulah, Starr County, Texas, Scrapbook (September 1967)," Cabinet 10, Item 1, Mario E. Ramirez, M.D. Collection, Mario E. Ramirez, M.D. Library, Harlingen, TX (hereafter cited as Ramirez, "Hurricane Beulah" scrapbook; the entire archive hereafter cited as Ramirez Collection), 6. Among the collection's books and folders, a series of three-ring binders contain news clippings and correspondence illustrating major eras of his career. Ramirez began this particular binder with an overview of his life. In that introductory remembrance, Ramirez determined the time span of two weeks of relief efforts. He also realized that, upon reflection on all of the public laurels showered on his career, his long string of honors began only after the 1967 relief efforts. The guide to the Ramirez Collection is online here: www.tinyurl.com/mx8fsy2.

[5] Ramirez, "Hurricane Beulah" scrapbook, 7.

[6] Ramirez, *Hurricane Beulah: September 19, 1967 to October 3, 1967, Roma, Texas, Prologue: 40 Years Later*, "Hurricane Beulah" scrapbook, Ramirez Collection (hereafter cited as Ramirez, *Hurricane Beulah: Prologue*), 1.

[7] For a brief but detailed timeline of his life and career, see "Mario E. Ramirez, M.D. – Selected Career Highlights," *News*, The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, PDF, http://www.tinyurl.com/mdvps4h, (hereafter cited as Ramirez career timeline).

city, state, and federal government documents, interviews, videos, and academic examinations. It borrows biographical, narrative, and borderlands history approaches to profile Ramirez as a man who believed throughout his life that he could make a difference in many Valley lives. It argues that he successfully realized that belief in the fields of medicine, politics, and education. Specifically, this historical analysis asserts that Ramirez had a significant and positive influence on the lives of Valley residents throughout the six decades he served as a local family physician. His service as a Starr County judge and his multifaceted administrative and leadership roles throughout the University of Texas system enabled him to influence political and educational issues beyond the borders of his medical profession.

Beulah is a perfect example of how Ramirez utilized his community and professional standing as a South Texas doctor, and his familiarity with a predominantly Mexican-American population to significantly improve – both in the short term and in the long term – his Starr County community. The Beulah relief efforts further enhanced his image as a credible role model, as a legitimate community voice, and as a state and national representative of the Valley and its Latino residents. He worked with medical professionals from Mexico and other parts of Texas to confront the hurricane's destruction. He emerged from the crisis with new networks connecting him to political and medical officials at state and federal levels. He built on those relationships to advance his ambitions and make the most of the opportunities they afforded him.

By studying what Beulah destroyed and what Ramirez repaired and went on to build, the overall historical understanding of the multicolored and multilayered tapestry of a transnational borderlands community is sharpened. The arc of Ramirez's life offers a vantage point from which to appreciate and explore more than eight decades of Valley history -- from the generations of settlers confronting borderlands violence to the growing generations of young

men and women who emerged from Valley educational programs, followed Ramirez's medical footsteps, and further enriched their Valley societies.

Following this introduction, this thesis is organized into six major sections. First, a review of relevant academic literature contextualizes this work and its potential contribution to four academic fields. The second section offers a brief historical illustration of the Valley before Ramirez's birth in April 1926. It then summarizes his life, education, marriage to Sarah Aycock, family life, Air Force service, and medical career up to 1967. The third section considers three significant developments in Ramirez's life and in the Valley before September 1967, when Beulah struck. A unique narrative history illustrates how Ramirez and other Valley residents from Brownsville to Corpus Christi to Roma confronted the storm's consequences for seventeen days. The fourth and fifth sections follow Ramirez as he entered Starr County politics and assumed a leadership role in higher education initiatives. The sixth section and a brief conclusion examine Ramirez in retirement, his influence on medical initiatives that still unfold today, and the Ramirez Library – the glittering jewel of his intellectual legacy.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW AND RELEVANCE

This project views the Valley as a vibrant multicultural tapestry -- some of it frayed from borderlands tensions, some of it radiant in ethnic color, rich in historical texture, or scorched from brutal interracial conflict. It was a medically-underserved region ravaged by hurricane winds and historic floods. It was a territory political bosses sliced up and labor leaders marched across. Writers and scholars grappled for decades with questions the Valley's historical issues – class, identity, violence, borderlands space -- posed to their comprehension of the region.[8]

This thesis inserts the story of Ramirez's life into at least four academic conversations: Valley history, borderlands history, Latino biography, and Beulah history. Examining a few examples of relevant works – the foundation upon which this analysis is built -- contextualizes this work's contributions to those conversations and offers ideas for successive studies.

Valley history

Academic work that considered the Valley a wasteland of mystery and tragedy filled the relevant literature before the 1960s. The Valley was, to these writers, a region neither colonial nor independent Mexico properly controlled. These views served not only "to rationalize and justify the dismemberment of Mexico between 1836 and 1846" for those who actually executed that conquest but also for the generations that followed them. Anglo "civilizing" forces were crucial, these writers explained. One legacy of such attitudes was an array of histories that downplayed or deliberately ignored Texas Latinos, including Valley Latinos, as significant historical actors. For example, in 1917 Frank Cushman Pierce considered the Valley plagued by "the ignorant Mexican." In 1935, Walter Prescott Webb wrote that "[u]nder good leaders,

[8] Prominent scholars and writers include Walter Prescott Webb, Joe B. Frantz, Jovita Gonzalez, Arnoldo de Leon, Emilio Zamora, Cynthia Orozco, David Montejano, Milo Kearney, Anthony Knopp, Daniel D. Arreola, and Omar Santiago Valerio-Jimenez.

[Mexicans] were a docile and harmless people, but under evil guidance they were as bad as their leaders desired." In 1951, Lyle Saunders and Olen Leonard saw the Valley endangered by "wetbacks" and their socially-destabilizing propensity for "minor crimes and delinquencies."[9]

They represented paternalistic and imperialist views of Valley communities as spoils of a just war, as chaotic and uncivilized landscapes desperate for modernity, and as regions filled with inferior Latino bodies, hearts, and minds desperate for Anglo guidance and improvement. Texans, Arnoldo De Leon wrote in 2003, were "comfortable with old myths" of morally- and physically-superior Anglos that the "post-World War II consensus history" promoted.[10]

But there were notable exceptions in the early literature. For example, Jovita Gonzalez's 1930 master's thesis for the University of Texas at Austin explored the Valley's vibrant social and political life. Like Ramirez, Gonzalez was the child "of land-rich Mexicans who lived in Roma." Her thesis pointed to "advanced progressive Texas Mexicans" she saw rising to positions of prominence in the Valley. She asserted that they "bring with them a broader view [and] a clearer understanding of the good and bad qualities of both races." In 1958, Américo Paredes celebrated Latinos who resisted Anglo rule, men who would "linger in the memories of a new generation until the last old man dies."[11] Gonzalez and Paredes, among others, offered examples of how intelligent studies of Texas culture and history could celebrate Latino stories and study

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[9] Zamora, Orozco, and Rodolfo Rocha, "Introduction," *Mexican Americans in Texas History*, eds. Zamora, Orozco, and Rocha (Austin, TX: Texas State Historical Association), 1-18; Frank Cushman Pierce, *A Brief History of the Lower Rio Grande Valley* (Menasha, WI: George Banta Publishing Company, 1917), HathiTrust, accessed September 27, 2014, http://hdl.handle.net/2027/loc.ark:/13960/t1xd1ks3r, 118; Walter Prescott Webb, *The Texas Rangers* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1935), 346; Lyle Saunders and Olen Earl Leonard, *The Wetback in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1951), 46.

[10] De Leon, "Whither Tejano History: Origins, Development, and Status," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 106, no. 3 (January 2003): 350-351.

[11] Gonzalez, "Social Life in Cameron, Starr, and Zapata Counties" (MA thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1930), 113; Teresa Palomo Acosta and Ruth Winegarten, *Las Tejanas: 300 Years of History* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2004), 94; Américo Paredes. *With His Pistol In His Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1958). Latino Literature, accessed September 21, 2014, http://lit.alexanderstreet.com.libweb.lib.utsa.edu/lali/view/1000047828.

assertive Latino actors on social and political stages without diminishing the state history's overall richness, sophistication, or insight.

Since the 1960s and 1970s, during which the fields of new social and ethnic history blossomed and Chicano/Tejano civil rights movements strengthened, the historical literature of Texas, the Valley, and Texas Latinos gradually grew wider and deeper.[12] New generations of historians – including many more women and Latinos -- focused on ignored or unknown aspects of Texas society. They pointed out the beauty and sophistication of Tejano culture. They attacked "the myth of Mexican docility." They argued against any claims that "problems inherent in Mexican American culture" explained or justified Anglos' social oppression or exclusion of Latinos.[13] Most importantly, instead of ignoring racial tensions, these historians pointed to those tensions. They analyzed the legacies of both sweeping historical exclusion and specific incidents of brutal borderlands violence.

Sterling examples of such scholarship emerged in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. For example, in the 1980s, de Leon illustrated an assertive, adaptive, resilient, and bicultural Latino society in *The Tejano Community*. His subsequent work, *They Called Them Greasers*, analyzed the origins and deadly consequences of white supremacist racism directed at Mexicans and Mexican Americans throughout Texas history. David Montejano's *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* explored how four eras of Texas economic development – incorporation, reconstruction, segregation, and integration -- changed class and race relations. These works offered vivid examples of Latinos' violent and non-violent resistance to Anglo oppression, coupled with illustrations of how Anglo authorities responded with social repression,

[12] Edward J. Escobar, "The Dialectics of Repression: The Los Angeles Police Department and the Chicano Movement," *The Journal of American History* 79, no. 4 (March 1993): 1483-1514; Montejano, *Quixote's Soldiers: A Local History of the Chicano Movement, 1966-1981* (Austin TX: University of Texas Press, 2010).
[13] De Leon, "Whither Tejano History," 352-353.

racial violence, and intellectual erasure of Mexican contributions to Texas history.[14] In 1995, Milo Kearney and Anthony Knopp published *Border Cuates*, a study of cultural, economic, and political fluidity between Brownsville and Matamoros. Kearney also edited a series of Texas academic journals that seriously explored and analyzed a wide array of aspects of Valley heritage and history.[15] In 1998, as de Leon explained, Armando Alonzo's *Tejano Legacy* pushed back against his Latino predecessors in the academic literature by arguing that Anglo-Latino race relations were less confrontational than past writers thought. He also claimed that Latinos lost their lands to Anglos for a variety of reasons beyond "Anglo fraud" or outright violence. Also in 1998, Leticia Garza-Falcon's *Gente Decente* attacked Webb for his "racist stereotypes of Mexicans" and deliberate "exclusionary history." In 1999, sociologist Chad Richardson's *Batos, Bolillos, Pochos, and Pelados* examined class, race, and ethnicity in the Valley. He called the border "a place of conflict created by decisions in far-off capitals."[16]

The twenty-first century saw Tejano and Valley history blossom. Daniel D. Arreola's 2002 book *Tejano South Texas* argued that when seen through the lens of cultural geography, "Mexican South Texas is a distinctive borderland, unlike any other Mexican American" region in the U.S. In 2003, Benjamin Heber Johnson's *Revolution in Texas* examined the 1915 Plan de San

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[14] De Leon, *The Tejano Community, 1836-1900* (Albuquerque, N.M.: University of New Mexico Press, 1982) and *They Called Them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes Toward Mexicans in Texas, 1821-1900* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1983); Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1987), ACLS Humanities E-Book, accessed September 23, 2014, http://quod.lib.umich.edu.libweb.lib.utsa.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=acls;idno=heb00601.

[15] Kearney and Knopp, *Border Cuates: A History of the U.S. Mexican Twin Cities* (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 1995). Kearney, Knopp, and Antonio Zavaleta, eds. *Ongoing Studies in Rio Grande Valley History* (Brownsville, TX: Texas Center for Border and Transnational Studies, University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College, 2011). This is one of a series of compilations of essays, articles, poetry, and art. Also see the *Journal of South Texas*, published by Texas A&M Kingsville, along with *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* and the online *Handbook of Texas* (tshaonline.org/handbook), both published by the Texas State Historical Association.

[16] De Leon, "Whither Tejano History," 355-356; Armando Alonzo, *Tejano Legacy: Rancheros and Settlers in South Texas, 1734-1900* (Albuquerque, N.M.: University of New Mexico Press, 1998); Leticia Garza-Falcon, *Gente Decente: A Borderlands Response to the Rhetoric of Dominance* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1998); Richardson, *Batos, Bolillos, Pochos, and Pelados: Class and Culture on the South Texas Border* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 2.

Diego, which outlined a planned Latino rebellion against abusive Anglo rule, and argued that it helped middle-class Tejanos clinging to their Mexican ethnicity to finally accept "the benefits of becoming Americans." Timothy Bowman's 2011 dissertation used the Valley's citrus industry as a prism through which to argue that the region was little more than an oppressed U.S. colony cut out of the northern Mexican cultural body.[17]

De Leon, Montejano, Jovita Gonzalez, Kearny, Arreola, Johnson, and their colleagues labored to bring balance and justice to the Lone Star State's historical record. By reminding students and scholars that there was another side to every Texas legend, daring to recast some fabled Texas Rangers as cold-blooded murderers, redefining the Mexican War as an imperialist U.S. invasion and conquest, creatively celebrating elements of Tejano culture, and guiding new generations of Latino scholars, they advanced Latino civil rights ambitions everywhere. They furthered the overall campaign to keep stories of the suppressed from themselves being suppressed. They led similarly-minded scholars to expand on their work or find fresh subjects and approaches to Tejano history, including Valley history. Today, de Leon writes, historians consider the field "among the most innovative and vibrant fields within Texas history."[18]

Narrowing down from a review of broad Texas history and theoretical fields, this work specifically draws on, and in return contributes to, the body of historical and archaeological work on Starr County and Roma. For example, Richard R. Bailey's 1976 article and Ray Robert Leal's 1983 dissertation examined Starr County's 1966 labor unrest. Hubert J. Miller's 1984 article

[17] Arreola, *Tejano South Texas: A Mexican American Cultural Province* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2002). For more on the cultural geographic approach to the borderlands, see Richard L. Nostrand, "The Hispanic-American Borderland: Delimitation of an American Culture Region," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 60, no. 4 (December 1970): 638-661; De Leon, "Mexican Americans," in *Discovering Texas History*, ed. Bruce A. Glasrud (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014), 42; Benjamin Heber Johnson, *Revolution in Texas: How a Forgotten Rebellion and Its Bloody Suppression Turned Mexicans Into Americans* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003); Timothy Bowman, "Blood Oranges: Citriculture, colonialism, and the making of Anglo-American identity in the Lower Rio Grande Valley borderlands during the twentieth century" (Ph.D diss., Southern Methodist University, 2011).

[18] De Leon, "Mexican Americans," in *Discovering Texas History*, 31.

studied early twentieth-century Mexican migration. Stephen Andrew Townsend's 1989 thesis examined the steamboat industry on the Rio Grande.[19] Together they contributed to the growing push against traditional Texas narratives and mythology by turning their spotlights onto suppressed workers and immigrants -- groups determined to take action to improve their prospects -- or onto the Valley, an understudied region of Texas that roared with transnational commerce that linked the area to larger international commodity chains. Archaeologists made their own contributions with examinations of Roma's architecture, geography, and civic evolution. For example, José E. Zapata's 2002 thesis looked at Roma's economic history and at the importance of specific buildings, but it also offered a succinct historical tour of Roma before 1920.[20] This study of Ramirez contributes to that scholarship with details of life in Roma throughout the twentieth century, particularly from Ramirez's perspective, and particularly with an illustration of Roma's and Rio Grande City's citizens as they faced Hurricane Beulah in 1967.

Borderlands history

The theoretical enrichment of this historical literature comes in part from Borderlands studies, which essentially argues that scholars should not consider regions like the Valley as a nation's fringe areas but as dynamic political and cultural spaces where national and ethnic identities are negotiated, where the effectiveness of nation-states are tested, and where men and women exist amidst a maelstrom of political loyalties, sexual freedoms, and racial oppressions. The field moves the focus of historical examination away from a traditional center – urban areas

[19] Richard R. Bailey, "The Starr County Strike," *Red River Valley Historical Review* 4, no. 1 (Winter 1976): 42-61; Ray Robert Leal, "The 1966-1967 South Texas Farm Workers Strike" (Ph.D diss., Indiana University, 1983); Hubert J. Miller, "Mexican Migrations to the United States, 1900-1920: With a Focus on the Texas Lower Rio Grande Valley," *Borderlands Journal* 7, no. 2 (Spring 1984): 165-205; Stephen Andrew Townsend, "Steamboating on the Lower Rio Grande River" (MA thesis, Texas A&I University, 1989).

[20] Nancy O'Malley, Lynn Osborne Bobbitt, and Dan Scurlock, "An Historical and Archaeological Investigation of Roma, Texas," *Special Report 20*, Office of the State Archaeologist (Austin, TX: Texas Historical Commission, 1976); José E. Zapata, "A Historical Archaeology of Roma, Texas" (MA thesis, University of Texas at San Antonio, 2002). Zapata examined about a half-dozen properties around Roma's central plaza to explore in part how and why Roma's Latino businessmen displaced their Anglo counterparts as the Valley grew economically and industrially.

or capital cities -- and onto border regions, arguing that traditional cores of power, society, and culture resulted from what borderlands cultures conceived on their own.

Historians Jeremy Adelman, Stephen Aron, Pekka Hamalainen, and Samuel Truett led those challenges against histories that take those top-down perspectives, and this work aligns its approach to Ramirez and the Valley with their approaches. This study of Ramirez in part focuses on him as a privileged Latino amidst working-class societies, far from centers of power and urbanity. Chad Richardson celebrates Valley citizens as "innovators and problem solvers on the forefront of change." As Hamalainen and Truett would perceive, Ramirez and fellow Valley citizens possessed malleable concepts of nation and cultural flexibility – their sense of home transcended lines on a map -- and this analysis will illustrate those concepts embedded in Ramirez's actions.[21] This study of borderlands actors confronting disaster and violence joins the response to Hamalainen's and Truett's call for diversity in Mexican-American borderlands studies, with attention paid to "transnational … transcultural and transregional" histories.[22]

This is a case study of a proud son of a fluid transnational space, which Gloria Anzaldua called "a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary."[23] Using her ideas, this thesis also considers Ramirez as essentially a walking borderland, a microcosm of the Valley's borderlands dynamic. Anzaldua's fellow Valley citizen carried ethnic and political divisions in his heart and mind, existing simultaneously -- as she did -

[21] Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, "From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in Between in North American History," *American Historical Review* 104, no. 3 (June 1999): 814-841; Pekka Hamalainen and Samuel Truett, "On Borderlands," *The Journal of American History* 98, no. 2 (2011): 338-361; Richardson, *Batos, Bolillos, Pochos, and Pelados*, 2. Also see Valerio-Jimenez, *River of Hope: Forging Identity and Nation in the Rio Grande Borderlands* (Durham, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), Gary L. Kieffner, "Riding the Borderlands: The Negotiation of Social and Cultural Boundaries for Rio Grande Valley and Southwestern Motorcycling Groups, 1900-2000" (Ph.D diss., University of Texas at El Paso, 2009), and Lawrence A. Herzog, *Where North Meets South: Cities, Space, and Politics on the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Austin, TX: Center for Mexican American Studies and University of Texas Press, 1990).
[22] Hamalainen and Truett, "On Borderlands," 346-347, 353-354.
[23] Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987), 25.

- in multiple worlds, in that "third space between cultures and social systems," and adapting to environments and situations among different races and classes.

These theoretical perspectives do not obscure the illustrative qualities of this narrative history. They are worth mentioning because they offer an important perspective from which to appreciate Ramirez's view of his world on both sides of an international border, along with the talents and intellect that brought him into state and national arenas of power and influence.

Biographies

De Leon's 2003 review of Tejano literature also noted a new wave of biographical approaches to important Latinos.[24] Throughout the past thirty years, for example, Dr. Hector P. Garcia of Corpus Christi and San Antonio's U.S. Rep. Henry B. Gonzalez and Jose Angel Gutierrez received well-deserved historical spotlight.[25] Jovita Gonzalez, "one of the first university educated Tejana intellectuals in the twentieth century," whose works on Tejanos became "a powerful tool of resistance against efforts to erase them from the historical record of Texas," received recent biographical and literary examinations.[26] In 2004, Gabriela Gonzalez examined San Antonio community activists Carolina Munguía and Emma Tenayuca.[27] New generations of academics participating in Tejano history fueled this widening array of characters introduced to the historical stage, thanks to the pioneers that trained, guided, and inspired them.

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[24] De Leon, "Whither Tejano History," 361.

[25] Ignacio M. Garcia, *Hector P. Garcia: In Relentless Pursuit of Justice* (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 2002); Thomas H. Kreneck, "Dr. Hector P. Garcia: An Archivist Historian's Perspective," *Tejano Epic: Essays in Honor of Felix D. Almaraz Jr.* (Austin, TX: Texas State Historical Association, 2005), 99-113; Michelle Hall Kells, *Hector P. Garcia: Everyday Rhetoric and Mexican American Civil Rights* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006); Matt S. Meier and Feliciano Ribera, *Mexican Americans/American Mexicans: From Conquistadors to Chicanos* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 216-217.

[26] Acosta and Winegarten, *Las Tejanas*, 94; Thomas H. Kreneck, "Recovering the 'Lost' Manuscripts of Jovita Gonzalez," *Texas Library Journal* 74, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 76-79; Milagros López-Peláez Casellas, "Jovita Gonzalez's 'Dew on the Thorn:' A Chicana response to patriarchy" (Ph.D diss., Arizona State University, 2003); Laura Patricia Garza, "Jovita Gonzalez, Adela Vento y Consuelo Aldape de Vega Hidalgo: Precursoras del pensamiento fronterizo" (Ph.D diss., University of Houston, 2012).

[27] Gabriela Gonzalez, "Carolina Munguía and Emma Tenayuca: The Politics of Benevolence and Radical Reform," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 24, no. 2/3 (2003): 200-229.

This thesis adds Ramirez to that historical stage. His career swept over much of Texas, took him to the White House, and earned him a historic Texas Medical Association presidency and a seat on the UT System Board of Regents. His vision of a better life for Valley residents inspired several generations of students, physicians, and health care workers. Ramirez represented countless Valley actors who found their own solutions to their communities' problems. Specifically, this thesis brings together for the first time in one academic work dozens of news articles, magazine profiles, letters, and interviews in order to illustrate his career and achievements as a Valley physician, political actor, and educator. This work is the first significant academic step onto Ramirez's landscape of history, with the hope that many more conversations and studies of his life and legacy will follow.

Beulah history

Hurricane Beulah as a historic event appears in the academic literature mostly as a scientific case study for meteorologists, public health officials, or disaster plan evaluations. For example, Gary K. Grice in 1968 and Robert Orton in 1970 investigated the record number of tornadoes Beulah spawned. Also in 1970, John Robert Brouillette's dissertation analyzed general communication problems during natural disasters.[28]

At least three archives offer crucial information on the hurricane's historical impact on the borderlands. The Harry Estill Moore Papers, stored at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin, contain a plethora of South Texas newspaper coverage, including daily coverage of the event and the aftermath, alongside enthralling long-form narratives of frightened citizens, brave civil servants, and determined reconstruction

[28] Gary Kenneth Grice, "An Investigation of the Tornadoes Associated with Hurricane Beulah" (MA thesis, Texas A&M University, 1968); Robert Orton, "Tornadoes Associated with Hurricane Beulah on September 19-23," *Monthly Weather Review*, 98, no 7 (July 1970): 541-547; John Robert Brouillette, "Community Organizations Under Stress: A Study of Inter-organizational Communication Networks During Natural Disasters" (Ph.D diss., Ohio State University, 1970).

efforts.[29] UTHSCSA's online archive contains dozens of photographs taken during the relief efforts. Ramirez's archive at the UTHSCSA's Regional Academic Health Center in Harlingen, Texas, contains his own collection of newspaper accounts, feature stories, memoirs, and other sources that vividly illustrate the Beulah drama.

This thesis fills a gap in the Beulah literature by weaving together information from those collections with government reports, correspondence, and memoirs to illustrate how Ramirez and other Valley residents experienced the hurricane and overcame its destructive effects. The work will be useful to Valley historians, hurricane historians, analysts of relief efforts, authors of future Beulah studies, and scholarly works on borderland and nationalist issues.

Conclusion

This thesis proceeds with confidence that it makes significant contributions to these four fields of study. Valley history benefits from examinations of Ramirez's family, his hometown, and his practice. Borderlands history benefits from a case study of his existence in worlds dominated by different governments, powers, and perceptions. Beulah history has a detailed account how a transnational relief effort stretched out over an archipelago of drowned communities. The biographical field has a new Latino protagonist on its historical stage.

Looking ahead, there are many more perspectives – including gender and religion – that scholars should embrace for future work on important Texans like Ramirez, along with deeper analysis of the topics this thesis explores. Historians should not neglect the many women, including Sarah Aycock Ramirez and Mary Ann Headley Edgerton, who devoted their medical careers to the Valley. Gender studies may also illuminate how patriarchal families viewed and interacted with authority figures like physicians, especially family practitioners who often cared

[29] Collection hereafter cited as Moore Papers.

for generations of the same family, and how that calculus might have changed if the physician was a woman. It is probable, as Ramirez believed, that wives or mothers were key factors in the doctors' decisions to stay or move elsewhere, which fundamentally affected the availability and quality of Valley health care. Religious belief also offers a rich field of study that includes historical actors like Ramirez, who balanced deep faith with scientific expertise, and like other physicians who confronted (and likely tolerated) patients' devotion to folk medicine or spiritual approaches to illness. This smattering of suggestions for future study hopefully invigorates the intellectual imaginations of subsequent participants in historical Valley conversations.

CHAPTER 2: ORIGINS

The Lower Rio Grande Valley is a fascinating South Texas region consisting of Cameron, Willacy, Hidalgo, and Starr counties. The Rio Grande, marking the border between the United States and Mexico, drains the Valley's 43,000 square miles as it winds more than 120 miles into the Gulf of Mexico.[30] It is a region over which armies, Native Americans, Texas Rangers, and smugglers fought, and where farmers, businessmen, and oilmen came to find their fortunes. It is a zone where men and women made (and still make) decisions of identity, loyalty, and citizenship. For some it was simply a region where one nation ended and another began. For others, home and family were on both sides of an inconvenient river, the border was a line on an irrelevant political map, and the Valley was a crucible where the best and worst of two national societies coalesced into a new multiracial culture. Interracial violence, debates over racial and national identities, economic development, and migrations enriched the landscape upon which Ramirez's ancestors built a family and a legacy that inspired him throughout his life.

Place

Ramirez was born in 1926 in Roma, a town in southwestern Starr County and 14 miles west of Rio Grande City. Before the Mexican War, it comprised the northern portion of the Mexican town San Pedro de Roma. U.S. victory turned the Rio Grande into an international border, cutting the town in half. Despite its small size, Roma was important. It was a vital

[30] David M. Vigness and Mark Odintz, "Rio Grande Valley," *Handbook of Texas Online*, Texas State Historical Association, accessed August 1, 2014, http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/ryr01. Also see Gonzalez, "Social Life in Cameron, Starr, and Zapata Counties;" Kearney and Knopp, *Border Cuates*; Arreola, *Tejano South Texas*; Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*; and Valerio-Jimenez, *River of Hope*.

Confederate river trading port during the Civil War.[31] It hosted a post office. During the Mexican Revolution, Roma was a haven for war refugees.[32]

When a new railroad was built for Rio Grande City in 1925, new roads were built for Roma to ensure it remained part of the economic network. In 1927, engineers selected Roma as one end of a vital bridge linking the U.S. and Mexico.[33] The 1930s saw an oil boom in the area, and Roma's population began a small but steady rise. Optimism was in the air as the town buzzed with construction and activity. A 1935 article scoffed that "[t]he sophisticated tourist hell-bent for the glories that [await] him in the orange-blossomed aroma of the Lower Rio Grande Valley no doubt … wonders why" anyone would want to live in Roma. Yet, the article countered, "he would be amazed at the signs of prosperity apparent on every hand."[34] Roma was also home to French- and German-influenced architecture – including Ramirez family buildings -- that later generations celebrated as a national treasure.[35]

Rio Grande City is the county seat. Like Roma, it was an international shipping port, and it sits across the Rio Grande from Camargo, Mexico.[36] The Mexican War necessitated the construction of a military installation, later named Fort Ringgold. The town received a post office soon after. It was 100 miles from the Gulf Coast, but nineteenth-century Rio Grande City, like Roma, was hardly isolated. It maintained a trade relationship with New Orleans and markets beyond. Texas Rangers and the U.S. Army used the town as a base of operations from which

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[31] Zapata, "A Historical Archaeology of Roma, Texas," vi.
[32] Zapata, "A Historical Archaeology of Roma, Texas," 44-45. Also see "The South Texas Border, 1900-1920: Photographs from the Robert Runyon Collection," University of Texas at Austin Libraries, University of Texas at Austin, accessed November 7, 2014, http://runyon.lib.utexas.edu.
[33] Dick D. Heller, Jr., "Roma-Los Saenz, TX," *Handbook of Texas Online*, Texas State Historical Association, accessed August 1, 2014, http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hgr06; Zapata, "A Historical Archaeology of Roma, Texas," 44-45.
[34] Al Brooks and Virgil Lott, "Roma is On the Up and Up," *Rio Grande Herald*, April 26, 1935.
[35] Heller, "Roma-Los Saenz, TX." The final section of this thesis briefly notes preservation initiatives in Roma.
[36] Garna L. Christian, "Rio Grande City, TX," *Handbook of Texas Online*, Texas State Historical Association, accessed August 1, 2014, http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hfr05.

they responded to cross-border violence. By 1920, more than 2,000 people lived in Rio Grande City among a variety of businesses and services. Like Roma, it benefited from the 1930s oil boom. The population remained around 2,500 for the next two decades as depression, war, and debt rocked its economic foundations. By 2013, the U.S. Census estimated a population of 14,000.[37] Both towns were central to Ramirez's life.

When Ramirez was born in 1926, the 1,200-square mile Starr County was home mostly to ranches, cattle, and oil/gas operations, unlike much of the rest of the Valley to the north and east, which supported many more orchards and farms. The county was named after James Harper Starr, a Texas land agent, government official for the Republic of Texas and the Confederacy, and (appropriate for this analysis) a physician. By the eve of the Civil War, Starr County had lost chunks of land to new Hidalgo and Zapata counties, and in 1911 Brooks County took more land in the north, along with Starr County's "best farmland."[38] By 1920, more than 11,000 people lived in Starr County, ninety percent of them Latino. Anglo settlers did not arrive until the railroad network reached into the county in the mid-1920s, and they opted for segregation between themselves and Latinos instead of marrying into the region's Latino families as their predecessors had done. The county saw strips of cotton and vegetables but ranches still dominated the landscape. For decades, the oil industry dominated the county's economy, which handcuffed the financial health of thousands of workers to fluctuations in oil prices. From the 1930s to the 1970s, historian Alicia A. Garza wrote, Starr County's "oil production totaled more the 216 million barrels." The population kept growing. The 1960 census counted more than 17,000 people. After the 1970s, a weakened oil industry and growing unemployment beyond the

[37] Christian, "Rio Grande City, TX;" "Rio Grande City (city), Texas," *State and County QuickFacts*. United States Census Bureau, accessed August 9, 2014, http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/48/4862168.html.
[38] Alicia A. Garza, "Starr County," *Handbook of Texas Online*, Texas State Historical Association, accessed October 19, 2014, http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hcs13.

Valley, which greatly limited financial options for its residents, only worsened the county's poverty. By the mid-1980s, Garza wrote, "50 percent of the population received food stamps," more than half of the county's residents were unemployed, and the county, almost completely Latino, was counted as one of poorest in the U.S. Those rates only worsened in the 1990s.[39] By 2013, the U.S. Census estimated a population of 62,000.[40]

Violence

Legacies of poverty and segregation were not the only shadows looming over the history of Ramirez's homeland. Violence also shaped the Valley's evolution in the decades after the Mexican War. After U.S. victory, racial, ethnic, and nationalist tensions broiled among the volatile mix of Anglos, Tejanos, and Mexicans as transitional generations waged bloody campaigns for control of the regional tapestry. "Men were expected to consider their relatives and closest neighbors, the people just across the river," Paredes wrote, "as foreigners in a foreign land."[41] Echoes of the subsequent racial violence must have deeply resonated within the hearts and minds of the Valley's twentieth-century residents. "Hatred, anger, and exploitation are the prominent features of this landscape," Anzaldua wrote. "[We] were jerked out by the roots, truncated, disemboweled, dispossessed, and separated from our identity and our history."[42] Historical resistance to actual and perceived Anglo power in the Valley came in the form of small armies, charismatic leaders, and regular people transformed into folk heroes. Suppression came with Texas Ranger badges, U.S. soldiers, posses, and creatively sadistic murders. Several notable incidents towered over a history of interracial conflict.

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[39] Garza, "Starr County"; Linda Sybert Hudson, "Starr, James Harper," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed October 19, 2014, http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fst22; Zapata, "A Historical Archaeology of Roma, Texas," 31-32.
[40] "Starr County, Texas," *State and County QuickFacts*. United States Census Bureau, accessed October 19, 2014, http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/48/48427.html.
[41] Paredes. *With His Pistol In His Hand.*
[42] Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 19, 30.

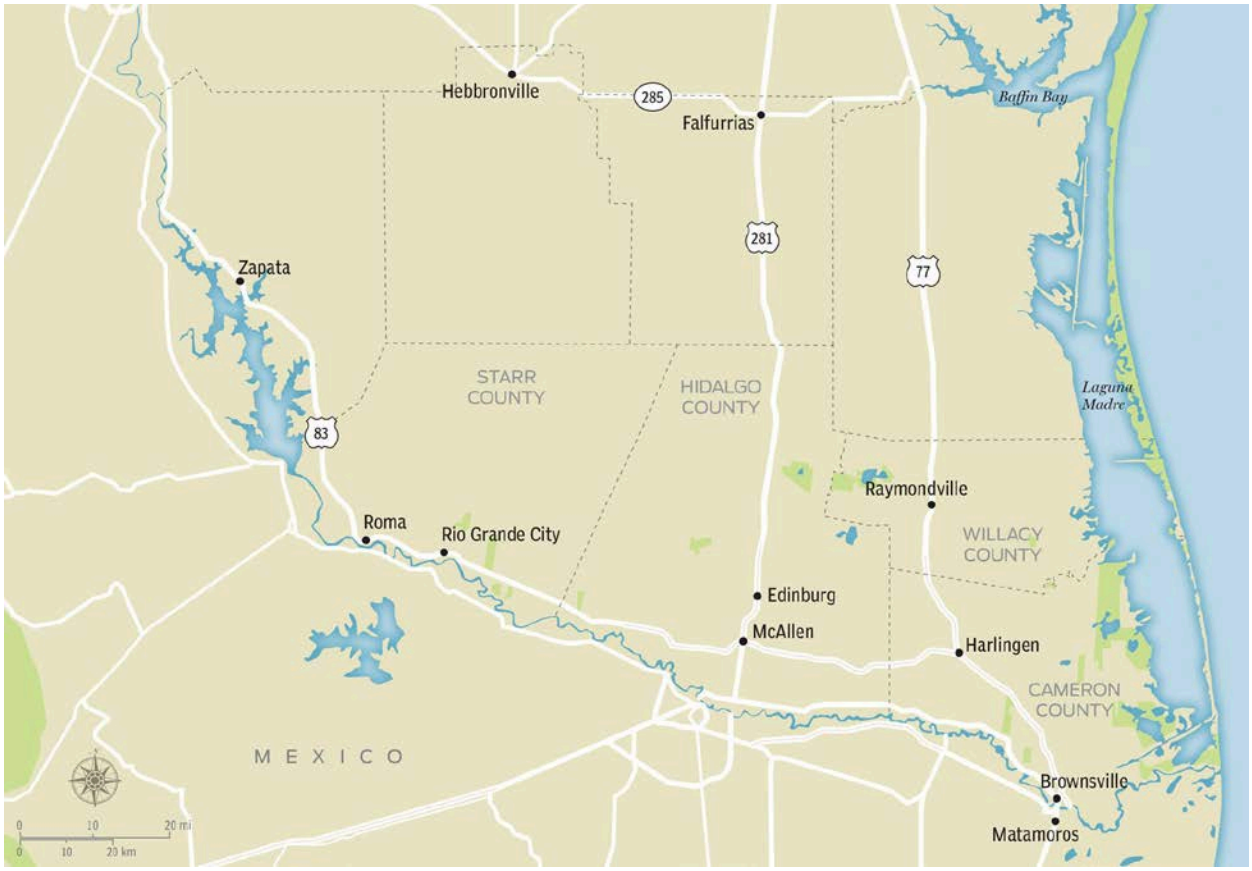

FIGURE 1
The Lower Rio Grande Valley. Map courtesy of John Bruce.

One of the most famous of those charismatic resistance leaders took center stage in July 1859. Juan Cortina, scion of a prominent ranching family, shot a Brownsville policeman for abusing a Cortina family servant. Cortina fled Brownsville and then returned weeks later with small army. He declared that Anglos stole land from his suppressed Mexican brethren and stripped them of their political rights.

Rangers, allied with Tejanos offended by what they saw as Cortina's pointlessly violent and doomed campaign, counterattacked with indiscriminate killings and abuses. After fighting

the U.S. Army at the Battle of Rio Grande City, "the most feared Mexican American in Texas" fled into Mexico and waged irregular war for twenty years.[43]

Thirty years later, in 1888, the Starr Country sheriff arrested a Mexican-American man for robbery, who was later killed supposedly because he tried to escape. His killer was Victor Sebree, the U.S. Inspector of Customs, a sheriff's assistant, and a popular suspect in several lynchings of Mexican civilians. Rio Grande City protestors appealed for political help from journalist Catarino Garza, who then wrote editorials claiming Sebree murdered the prisoner. When Sebree saw Garza at a political event, he shot him. Garza survived, and his dozens of supporters pursued Sebree until the gunman found safety in Fort Ringgold. Local lawmen and officials looked at the pursuit and protests and saw a riot. The unrest became national news, and the nervous governor, facing headlines blaring of a new U.S.-Mexico war, prepared an armed force to move into Starr County. Protestors dispersed but tensions burned long afterwards.[44]

The twentieth century opened with even more violence. In 1901, a South Texas sheriff tried to arrest ranch-hand Gregorio Cortez but wounded his brother instead. Cortez shot and killed the lawman, and then fled. The Texas Rangers led a 300-man posse in a 500-mile long pursuit, and they captured Cortez eight miles from the border. He was sentenced to life in prison until supporters secured a pardon for him in 1913.[45]

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[43] Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 23-25; Jerry Thompson, "Cortina, Juan Nepomuceno," *Handbook of Texas Online*, Texas State Historical Association, accessed April 9, 2014, http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles /fco73; Juan Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 101.

[44] Garza, "Rio Grande City Riot of 1888," *Handbook of Texas Online*, Texas State Historical Association, accessed April 9, 2014, http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/jcr03; Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 25. Garza returned in 1891 with "a plan to overthrow Mexico's government." The journalist also condemned the "marginalized status of ethnic Mexicans in Texas, which he attributed to Anglo racism and the corruption of machine politics." Garza used his popular following to form a small army, marched it into Mexico as a challenge to President Porfirio Diaz. His small army eventually dissipated, but his sentiments lived on long after he did. Garza demanded dignity, equality, and justice for his impoverished people.

[45] The incident inspired the "Ballad of Gregorio Cortez." YouTube offers many versions: http://tinyurl.com/lzc4ruc. Also see Paredes, *With His Pistol In His Hand.*

Valley residents aligned these revolutionaries, fugitives, and shooting victims in their imaginations to form a pantheon of dignified resistance to growing Anglo control of the Valley. "Such legends," historian Benjamin Johnson wrote, "used the deeds of individual men to embody defiance of the oppression brought by Anglos," reinforced by legions of federal soldiers and deadly Texas Rangers.[46] But these incidents paled in comparison to what unfolded in 1915, igniting one of the bloodiest eras in Valley history.

Labor and economic factors, coupled with revolutionary violence, shaped the Valley's social landscape before this 1915 incident. Miller noted that Mexico's modernization initiatives included new railroads in northern Mexico, which attracted and quickly transported workers to the northern border region. But a 1907 recession in Mexico drained away the opportunity for many of those migrants, who then looked north for opportunity.[47] The subsequent 1910 Mexican Revolution sent social and political tremors throughout the Valley's power structures, and regional leaders feared the chaos south of the Rio Grande would spark a revolutionary firestorm north of the river. The recession and the violence sent thousands of Mexicans streaming across the border. "In 1912 alone," historian David E. Lorey wrote, "23,238 Mexicans entered the United States." Such a fundamental change in the composition of the Valley's population signaled to regional leaders that more changes might be on the horizon.[48] But no one anticipated the era of unrest that set the Valley aflame.

In early 1915 in San Diego, Texas, conspirators composed the first of a series of initiatives that sought more than simple reform.[49] That summer, Latinos in the Valley attempted

[46] Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 23.
[47] Miller, "Mexican Migrations to the U.S., 1900-1920," 173.
[48] David E. Lorey, *The U.S.-Mexican Border in the Twentieth Century* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Books, 1999), 70.
[49] Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*; Don M. Coerver, "Plan of San Diego," *Handbook of Texas Online*, Texas State Historical Association, accessed April 9, 2014, http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/ngp04.

to execute the Plan de San Diego, a strategic uprising among Latinos, Japanese, Native Americans, and blacks. The plot, historian Anthony Quiroz wrote, "called for an uprising [throughout] the Southwest." They planned to kill all white males between Texas and California, seize the southwestern states from the Pacific Ocean to the Valley, form a new nation based on social justice, and claim a rightful place among North American republics.[50] The secessionist insurgency consumed South Texas like a prairie fire, Johnson explained. The raiders killed dozens of Anglo farmers. In response, "vigilantes and Texas Rangers led a far bloodier counterinsurgency that included the indiscriminate harassment of ethnic Mexicans, forcible relocation of rural residents, and mass executions."[51] Terror was fought with terror. Johnson put it simply: "Anyone who looked 'Mexican' was vulnerable." Latinos' provable guilt or presumed innocence were not issues considered when ropes were tightened around their necks, when their kicking bodies were hoisted onto branches, or when horseback riders (often the same murderous Rangers) dragged the bloated, lassoed corpses across the landscape. Other victims were burned alive as counterinsurgents destroyed crops and incinerated homes. Rotting Latino corpses on the side of the road or floating down a river became a common sight in South Texas, part of the normal reality of life in a society immersed in a race war.[52] This chaos, still too-little known among twenty-first century readers, was one of the most dramatic social firestorms that shaped the Valley society into which Ramirez was born.

The United States backed Venustiano Carranza as the new leaders of war-torn Mexico, which angered Carranza rival Francisco "Pancho" Villa. Amidst the already roiling borderlands violence, Villa expressed his displeasure with a series of raids, including a cross-border attack on

[50] Anthony Quiroz, "The Quest for Identity and Citizenship: Mexican-Americans in Twentieth-Century Texas," in *Twentieth Century Texas, a Social and Cultural History*, eds. Mary L. Kelley and John W. Storey (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2008): 44; Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 113-120.
[51] Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 2.
[52] Quiroz, "The Quest for Identity," 44; Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 116-118.

Columbus, N.M., in March 1916. These raids inspired Ramirez's maternal grandfather to move to Roma for safety. The U.S. Army send a force under Gen. John J. Pershing after Villa, but the Mexican Expedition failed to capture him.[53] Historians later concluded Carranza's forces cynically modulated the raids unleashed in the name of the Plan de San Diego in order to "influence relations" with the U.S.[54] The death toll from both the Plan and its suppression, Johnson wrote, probably numbered "in the low thousands."[55]

But the bloodshed was not the Plan's only defining feature. Johnson argued that the uprising ended two important eras for the Valley. Its beginning signaled what would be "the last major movement seeking reunification with Mexico, [and its defeat] marked the end of the American conquest of the Southwest." It also inaugurated a new era for many Mexican Americans. Before the Plan, Johnson wrote, some upper- and middle-class Tejanos hoped to achieve equality with Anglos by working within Anglo institutions and industries but without rejecting their Mexican heritage. The rebellion disrupted that strategy as Anglos counterattacked all Mexicans regardless of an individual's loyalty. He argued that their "cultural identity emanated from conflict caused" by the Plan.[56] Based in part on this new mindset, Mexicans in the United States and Mexican-Americans continued their fight for better lives, social justice, and economic equality.[57] Specifically, Latinos took political initiatives to continuously ensure their rights as U.S. citizens. The most vivid example came in 1930 when they formed the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC).

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[53] The PBS documentary series "American Experience" produced a fascinating and too-short film on this incredible incident, in which the U.S. launched one of the most technologically advanced military operations of the pre-World War I era. Online here: http://tinyurl.com/lh8cpre.
[54] Coerver, "Plan of San Diego."
[55] Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 120.
[56] De Leon, "Mexican Americans," in *Discovering Texas History*, 42.
[57] Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 5.

Racism and racial violence in the Valley throughout the first quarter of the twentieth-century were not limited to Latinos or to Native Americans. In 1906, when black army soldiers in Brownsville were wrongly accused of rioting, President Theodore Roosevelt dismissed 167 black servicemen.[58] Historian Norman Rozeff pointed out that the "Valley was not immune to the sick spectacle" of the Klu Klux Klan. Although the KKK "was a terrorist society by nature," it tried to "legitimize itself with open political activities." In Texas, where it demonstrated in McAllen, San Benito, Harlingen, Edinburg, and Mercedes, "it grew in political power through 1923 [before] membership declined to around 2,500 by 1928"[59]

Immigration, identity, and class

"Everyday life in [South] Texas," historian Philip Samponaro explained, "personifies the transnational reality of the border, with a … population that has family roots not only in Texas' Lower Rio Grande Valley but also in Mexico."[60] The Mexican War changed the political maps for generations of Valley communities. What was once just a river became both an international boundary and a symbol of Mexican defeat and U.S. aggression. Military installations like Fort Ringgold, Fort Brown, and Fort McIntosh, anthropologist Jose E. Limon wrote, "guaranteed the coming imposition of a new political economy and hegemonic sociocultural order."[61] Valley residents like the Ramirez family, whose regional roots stretched over decades, faced a new reality that demanded from them the acceptance of new social orders and perspectives. Coupled with racial violence were more private but no less central questions of personal identity in this borderlands region. Alongside that sense of identity, large waves of immigration and a re-

[58] Edmund Morris, *Theodore Rex* (New York: Random House, 2001), 453-455, 464-467.
[59] Norman Rozeff, "The Klu Klux Klan in the Rio Grande Valley," *Ongoing Studies in Rio Grande Valley History* 10 (2011): 117-126.
[60] Philip Samponaro, "Pa que buscas tres pies al gato teniendo cuatro? Teaching Local History on the South Texas-Mexico Border," *Ongoing Studies in Rio Grande Valley History* 10 (2011): 359-389.
[61] Jose E. Limon, *Dancing with the Devil: Society and Cultural Poetics in Mexican-American South Texas* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 23.

ordered class consciousness changed the Valley by the 1930s. These social veins coursing throughout Valley history shaped political and cultural landscapes on which Ramirez's life was based, and ideas exploring them deserve brief examinations.

Economic blossoming in the Valley after 1898 drove immigration from both north and south into the Valley. Until the dawn of the twentieth-century, much of the region was landscape of scrub, wildlife, and scattered settlements. But major irrigation initiatives in 1898 and a new railroad in 1904 tapped into the Valley's tremendous agricultural fertility. They redefined the region as the heart of new industries and potentially a new source of political and economic power, particularly as World War I industrial mobilization produced [r]ailroad construction, mine work, and industrial job opportunities."[62] That potential attracted legions of farmers and workers, moved most of South Texas toward farming and away from ranching, and led to steady population growth throughout the 1920s.[63] Lorey estimated that "between 1900 and 1930 almost 10 percent of Mexico's population migrated north to the United States."[64] Ramirez's paternal grandfather was among those thousands of immigrants. Miller counted almost 11,000 immigrants to the Valley in 1915. He counted more than 51,000 in 1920.[65]

By 1930, after two decades of an irrigation expansion from 53,000 acres to 257,000 acres, more than 175,000 people lived amongst the Valley's colorful patchwork of ranches, cotton fields, and citrus trees.[66] That Valley growth reflected a steady increase in the Latino population throughout Texas. Historian Robert H. Angell pointed out that the 1900 U.S. Census

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[62] Vigness and Odintz, "Rio Grande Valley;" Miller, "Mexican Migrations to the U.S., 1900-1920," 176.
[63] Vigness and Odintz, "Rio Grande Valley;" Johnson, "Unearthing the Hidden Histories of a Borderlands Rebellion," *Journal of South Texas* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 9-10.
[64] Lorey, *The U.S.-Mexican Border in the Twentieth Century*, 69; Norman D. Brown, "Texas in the 1920s," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed on October 20, 2014, https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/npt01.
[65] Miller, "Mexican Migrations to the U.S., 1900-1920," 167.
[66] Vigness and Odintz, "Rio Grande Valley;" Arreola, *Tejano South Texas*, 49-51.

reported more than 108,000 people who were born in Mexico lived the U.S. By 1910, that nationwide number grew to 219,000, with 124,000 living in Texas. By 1920, the number grew to 478,383, with 249,000 of them in Texas.[67]

But more growth did not lead to more equality. As people flowed into the Valley, class structure determined how the new societies were built. Montejano interpreted "Texas border history … in terms of a succession of class societies," and he outlined the process in *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986*. The Mexican War destroyed classic Spanish hacienda society, he explained, and the remnants evolved into an "Anglo-Mexican ranch society," which was then destroyed by "an agricultural revolution" at the dawn of the twentieth century. That evolved into a "segregated farm society," which was then steamrolled by war mobilization, industrialization, and urban modernity.[68] Omar Santiago Valerio-Jimenez wrote that Anglo nation-building institutions, like city and county bureaucracies and the U.S. legal system, severed Latino elites' traditional control over their labor force. Their relationships with their workers' social and financial lives changed once citizenship linked everyone to American laws and labor standards, which advantaged Anglo politicians, farmers, and businessmen. For workers seeking to escape oppressive working conditions, Montejano's stages turned the Rio Grande into the line where Latino elites' power ended and laborers' freedom began.[69]

Gonzalez's study of class changes indicated that since 1900, former landowners and "cowboys, renters, and servants" combined to form the new class of small farmer, "whose property," bought from their former employers, ranged "from a few acres to a few hundreds of

[67] Robert H. Angell, "'I Am a Mexican-American Raised in Mexico:' A Case Study of Cross-Border Migration from 1900 to 2008," *Ongoing Studies in Rio Grande Valley History* 10 (2011): 231-259.
[68] Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986*, 8.
[69] Valerio-Jimenez, *River of Hope*, 130, 180-182.

acres," and elevated them to a new landowning status among Valley residents.[70] The re-ordered class structure generally saw "Anglos at the top (either as ranchers, farmers, or industrialists) and Mexicans at the bottom (as ranch *peones*, migratory field hands, or unskilled or semiskilled workers in post-World War II urban manufacturing)."[71] Anglo farmers in South Texas grew more powerful politically and economically as they rode the wave of regional economic transformation, Arreola pointed out, and their Mexican workers "became an underclass … without political clout."[72] Anglos, Valerio-Jimenez wrote, racialized their class distinctions and "generally viewed wealthy Mexicans as 'white' and their poor counterparts as racial 'others.' "[73]

The evolving class structure informed new identities in the 1930s Valley. Historian Richard A. Garcia explored how identities dominated by historical Mexican heritage evolved into identities dominated by modern, Anglo-centric American outlooks. Essentially, he explored how people in the Valley learned to look north instead of south when deciding where they (and others) belonged in the American context. He argued that state-formation pressures on immigrants to adopt American values and traditions led to "the emergence of an Americanized middle-class element." Above this middle class he saw "wealthy exiled Mexican Revolution refugees." Naturally, below the middle class he saw the poor and working lower classes. Garcia mirrored Johnson's argument in *Revolution in Texas* when he illustrated wealthy Mexicans and Mexican-Americans caught in Anglo counterattacks during the Plan de San Diego drama. By the 1930s, he explained, they were draped in a new identity as loyal Americans determined to convince Anglos to recognize their equal standing and rights. "Instead of trying to re-draw the border through the kind of insurrection that had worked in Mexico," Johnson added, "they

[70] Gonzalez, "Social Life in Cameron, Starr, and Zapata Counties," 39-40.
[71] De Leon, "Mexican Americans," in *Discovering Texas History*, 32; Johnson, "Unearthing the Hidden Histories of a Borderlands Rebellion," 10.
[72] Arreola, *Tejano South Texas*, 49.
[73] Valerio-Jimenez, *River of Hope*, 4-5.

understood that the border was fixed." They had to work within the society to transform it instead of simply tearing it down like the Plan tried to do. From LULAC, Garcia wrote, they waged their civil rights movement, "called on Tejanos to contribute constructively to their country's well-being, and worked dutifully to earn Tejanos a place in the American mainstream." Johnson considered this middle-class movement "one of the most important ways in which South Texas has shaped the larger course of U.S. history"[74]

Education and identity were also intertwined in the Valley. Political unrest, borderlands violence, and revolution drove the migration from Mexico, despite the potentially deadly fate threatening any Mexican's dreams of a better and brighter future for their descendants. For many, that new future began with an education. The Anglo-dominated Texas, however, initially doomed a proper inclusion of Latino history in the education those descendants received, Samponaro explained. Students living as far south as the Valley looked northward for their historical perspectives, rather than imagining a region, and themselves, integrated with lives, societies, and histories from across the river. The biased historical education smoothed "the assimilation of the area into the United States" and institutionalized an Americanized twentieth-century education that deprived the residents of any alternative perspectives on their past.[75]

The borderlands identity was based on how Valley residents perceived their region, or as academics might term it, how they perceived their "space." In 2014, Cameron Blevin's broad brushstrokes illustrated the contours of this concept in an article exploring how a Houston newspaper "constructed an imagined geography" at the end of the nineteenth century. Certainly a

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[74] Richard A. Garcia, *Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class: San Antonio, 1929-1941* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1991); De Leon, "Mexican Americans," in *Discovering Texas History*, 32-33; Johnson, "Unearthing the Hidden Histories of a Borderlands Rebellion," 19.

[75] Samponaro, "Teaching Local History," 365; also see Guadalupe San Miguel, *"Let Them All Take Heed:" Mexican Americans and the Campaign for Educational Equality in Texas, 1910-1981* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987).

newspaper is far different from a region or a people, but the mechanisms of social construction were similar. Some historians, Blevins explained, saw space as "constitutive, ever-changing, and strongly tied to processes of power," and Valley residents' sense of who controlled their region from generation to generation – along with the benefits or consequences of that control -- applied to this approach. Other historians argued that a region's residents "transform space into a particular, defined *place* by inscribing locations with meanings, values, feelings, and imaginings." They imagined their world in various ways, "from lived experiences to emotional attachments to acts of naming." Many Valley residents viewed their region, built their space, and constructed an identity based on their long chains of family and memory. They carried in their hearts the folk stories, songs, aspirations, and examples of dignified resistance. They emulated methods of adaptions to decades of social, economic, and racial change. They applied that sense of legacy and culture to their region – to their space – and by extension to themselves.[76]

More importantly, Valley residents were not simply people enduring political change. These actors in the borderlands took advantage of the change, defied its inherent restrictions, or redefined its significance to their space. Valerio-Jimenez wrote that "local inhabitants in both countries subverted [the border] by moving back and forth across the river to obtain political refuge, safety from legal prosecution, and economic opportunity."[77] They interacted with Mexican nationals as equals and with Anglos as subordinates. Facing down and slipping past Border Patrol checkpoints, which Valerio-Jimenez considers the descendants of "nineteenth-century [U.S.] forts," the borderlands residents challenged "the power of national-states to control populations along their borders" and linked their Valley to borderlands throughout the

[76] Cameron Blevins, "Space, National, and the Triumph of Region: A View of the World from Houston," *The Journal of American History* 101, no. 1 (June 2014): 122-147.
[77] Valerio-Jimenez, *River of Hope*, 3.

world, in which "populations of workers (similarly scorned and suspected of disloyalty)" struggle to survive in a society caught between multiple national pressures and discriminations.[78]

Colorful antiheroes, dramatic border violence, deadly racism, vital questions of identity, and the rise and fall of economic fortunes all shaped generations of Valley residents. A bitter legacy of racial violence ran through many communities and family histories. An Americanized education for generations of Valley children cleaved them from a Latino heritage that glowed in their hearts and minds. Class consciousness intertwined with identity and new power distribution among Anglos and Latinos. This was the social and political environment in which Ramirez's family grew and into which he was born.

Family and early life

Ramirez was proud of his deep 200-year-old Texas roots. His family, he wrote in 1976, lived "literally under all of its six flags."[79] He must have loved stories about his ancestors surviving the harsh landscape. He must have loved hearing how they built new communities and new futures for themselves and their families. As a boy he could look around Roma and see what they and other founding families created. Perhaps he wondered what contribution he would make and what accomplishments his future family would celebrate.[80]

Ramirez's paternal grandfather was Manuel Ramirez, born in Mier, Mexico, in 1869.[81] Ramirez explained that his grandfather later moved to the U.S. and became a citizen, one of the

[78] Valerio-Jimenez, *River of Hope*, 281-285.
[79] Ramirez to Dolph Briscoe, December 27, 1976, "Documents and Personal Letters, Mario and Sarah Ramirez. Scrapbook," Cabinet 14, Item 14, Ramirez Collection (hereafter cited as "Documents and Personal Letters").
[80] Mario E. Ramirez, interview by Robert Dale Long, *Pioneer Physician interview with Mario E. Ramirez, MD* (University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, 2011) from University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, *Community Video*, MPEG video, 60:07, http://library.uthscsa.edu/tag/mario-ramirez (hereafter cited as Ramirez, *Pioneer Physician Interview*).
[81] Zapata, "A Historical Archaeology of Roma, Texas," 29.

many "[Mexicans who moved into] the region between 1900 and 1930."[82] He worked as a postmaster, rancher, and U.S. customs officer. He later opened a general store that operated as long as 2005. He also built and "financed personally" the community's first water system, Ramirez recalled, which "consisted of a pump, a concrete reservoir, and two tanks on a tower." He built "water lines throughout the town and furnished unlimited water to residents" for two dollars a month.[83] He married Elodia Saenz Ramirez, who was born in Roma in 1876.[84] Her ancestors, Ramirez said, were "the founders of the community."[85] Her grandfather was Roma's first mayor.[86] The couple had five sons and three daughters, and they were affluent enough to send their children to San Antonio private schools.[87] A 1935 article celebrating Roma's economic growth cited his "construction of two modern brick rent cottages … on the highway" as an example of an exciting building boom.[88]

One of those five sons, Efren Manuel Ramirez, married Carmen Hinojosa, who was born in Estacion Aldamas, Mexico.[89] Her father was a rancher. "During the Pancho Villa revolution," Ramirez remembered, "her family moved temporarily to Roma," where she met her future husband. Efren Ramirez was also a postmaster and a rancher.[90] He ran a service station and sold Ford automobiles in Ciudad Miguel Aleman, Mexico, and in Rio Grande City. As the *Rio*

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[82] Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire*, 102.
[83] Ann Reed Washington, "A Doctor in the Family: Mario Ramirez, M.D." in *Rio Grande Round-Up*, eds. Valley By-Liners (Edinburg, TX: Border Kingdom Press, 1980), 351.
[84] Zapata, "A Historical Archaeology of Roma, Texas," 29.
[85] Mario E. Ramirez, interview by Penelope Borchers, Special Collections Librarian, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, *Oral history interview with Dr. Mario E. Ramirez* (University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, October 2, 2007) from University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, *Community Audio*, MP3 audio, 94:59, http://library.uthscsa.edu/tag/mario-ramirez/ (hereafter cited as Ramirez, *Oral history*). Mier is in the Mexican state of Tamaulipas. Town's location online here: http://tinyurl.com/ke5ysq8.
[86] Marcia Smith-Durk, "'Dr. Mario:' He's the Star in Starr County," *Dallas Times Herald*, December 17, 1978.
[87] Zapata, "A Historical Archaeology of Roma, Texas," 29; Washington, "A Doctor in the Family," 351.
[88] Brooks and Lott, "Roma is On the Up and Up."
[89] Ramirez, *Oral history*. Estacion Aldamas is in the Mexican state of Nuevo Leon. Town's location online here: http://tinyurl.com/lr79rbm.
[90] Kenneth Roberts, "Starr Pioneer Ramirez Succumbs," *Rio Grande Herald*, August 15, 1985, accessed October 15, 2014, http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth194989.

Grande Herald cited his father's building projects as signs of Roma's economic growth, they also cited Efren's report of more activity at the "Gulf Station" He "finds business so improved," the article explained, that he had to enlarge his store.[91] Efren's brother owned a drugstore, and he used his limited medical knowledge to act as the town's unofficial doctor. "He was my strongest mentor," Ramirez recalled years later.[92]

Mario Efrain Ramirez was born on Saturday, April 3, 1926, in Roma to Carmen and Efren Ramirez. Mary Ann Headley Edgerton, a Rio Grande City physician, delivered baby Mario.[93] His parents added to their family a younger sister on January 1, 1929, and a younger brother, Efren Manuel Jr., on April 15, 1933.[94] In 1940, Efren Jr. became gravely sick.[95] "Antibiotics were not immediately available in Starr County," Ramirez recalled, "and he died on April 21, 1940." His mother fell into such deep depression, he recalled, that "I feared she was going to die." His parents soon had another son, Roel, born in 1943, but they – and he – were never the same again.[96] "I always wanted to be a doctor," Ramirez remembered.[97] This devastating family loss, he wrote, "undoubtedly reinforced my desire to study medicine."[98]

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[91] Brooks, "Roma Continues to Grow," *Rio Grande Herald*, June 7, 1935.
[92] Ramirez, *Oral history;* Ramirez, "A Brief History of Medicine in South Texas," Cabinet 10, Item 10, Ramirez Collection (hereafter referred to as Ramirez, "A Brief History"), 8; Ramirez, *Pioneer Physician Interview*.
[93] Ramirez called Edgerton "one of the pioneer physicians of the area," and he idolized her as a groundbreaking woman and doctor. She still practiced medicine when Ramirez opened his Roma medical practice. He remembered that she carried a pistol to protect herself during her trips through isolated areas. Learn more about her here: http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth195032/m1/2.
[94] Ramirez, *Oral history.* Ramirez explained that he was meant to share his father's middle name, Efren. But "an error occurred at registration," and he was named Efrain instead. The correct name went to his younger brother.
[95] Ramirez, *Oral history;* Ramirez, "A Brief History," 8. Ramirez recalled that a Rio Grande City physician "initially diagnosed tetanus, but the diagnosis was changed to osteomyelitis of the knee (a bone infection)." His brother developed "[s]epticemia, and a renal shutdown followed, and he died shortly thereafter."
[96] Ramirez, *Oral history.*
[97] Ramirez, "Hurricane Beulah" scrapbook, 2.
[98] Ramirez, *Oral history;* Ramirez, "A Brief History," 8.

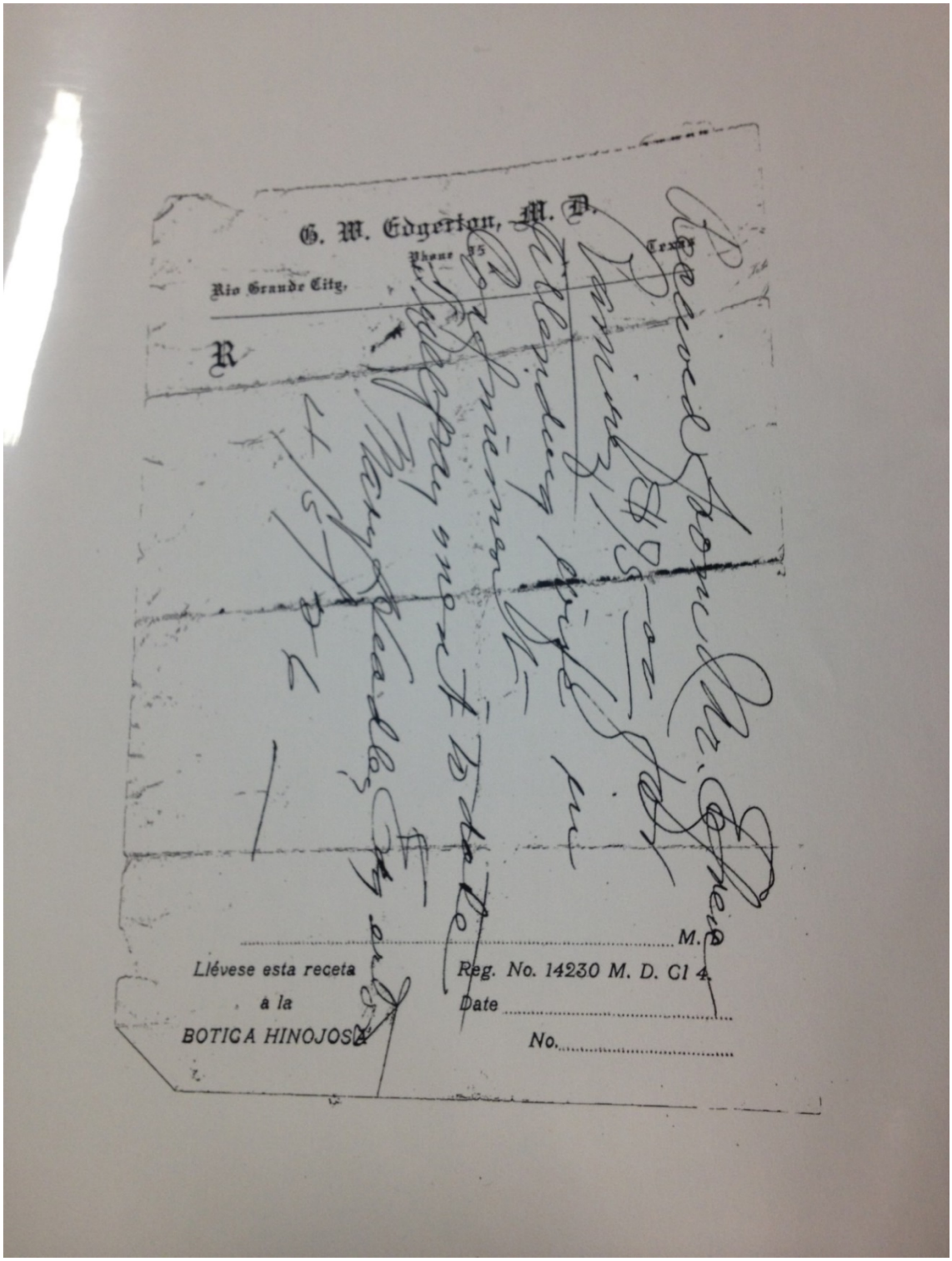

FIGURE 2
Dr. Mary H. Edgerton's receipt for delivering Ramirez. Photo by author.
Mario E. Ramirez, M.D. Library, UT Health Science Center Regional Academic Health Center, Harlingen, TX.

Ramirez was born into Roma's upper- or upper middle-class, who were probably part of the regional elite. He looked up at his elders and saw professionals and businessmen, government employees, educators, and community founders. He grew up in a sophisticated world of accomplished role models and relative technological comfort.[99] He played with a Kodak camera.[100] "We had radios when I was young," he remembered, "and TV came during my adolescence. Few people could afford it."[101] But his family could afford it. Perhaps he learned to feel an obligation to one's community. Whether it came in the form of a water plant, government service, amateur medical care, or teaching, the use of one's intellectual gifts had to produce something significant for society. Perhaps his elders expected Ramirez and his siblings and cousins to be more than simply one more generation of successful professionals. The first step in fulfilling those expectations was an Americanized education, which began at age five when an aunt took him to school with her. He learned fast. "By the time he was six," a 1980 profile claimed, Ramirez "was ready for the second grade."[102] Ramirez did not directly address in any memoirs the genesis of his sense of responsibility to his community but his professional decisions and speeches throughout his life indicate his commitment.

[99] Ramirez, *Oral history*. Ramirez admitted he had few hobbies and played few sports. "I was never physically very strong," he recalled. He played casual softball with school friends and played tennis in college. He collected stamps. He loved Ernest Hemingway novels, books about South Texas history, and stories of bullfighting.
[100] Cabinet 3, Item 1, Ramirez Collection. Ramirez's father often took photos of his children with a 1921 Pocket Eastman Kodak camera. He inspired his son to pursue a lifelong interest in amateur photography. His father's camera is described in the collection guide as a "1921 No. 1a Pocket Eastman Kodak." "Undoubtedly," Ramirez wrote, "this is what motivated my initial and very early interest in photography." In 2014, the Ramirez Collection displayed at least a half-dozen of his cherished cameras, including a "Hasselblad 500EL Camera." U.S. astronauts, Ramirez wrote in descriptive notes for the collection guide, adopted the Hasselblad after 1962 when it captured sharp and clear images from spaceflight. NASA partnered with the camera company to build the "ideal space camera," and the 500EL model took photos of the first manned moon landing in July 1969.
[101] Ramirez, *Oral history*.
[102] Washington, "A Doctor in the Family," 352.

"Both my parents encouraged me and never lost faith that I would succeed," Ramirez recalled.[103] He was bused to Rio Grande City High School throughout his senior year because Roma schools were not accredited to graduate students. But even that school had limitations. Ramirez remembered that the school tried to establish a physics class, but the woman assigned to teach it did not know anything about physics. On December 8, 1941, Ramirez remembered, a school bell summoned all the students to the auditorium, where they stared at a radio and heard Franklin Delano Roosevelt ask the U.S. Congress for a declaration of war against the Japanese Empire. The next day, he recalled, the woman stopped trying to teach physics and instead directed the class to build model Japanese airplanes "so we could [identify them] in case they [bombed] Starr County."[104] He also learned shorthand and taught himself to type up to 100 words per minute. Ramirez graduated in May 1942, he remembered, "somewhere in the top 10 percent." Ramirez was 16 years old. He intended to attend St. Mary's University in San Antonio but when two high school friends headed for Austin, "I changed my mind and joined them."[105] In June he entered the University of Texas at Austin. "I remembered the thrill that I used to experience," he wrote decades later, "when the tower was lit orange. … It seemed to glow from within and seemed somewhat mystical."[106] Despite feeling that he was not academically prepared – he considered his early performance "a catastrophic nightmare" -- he was so successful that he gained early admission to medical school and began studies in January 1945.

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[103] Ramirez, *Pioneer Physician Interview*. Ramirez began school in September 1931.
[104] Ramirez, *Oral history*; Ramirez, as interviewed by Erin Purdy, *On Serving as a Regent*, Shirley Bird Perry University of Texas Oral History Project, October 13, 2006, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin, Box 2x116, Folder 17, UT Oral History Project, 2005-present, also in the Briscoe Center, (hereafter cited as Ramirez, *On Serving as a Regent* transcript), 3; Ramirez, "Commencement Address," May 18, 1985, Cabinet 14, Item 9, 2, Ramirez Collection. Roosevelt's speech is online here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YhtuMrMVJDk.
[105] Ramirez, *Oral history*,
[106] Mario E. Ramirez to Lorene L. Rogers, 24 April 1979, "University of Texas. Distinguished Alumnus Award. Scrapbook," Cabinet 10, Item 12, Ramirez Collection (hereafter cited as Ramirez, "Distinguished Alumnus" scrapbook).

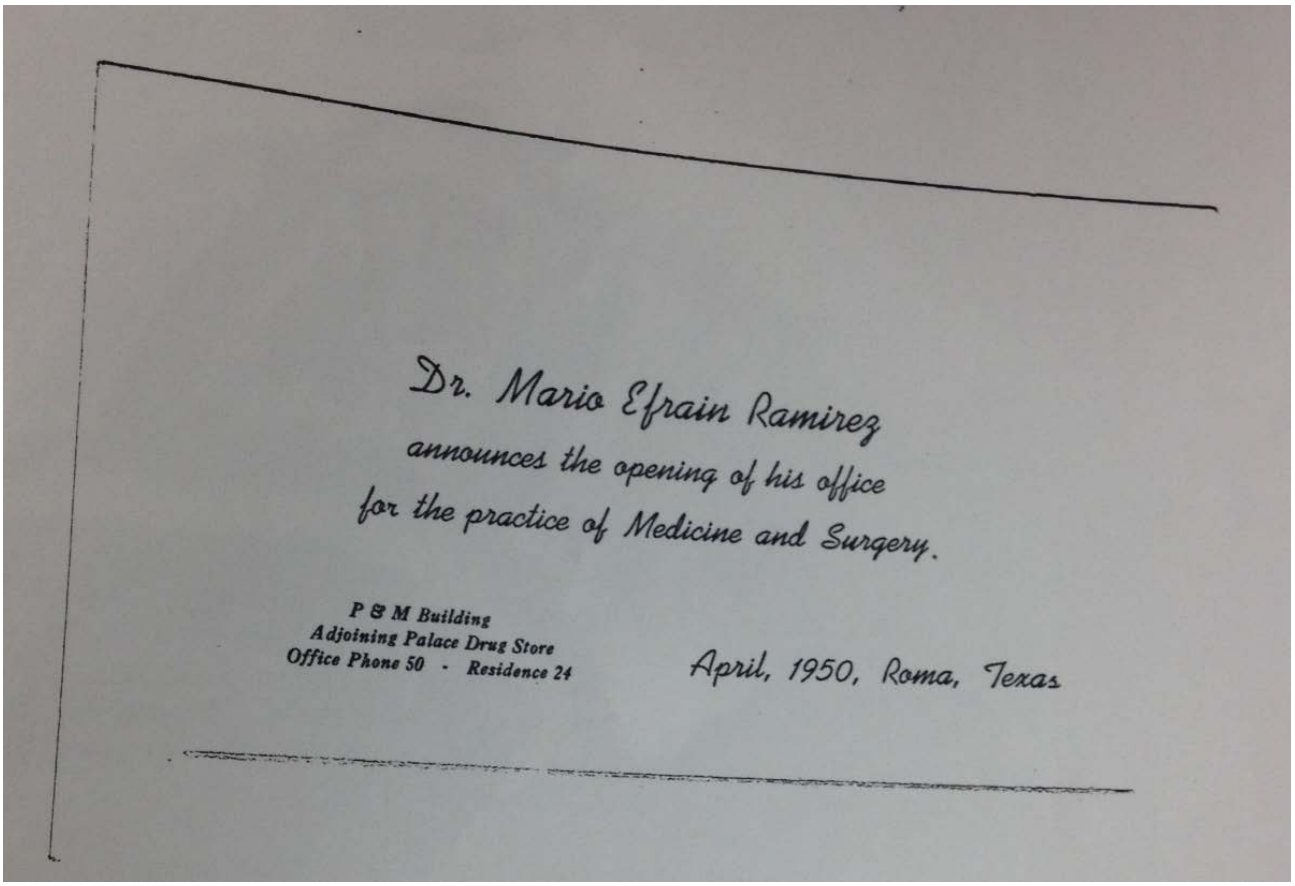

FIGURE 3
Ramirez's advertisement for his new medical practice in Roma. Photo by author.
Mario E. Ramirez, M.D. Library, UT Health Science Center Regional Academic Health Center, Harlingen, TX.

At the University of Texas, "I learned the value of knowledge," he told graduating students decades later, "and the importance of life-time learning."[107] In June 1948, he graduated from University of Tennessee's medical school in Memphis and began an internship and then a medical residency at Shreveport Charity Hospital in Louisiana.[108] Ramirez intended to focus on pediatrics, in part "because of the influence of my brother's death." But he realized that if he returned to Roma he had to generalize his medical practice. So he broadened his focus.

[107] Ramirez career timeline; Ramirez, *Oral history*; Ramirez, "Commencement Address," 2-4.
[108] Library Entrance, Item 3, was a reprint of his medical school diploma, dated June 7, 1948. Wall Display, Item 34, in the Ramirez Reading Room was a diploma from the E.A. Conway Memorial Hospital in Monroe, La., dated April 5, 1950, certifying that Ramirez completed a "Mixed Residency" from January 1 to April 1, 1950.

While in Shreveport, Ramirez recalled, he was eating lunch when he looked out the window and "saw this beautiful young nurse." She was Sarah Aycock, a student nurse from Shreveport Children's Hospital. They married in Roma during the 1949 Thanksgiving holidays, alongside his sister and her new husband.[109]

In April 1950, Ramirez completed his residency in Louisiana. That same year, the young couple returned to Roma and opened a family medical practice on April 21, 1950, exactly 10 years after his brother's death.[110] Ramirez was the only physician for a town of about 1,500 people in a county of less than 14,000.[111] "I always knew that I would return to my home," he remembered, even if it meant struggling financially in "the poorest county in the nation."

The couple wished to raise their children in the shade of a larger family network, and Ramirez knew only in Roma could that be achieved.[112] "It felt good to be home and amongst my people," he wrote. His parents and grandparents were nearby, and "my father's grandfather who defied the Indians … is still buried there. … That encouraged me to do the best that I could do to succeed."[113] He felt senses of kinship and responsibility to Roma. He knew he belonged there. "It was not a sacrifice to have returned," he asserted later. "[I]t would have been a sacrifice not to have done so."[114] Almost three decades later, Sarah Ramirez explained it best: "His roots were here. His heart was here."[115] Perhaps Ramirez knew those 200-year-old roots would energize and sustain him through the challenges he was about to confront. Those challenges included

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[109] Ramirez career timeline; Ramirez, *Oral history*. Sarah Aycock was born in 1930 in Dean, La.
[110] Ramirez, "A Brief History," 9.
[111] Ramirez, "Hurricane Beulah" scrapbook, 5; "Population History of Selected Cities, 1850-2000," *Texas Almanac*, Texas State Historical Association, accessed March 30, 2014, http://www.texasalmanac.com/sites/default/files/images/CityPopHist%20web.pdf; "Historical Census Browser," University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center, accessed March 30, 2014, http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/php/county.php. The 1950 U.S. census counted 1,576 people in Roma and 13,948 people in Starr County.
[112] They had five children who each became accomplished professionals: Mario Ramirez Jr., a judge, Patricia Anne Kittleman, an educator, physicians Norman M. Ramirez and Jaime E. Ramirez, and Roberto L. Ramirez, a lawyer.
[113] Ramirez, *Pioneer Physician Interview*.
[114] Ramirez, *Oral history*.
[115] Smith-Durk, "'Dr. Mario:' He's the Star in Starr County."

confronting "diseases that doctors in other areas of the country seldom encountered … and large numbers of elderly persons who had lost limbs because their diabetes had gone untreated."[116]

Establishing a new practice in a low-income region was not easy but those family connections helped. His father and uncle stood ready to help him personally and financially.[117] Ramirez borrowed $2,000 from his grandmother to rent a building from his aunt.[118] He and his wife built a small four-bed clinic next to his uncle's drugstore. They used "surplus army cots for beds and a few Sears & Roebuck bassinets for a nursery."[119] They made house calls whenever possible, and they improvised solutions to everyday problems. Sarah Ramirez, her husband recalled, "persevered, never complained, and never threatened to leave." She learned Spanish to better communicate with their patients, worked in the clinic, and accompanied him on house calls. Sarah never forgot the first baby they delivered. "We were paid 75 silver dollars," she recalled in a 1976 profile. "I still have every one of them."[120] When she could not go with Ramirez to deliver a baby, his father drove him to the home. The house often had no phone to call Ramirez to tell him exactly when the baby was coming, so his father had to wait in the car while his son waited inside with the mother.[121] "The practice was frontier medicine of sorts," Ramirez recalled. Money was always scarce. "There was one time," he recalled, "when I feared that bankruptcy would be inevitable."[122] Patients sometimes paid him with "kid goats and vegetables." Ramirez considered them simply "tokens of their appreciation."[123]

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[116] Linda Little, "A Man's Dedication, a Poor Land's Dream," *Dallas Morning News*, December 26, 1976, "Scrapbook," Cabinet 14, Item 4, Ramirez Collection (hereafter cited as Little, "A Man's Dedication").
[117] Ramirez, "Hurricane Beulah" scrapbook, 2-3.
[118] Smith-Durk, "'Dr. Mario:' He's the Star in Starr County."
[119] Little, "A Man's Dedication."
[120] Ramirez, "A Brief History," 9; Ramirez, *Oral history*; Little, "A Man's Dedication."
[121] Tom Fatherlee, "Valley Profiles … Mario Ramirez: Dr. Ramirez is Still Starr County's Main Medicine Man," *Monitor* (McAllen, TX), May 19, 1991.
[122] Ramirez, *Oral history.*
[123] Smith-Durk, "'Dr. Mario:' He's the Star in Starr County."

In 1951, the Starr County Commissioners' Court appointed Ramirez the county health officer, placing on his shoulders his first symbolic sash of state-sanctioned authority. In 1954, Ramirez assumed a role in mediating the flow of people across the border. He accepted an appointment as U.S. Public Health Officer at the "United States Quarantine Stations at Roma, Rio Grande City, and Falcon Dam." His duties, El Paso supervisory director Harold D. Lyman explained, included examining anyone crossing into the U.S. from Mexico for "presence of quarantinable, communicable, or contagious disease or having a defect which might … affect [their] ability to earn a living."[124] Lyman admitted that Ramirez was essential, if only because he was "the only physician in the area." Having Ramirez at those three entry points was crucial, he added, "as traffic at the … three ports of entry appears to be increasing." The letter did not say how long his term lasted, and Ramirez's memoirs did not specifically address the experience. Once his term ended, he made himself available as a "contract physician."[125] The borderlands citizen became part of the medical and bureaucratic structures that asserted a border and regulated who and what crossed it, structures that were not concerned about what people from the U.S. might be taking into Mexico. Any diseases or defects flowing southward through those same "ports of entry" would not be Ramirez's or the health service's official concern.

As his practice grew, Ramirez refashioned a house into "Roma's first maternity hospital" and clinic.[126] Patients first entered a small waiting room. When Ramirez was ready to meet them and gather their medical histories, they were moved into a middle room. He examined them in a larger room in the back of the building. They placed x-ray and EKG machines in the

[124] "Order of Commissioners' Court Appointing a County Health Officer for Starr County, Texas," Starr County Commissioners' Court, January 25, 1951, "Documents and Personal Letters," Ramirez Collection; Harold D. Lyman to Ramirez, 23 February 1954, "Documents and Personal Letters," Ramirez Collection.
[125] Toni Ivey, "How is Dr. Mario?" *Texas Medicine* 64, no. 1 (January 1968): 116.
[126] Ramirez, "A Brief History," 10; Ramirez, *Oral history.*

basement.[127] At first, Ramirez did not have an autoclave, an oven-like steamer, big enough to sterilize the medical gloves and other equipment needed to safely deliver babies. He had to borrow his parents' pressure cooker to sufficiently sterilize his equipment.[128] But despite the challenges of these first few years, Ramirez proudly recalled that "we never lost a mother."[129]

The Ramirez team pushed "very intensive inoculation programs" at schools throughout Starr County. He recalled that they inoculated schoolchildren against "diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, smallpox, and polio." They also treated rattlesnake bites, typhoid, tuberculosis, and "an occasional case of leprosy."[130] They likely also confronted and endured patients' beliefs in folk remedies or religion-based explanations for medical ailments.[131]

Ramirez's lifelong roots in the community at first posed a problem. Some people, he believed, were jealous of his success. Some patients only remembered him as a child on a bicycle or "in knee pants, and it is difficult to gain confidence, especially when it comes to middle-aged and older women," he remembered later.[132] "[A]t first I did not really have their full trust."[133] But he perceived that their shared familiarity gradually matured into a trusting doctor-patient relationship. "The family physician," he explained later, "enjoys a unique position whereby …

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[127] Ramirez, *Oral history.*
[128] Ramirez, "Hurricane Beulah" scrapbook, 4.
[129] Ramirez, "A Brief History," 10; Ramirez, *Oral history.*
[130] Ramirez, *Pioneer Physician Interview*.
[131] Josephine Elizabeth Baca, "Some Health Beliefs of the Spanish Speaking." *The American Journal of Nursing* 69, no. 10 (October 1969): 2172-2176; Ray Brown, Ramirez, E. Fuller Torrey, "Could the Hangup be Medical Folklore?" *Patient Care* (September 30, 1972): 61-75. The 1972 article encouraged medical care providers to at least endure patients' folklore beliefs, if not use them to comfort already-distressed people and earn their cooperation. It included a fascinating sidebar on page 72 that explained five popular Mexican-American "diseases" and their "treatments:" mal ojo, empacho, susto, caida de mollera, and mal puesto.
[132] "'Dr. Mario' Went Home And Won Their Hearts: Brother's Death Moves Roma M.D. To Medicine," *Laredo Times*, February 18, 1968.
[133] Ramirez, *Oral history.*

he or she becomes a surrogate member of his or her patients' families. … which is emotionally very rewarding beyond description."[134]

Ramirez also confronted professional problems that would plague him throughout his career. He joined the Hidalgo-Starr Counties Medical Association but felt isolated from other doctors who might advise him on difficult cases.[135] Few doctors wished to work in the area for more than several months. Despite the fact that his own wife worked alongside him, Ramirez reasoned that wives of the doctors wished to live in a better city with better schools for their children.[136] Physicians likely saw little practical benefit for their time spent in the impoverished region, especially when compared to the tremendous financial, familial, and professional sacrifices required. Despite the health care benefits they certainly brought to underserved communities, the overwhelming disadvantages probably made the endeavor of "frontier medicine" unsustainable over time. Those problems only further highlight the determination Ramirez must have felt to make his medical practice endure, grow, and succeed.

Ramirez felt throughout his young adulthood a desire to serve in the U.S. military. But the military never seemed to need him. Once he turned 18 in 1944, the military classified him 4F because, he wrote later, "I was very much underweight [and] had very poor dentition. …" Ramirez went on to medical school after that. During his last year of study, in 1947, Ramirez and some friends drove to Cincinnati, Ohio, he wrote years later, "to enroll in the United States Navy and possibly serve an internship [but] openings were not available." Even after Ramirez opened his medical practice in Roma, he remained in contact with the draft board. The board "informed [him] repeatedly that I was not needed at that time." But in late January 1955, Ramirez learned

[134] Ramirez, *Pioneer Physician Interview*.
[135] Ramirez, *Oral history.*
[136] Smith-Durk, "'Dr. Mario:' He's the Star in Starr County."

that his deferment would expire that May. In the fall of 1955, Ramirez trained at Gunter Air Force Base in Montgomery, Ala., and was commissioned a captain. He was assigned to the 6048th Air Base Wing at Haneda Airport in Tokyo, Japan.[137] Ramirez remembered feeling like he had been hit with a sledgehammer when he heard of his destination: "I was going to Tokyo, the largest city in the world!" He asked Rafael Garza, a McAllen doctor, to manage his practice during his tour of duty.[138] Ramirez worked at the Tokyo International Airport Dispensary, a facility where servicemen obtained medical supplies or medicine.[139] The "Japan tour changed our lives," he wrote. His third child, Norman, was born on the U.S. base. Ramirez tried to instill a "family practice" structure that ensured the same doctor consistently cared for the same Japanese and American families. Near the end of his tour, the Air Force transferred him to an Air Force hospital in Laredo in June 1957. Ramirez returned to Roma "with renewed vigor" later that year and was honorably discharged on April 8, 1958, five days after his thirty-second birthday.[140]

In 1958, Ramirez purchased a building from Genaro Madrigal, a leading local businessman, and turned it into a 15-bed hospital and dental clinic.[141] He equipped it with old hospital equipment, including "an old autoclave that we feared might blow up any day."

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[137] Ramirez, "Hurricane Beulah" scrapbook, 5; Ramirez, *Prologue*, "Documents and Personal Letters, Mario and Sarah Ramirez. Scrapbook," Cabinet 14, Item 1, Ramirez Collection (hereafter cited as Ramirez, *Prologue*), 2.
[138] Ramirez, *Oral history*.
[139] "Mario Efrain Ramirez, M.D." biographical sketch.
[140] Ramirez, "Hurricane Beulah" scrapbook 5; Ramirez, *Pioneer Physician Interview*; Ramirez, *Prologue*, 2.
[141] Barbara A. Meissner, Kristi Miller Ulrich, Zapata, and Steve A. Tomka, "Archeological Testing and Monitoring of the Proposed Roma Visitor Complex, City of Roma, Starr County, Texas," *Archeological Survey Report*, no. 336, Center for Archeological Research, The University of Texas at San Antonio, 2005, accessed November 27, 2014, http://car.utsa.edu/CARResearch/Publications/ASRFiles/301-400/ASR%20No.%20336.pdf; Ramirez, "A Brief History of Medicine in South Texas," Commencement Addresses, UT Austin, M.[E.] Ramirez, M.D. Scrapbook, Cabinet 14, Item 10, Ramirez Collection, 19.

FIGURE 4
The Manuel Ramirez Hospital and Dental Clinic in Roma, Texas. November 2014.
Photograph by author.

He named Starr County's first hospital for Manuel Ramirez, his grandfather, who helped his grandson pay for medical school but died before he saw him graduate.[142] The air-conditioned Manuel Ramirez Hospital made it easier and safer for Ramirez to treat seriously ill patients.[143] The first floor offered patients a large waiting room, a laboratory "tended by a registered lab

[142] "Young Roma Doctor Dedicates New Hospital to Grandparents," *Laredo Times*, July 13, 1960, 3, Newspapers.com, accessed November 7, 2014, http://www.newspapers.com/image/51133162/?terms=mario+ramirez+roma; Dave Harmon, "The Amazing Dr. Mario: Affection for Legendary Starr County Doctor Grows," *Monitor* (McAllen, TX), 1993. "Edward R. Hord-Office/Manuel Ramirez," *Roma National Historic Landmark District* (Roma, TX). The building was built in 1853 for Hord, a lawyer "who represented Mexican heirs of original landowners in the area." Confederate forces used it during the Civil War. Local historians speculate that by the 1880s Ramirez's ancestors recast it for "commercial/residential use." Ramirez turned it into a hospital.
[143] Ramirez, "Hurricane Beulah" scrapbook, 5; "Dr. Mario and Sarah Ramirez Honored as Texas Heroes," *HSC News*, April 3, 2007, http://www.uthscsa.edu/hscnews/singleformat.asp?newID=2352; Ramirez, *Oral history*.

technician," three large examining rooms, "two wings for our hospital patients, [and] an operating room and scrub room." The second floor contained rooms for pediatric and obstetrics patients.[144] By July 1960, Drs. Luis Davila, a physician and surgeon, and Rodolfo Canales, a dentist, assisted Ramirez.[145] Laredo surgeon Leonidas Cigarroa "offered to come to Roma once a week to perform major surgery on patients" who could not afford to go to McAllen or Laredo. One of those trips fundamentally inspired one of Cigarroa's young assistants, his nephew Francisco, to pursue a medical career.[146] The hospital's blood usually came from Laredo or McAllen, Ramirez remembered, but for emergencies he had a "walking blood bank." He made a register of local donors and their blood types. When he could not wait for a blood shipment, Ramirez looked at his register and summoned the people with the necessary blood type, and they came like volunteer firemen carrying water buckets, ready to help his patients.[147]

His ambitions, motivations, and actions all suggest that he deeply believed in a quartet of key beliefs: conscience, community, commitment, and education. His conscience demanded that he remain in the impoverished region, endure his own financial struggles, and resist any temptation to leave the Valley like so many other doctors and students had done. It was a belief he must have believed was legitimate, insightful, and morally right. His belief in community possibly sprung from his pride in his family legacy. He certainly believed that his contribution to the community was crucial, positive, and enriching to all its citizens. His belief in commitment kept his course steady, silenced his self-doubts, and veiled his concerns over the future. He was

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[144] Ramirez, "A Brief History," 12; Ramirez, *Oral history.*
[145] "Young Roma Doctor Dedicates New Hospital to Grandparents," 3.
[146] Ramirez, *Pioneer Physician Interview*; Ramirez, *My Years as Vice President*, 7-8. See Note 519 for Francisco Cigarroa's memory of how Ramirez inspired him.
[147] Ramirez, "Opportunities available for young doctors contemplating small town practice; rewards and trials it offers; and what extra responsibilities a small town practice entails compared to that in a large city," Ramirez Collection (hereafter cited as Ramirez, "Opportunities"), 9. When the magazine *Texas Medicine* posed interview questions for a January 1968 article about Ramirez, he sent them this undated, typed, sixteen-page response.

determined to help the sick and ailing around him. He was committed to making a difference as his elders had before him. Education was key to that effort -- for him and for the many more physicians he hoped would follow him. Bright students like Francisco Cigarroa needed better schools to prepare them for medical training. Medical students needed more hospitals and medical schools to prepare them for health care in the borderlands. Doctors needed sophisticated networks to continue their professional training and to learn from more experienced colleagues.

Beyond that Roma community, Ramirez, his family, his patients, colleagues, and neighbors were all part of a bigger world. "[L]iving in the borderlands," Anzaldua grimly mused, "produces knowledge by being within a system while also retaining the knowledge of an outsider who comes from outside the system."[148] They were part of a special population rooted in land and culture sliced away from its mother country. For example, according to a map, a treaty, a passport, or a checkpoint, Ramirez was officially an American, with all the rights and privileges that came with such citizenship. He was, also, officially not Mexican. These were nationalist designations determined by men in cities far from the Valley, with views of the Rio Grande far different than many Valley residents, who saw the river as simply something to be crossed during the course of a regular day. From the perspective of Ramirez and his family, his medical care touched people in all directions, including south of the border. The scope of his father's business existed on both sides of that border. The fluidity of this perceived space – the Valley – was a daily reality to Ramirez and his fellow Valley citizens.[149] To paraphrase Anzaldua, they

[148] Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 7.
[149] Paul Kramer, "A Border Crosses," *New Yorker*, September 20, 2014, accessed November 9, 2014, http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/moving-mexican-border. The article examines life in the Chamizal, a chunk of land ceded to the U.S. when the Rio Grande's course shifted south in 1864. In 1964, the U.S. returned the land to Mexico, and the U.S. residents had to leave their homes within weeks. Kramer's piece offers useful illustrations of fluid pre-1964 life in the borderlands. Also see "50 Years Ago, A Fluid Border Made the U.S. 1 Square Mile Smaller," NPR, September 25, 2014, accessed November 9, 2014, http://www.npr.org/2014/09/25/350885341/50-years-ago-a-fluid-border-made-the-u-s-1-square-mile-smaller.

lived within a nation established north of the river, and they carried within themselves the memories of how that nation was resisted. Naturally, no normal man or woman living their life in Roma or anywhere else in the Valley looked around, frowned, put their hands on their hips, and contemplated their complicated theoretical borderlands existence. Rio Grande City resident Ricardo S. Sanchez remembered that never "did I ever see the Rio Grande as an international border or limitation. … it was only a topographical feature that we had to live with given that our lives were inextricably linked to our family and our livelihood in Mexico."[150] Ramirez did not directly address borderlands issues in his memoirs or interviews. But he did not have to. That fluidity of perception, that natural blurring of official borders and lines and nations, is one of the most interesting aspects of life and lifestyle in the Valley, and it only enriches the Ramirez story.

By September 1967, Ramirez could look back at his professional life with some degree of satisfaction. He established his medical practice and his family in a comfortable community. His brief assignment to Japan opened his eyes to the larger world, to foreign cultures, and, more importantly, to a deeper sense of professional self-confidence and determination to improve his South Texas hometown. He helped build a new medical facility – the only one between Laredo and Mission -- and in 1964 added six more beds and a surgical wing. As its chief of staff he led efforts to improve the lives of hundreds if not thousands of people throughout Starr County.[151]

Throughout it all, he likely looked to his elders and predecessors for inspiration. He probably kept his grandfather's community accomplishments at the forefront of his mind, alongside his uncle's initiatives to help his "patients." He also likely admired courageous pioneer physicians like Edgerton, who delivered him in 1926. Her care for her isolated and impoverished

[150] Ricardo S. Sanchez, email interview with author, November 11, 2014. Sanchez joined JROTC in high school. "There was absolutely nothing," he wrote later, "that I wanted to do more than join the military." After college he was commissioned an Army officer. Lt. Gen. Sanchez retired in 2006 after thirty-three years in uniform.
[151] Ramirez, "Hurricane Beulah" scrapbook, 2.

patients regardless of the personal cost anticipated Ramirez's own struggle to bring medical care to some of the same families.[152] Ramirez asked for little in return. "The greatest reward," he remembered years later, "was the love and devotion that our patients expressed so vividly so very often."[153] Even as ominous tropical storm clouds darkened the eastern September skies, Ramirez must have sensed that he was making a positive difference in people's lives.

[152] Travis Whitehead, "Dr. Mere, Medicine Woman," *Texas Highways*, July 13, 2012, accessed October 13, 2014, http://texashighways.com/people/item/6343-dr-mere-medicine-woman. Edgerton died in 1952.
[153] Ramirez, *Pioneer Physician Interview*.

CHAPTER 3: BEULAH

Beulah was one of the most powerful hurricanes in U.S. history, and its historic floods in late September 1967 devastated the Valley. Ramirez assumed a leadership role in the relief efforts that followed. But he was more than a heroic physician. Ramirez did not simply impress a multitude of civilian, medical, and military officials with his professional skill and take-charge style. The crisis also highlighted his sophisticated sensitivity to Mexican nationalist pride and his patient tolerance of Mexican officials asserting state sovereignty over their citizens sheltering in Texas. Ramirez executed a masterful tightrope walk between borderland diplomacy and the professional urgency Beulah's destruction demanded.[154]

Ramirez and the Valley both experienced at least three significant events by September 1967. In April, Ramirez tried to ignore a "very severe pain in his arm and back." The cause was a problematic cervical disc, which required emergency surgery in Laredo. But Ramirez focused on a larger problem: Who would fill in for him at the Roma hospital? When word spread that he needed coverage, if only for a short time, McAllen physicians Forrest Fitch, Rafael Garza, and Hillburn Gilliam, and Laredo's Cigarroa took turns caring for Ramirez's patients.

Cigarroa and the Texas Medical Association finally found "Boyce Elliott, an intern at Robert B. Green [Hospital] in San Antonio," to handle the hospital. Elliott noticed his patient load at the hospital was unusually light, and he mentioned it to the nurses. They explained that

[154] Ramirez, "Hurricane Beulah: Sept. 19th to Oct. 3, 1967. Roma, Texas," Ramirez Collection, "Hurricane Beulah" scrapbook (hereafter cited as Ramirez, Beulah memoirs), 4. In late 1967, the Ex-Students' Association of the University of Texas at Austin asked alumni to contribute their memories of Hurricane Beulah to the Harry E. Moore Disaster Research Center archives. Ramirez responded with a 39-page day-by-day recollection that he initially wrote three weeks after the end of relief efforts. He then re-edited the piece and sent it to the Moore archives, where it joined more than a dozen other Beulah memories from alumni throughout South Texas. His memories and those of others who contributed to the archives are included throughout this chapter. The collection is now at the university's Dolph Briscoe Center for American History. The finding aid is online here: http://www.lib.utexas.edu/taro/utcah /00232/cah-00232.html. As he narrates the story, too often Ramirez uses "We" without specifying who he meant (besides himself). For the purposes of this analysis, the author will refer to him as a single actor unless Ramirez clearly specifies another participant.

many patients decided to wait until Ramirez returned rather than have an unfamiliar physician treat them. Despite the chilly reception, Elliott reveled in the wide variety of major and minor problems his few patients brought him. He later told Ramirez that the tour made him feel like a real doctor. "The feeling," he wrote, "is not a thing to be put well on paper."[155] After two weeks, Dr. Roberto Cuellar of Del Rio took over for Elliott, who moved to Michigan and served in the Air Force.[156] Ramirez recovered and joined Cuellar as relieved patients filled the waiting room.

The incident was significant in three ways. First, it was illustrative of Ramirez's own problematic health throughout his life. He admitted that as a child he was never physically strong. He endured the cervical disc incident, in the late 1980s he had a gall bladder operation, and in the 1990s he faced prostate cancer. His tendency for overwork in adulthood hardly contributed to his overall health. A doctor who ignored his own body's warning signs was perhaps medically irresponsible, especially if he was his community's only trusted physician, as Elliott quickly learned. Perhaps that was exactly why he ignored the signs, hoping against hope that they might fade away, as he anticipated the disruptions his absence might cause. Ramirez did not discuss in his memoirs or archived correspondence his rationale for delaying treatment. Second, the incident illustrated the region's supportive medical network, from Laredo, McAllen, and San Antonio, that jumped into action to help a fellow physician when he had no choice but become a patient. They combined their devotion to the profession with their respect for him and his work. Finally, the incident demonstrated how the Ramirez Hospital was a space in which a physician like Elliott was exposed to the intensity of Valley problems, which inspired him and re-defined his understanding of his social significance as a family doctor. Thanks to Ramirez, the

[155] Boyce Elliott to Ramirez, 9 May 1967, "Documents and Personal Letters," Ramirez Collection.
[156] Ivey, "How is Dr. Mario," 116-117.

hospital was more than a training ground for interns – it was a place where physicians likely realized their fullest potentials as healers, counselors, and role models in a multiracial society.

The year's second pre-Beulah incident loomed over Starr County for months, and Ramirez was inevitably pulled into the drama. In 1966, labor organizer Eugene Nelson assisted Cesar Chavez strike against California grape farmers. He then traveled to Houston to help Chavez battle wine companies. When that contest successfully sparked labor negotiations, Nelson needed a new crusade. In May 1966, he traveled to the Valley, where he met with workers in Roma and Rio Grande City. "By the end of May," historian Richard R. Bailey wrote, "he had signed up 700 members into the Independent Workers Association" (IWA).

On June 1, 1966, "in the middle of the cantaloupe and honeydew harvests," Nelson orchestrated a labor strike against the melon industry, sent picketers to a half-dozen farms and melon-packing centers, and demanded a labor contract and wage increases. Roma Mayor Ricardo Esparza, the GI Forum, and LULAC, among other leaders and groups, supported the action. The melon-growers, attempting to protect "8,000 acres of cantaloupes worth over two million dollars," responded by sending trucks to Roma's international bridge to gather "greencarders," Mexican laborers willing to do the work.[157] The protest ultimately failed, but by June 10 it garnered national headlines, and so the IWA planned a march from Rio Grande City to Austin.[158] It caught the attention of religious leaders, politicians, and Texas Gov. John Connally, who met the marchers in New Braunfels and tried to re-assure them that he understood their needs. Unconvinced, the marchers wound their way to Austin, where more politicians made

[157] Mary Margaret McAllen Amberson, "'Better to Die on Our Feet, Than to Live On Our Knees': United Farm Workers and Strikes in the Rio Grande Valley," *Journal of South Texas History* 20, no. 1 (2007): 61.
[158] Bailey, "The Starr County Strike," 46-49.

speeches to their rally. But little of substance was accomplished, and labor leaders returned to Rio Grande City to plan their next round of protests.[159]

Tensions between workers, law enforcement officers, and private citizens in Rio Grande City were heated. "From October 1966 to June 1967," Baily explained, the town saw "vandalism, chaos, and harassment of both law officers and citizens." Hundreds of students and activists, historian Mary Margaret McAllen Amberson wrote, "brought two tons of food and clothing to Rio Grande City at Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter."[160] When 1967's melon-picking season began again, the violence intensified. Strikes disrupted operations, trucks were sent to pick up "greencarders," protestors tried to stop them from crossing, and Texas Rangers pushed back the protestors. Again, the violence became national news, and the Texas Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights "met in Rio Grande City to investigate. ..." They found evidence that Rangers and police abused protestors, and committee members "recommended that their findings be forwarded to the Justice Department."[161]

The unrest escalated on June 1, 1967, when two protestors, Magadeleno Dimas and Benito Rodriguez drove home after a hunting trip. When they passed a melon-packing warehouse, the pair "brandished their rifles and yelled their support for the strikers." A worker in the shed saw men with weapons, and when they drove away he shot at them. He then told Rangers they threatened his life. The Rangers tracked down Dimas and Rodriguez in a house and entered. The strikers alleged that the Rangers beat them and kicked them. The Rangers claimed appropriate procedures were followed when arresting armed ex-convicts.[162]

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[159] Bailey, "The Starr County Strike," 50-52.
[160] Amberson, "'Better to Die on Our Feet, Than to Live On Our Knees': United Farm Workers and Strikes in the Rio Grande Valley," 70.
[161] Bailey, "The Starr County Strike," 52-55.
[162] Bailey, "The Starr County Strike," 56-57.

Four weeks later, the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor – including Massachusetts Democratic Sen. Edward Kennedy – opened hearings in Rio Grande City to learn more about the incident.[163] The subcommittee learned that two doctors examined Dimas and Rodriguez. The first was Ramirez, who "found the men conscious, oriented, and not complaining of any malaise." Bizarrely, the second doctor, Ramiro Casso of McAllen, "found just the opposite, that Dimas suffered a concussion and damage to his spine as a result of a severe beating."[164] The subcommittee entered into its records a June 1967 *Texas Observer* article titled "The Rangers and La Huelga," which briefly explored the discrepancy between Ramirez's and Casso's examination of Dimas, but it did not clarify anything. Ramirez testified to the subcommittee on June 29, and his recorded testimony also sheds little light on what happened. Ramirez said that when he examined Dimas, he "checked his blood pressure … his pupils … his pulse … his reflexes … and he appeared to be normal in every respect. …" Ramirez added that Dimas "had a laceration above the left ear approximately one inch in diameter. It was well sutured, there was no drainage, [and] the edges were well approximated." It is difficult to imagine Ramirez not asking Dimas why he needed a doctor to examine him or why he had a one-inch cut in his head. If Dimas truly had a concussion, perhaps he was too disoriented to explain himself, and perhaps it was somehow more evident by the time Casso examined the labor worker. Casso said that Dimas claimed that Ramirez spent only ten seconds examining him, which is hard to believe if Ramirez truly performed the examination he claimed to have made,

[163] Bailey, "The Starr County Strike," 58-59.
[164] Amberson, "'Better to Die on Our Feet, Than to Live On Our Knees': United Farm Workers and Strikes in the Rio Grande Valley," 76.

and the short sense of time may suggest Dimas' disorientation.[165] Ramirez never mentioned the incident in his memoirs or archived correspondence.

Little resulted from the hearings. The labor "campaign collapsed when the senators left Starr County," Bailey wrote, and the "melon harvest ended." Protestors helplessly watched as trucks carried off "40,000 boxes of cantaloupes and 340,000 boxes of honeydew melons."[166] Plans for renewed labor action sputtered, and by September it was too late to do anything else. Beulah shattered the industry, crippled the regional infrastructure for months, and blew away "all hope and desire" for more labor activity.[167]

The third significant development in 1967 was not political or medical. It was natural. More than a dozen inches of rain in the final weeks of August drenched the Valley. The farms, fields, ranchlands, and communities were saturated, and streams and rivers were full.[168] The last thing the Valley needed in September was more rain. By early September, officials from the International Boundary and Water Commission were optimistic. They "foresaw no more flooding along the Rio Grande."[169]

Beulah was the second named storm of the 1967 hurricane season and at the time was the third largest hurricane of the twentieth century.[170] During its 12-day march across the Caribbean region, the storm grew and shrank and grew again, but it never lost its deadly potency. After

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[165] "Hearings before the Subcommittee on Migratory labor of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare," Migratory Labor Legislation, United States Senate, 90th Congress, June 29, 1967, Rio Grande City, TX, and June 30, 1967, Edinburg, TX, 443-445, 467.
[166] Amberson, "'Better to Die on Our Feet, Than to Live On Our Knees': United Farm Workers and Strikes in the Rio Grande Valley," 72-73.
[167] Bailey, "The Starr County Strike," 58-59.
[168] "Hurricane Beulah, Sept. 8-21, 1967," U.S. Corps of Engineers, 1968, accessed July 10, 2014, http://cees.tamiu.edu/covertheborder/RISK/Exerpts.%20USACE%20REport.pdf, 10.
[169] John B. Anderson, "Beulah: A Report in Retrospect On the Third-Largest Hurricane of Record," *Corpus Christi Caller*, September 27, 1967, box 4za441, Moore Papers.
[170] Roy Sylvan Dunn, "Hurricanes," *Handbook of Texas Online*, Texas State Historical Association, accessed October 17, 2013, http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/ybh01.

Beulah's birth on September 5 and its upgrade to hurricane status soon after, it strengthened quickly as it swirled westward.[171]

Beulah's downpours relieved a drought in Puerto Rico that had "burned pastures and brought disease to the coffee trees." But it provided few other benefits to the Caribbean region. The hurricane's floods killed more than a dozen people on the islands of Martinique and St. Vincent. By the time it swung south of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, Beulah's sustained winds measured at least 100 mph. It weakened to a tropical storm south of Jamaica. The hurricane then regained most of its power and slammed into Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula with sustained winds around 120 mph. It survived its assault on Mexico – eleven people did not -- and strengthened still further over the warm Gulf of Mexico, with sustained winds exceeding 160 mph.[172] Texans along the Gulf Coast faced what might be the storm of a lifetime.[173]

Sunday, September 17

Lenora Going Rentfro, a counselor at Cummings Junior High School in Brownsville, remembered that Sunday began like "an ordinary enough day." But as she listened to news reports and weather advisories, her impression quickly changed. The Brownville Weather Bureau and the Texas Adjutant General's Department monitored Beulah's progress since

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[171] Metz*, South Texas Weather Journal.* See Appendix 1 for an explanation of hurricane wind speeds and categories of intensity. The formal Saffir-Simpson hurricane scale was not officially established until 1971, but its now-familiar categories are a useful and informal guide when considering Beulah's growth and strength over time.

[172] "These Ladies Led Brief, Violent Lives," *All Hands*, Bureau of Naval Personnel, U.S. Navy, January 1969, no. 624, 57, accessed June 25, 2014, http://www.navy.mil/ah_online/archpdf/ah196901.pdf; Arnold L. Sugg and Joseph M. Pelissier, el. al., "The Hurricane Season of 1967," *Monthly Weather Review*, 96, no. 4 (April 1968): 246, accessed September 16, 2014, http://www.aoml.noaa.gov/general/lib/lib1/nhclib/mwreviews/1967.pdf; "Hurricane Beulah: Preliminary Report with Advisories and Bulletins Issued," U.S. Weather Service, Environmental Science Services Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce, September 29, 1967, http://docs.lib.noaa.gov/rescue/hurricanes/QC9452B485H81967.pdf, 1-26. This fascinating anthology of somber and detailed advisories enables the reader to trace Beulah's evolution as the meteorologists did, as they gradually realized with horrific clarity that they were witnessing one of the greatest hurricanes they had ever seen.

[173] "It Happened in Texas," 1967, Office of Civil Defense, 9:15, Texas Department of Public Safety Historical Museum and Research Center, *Texas Archive of the Moving Picture*, accessed July 10, 2014, http://www.texasarchive.org/library/index.php?title=It_Happened_in_Texas.

September 9. After a week of watching Beulah ravage the Caribbean and Mexico, Maj. Gen. Thomas S. Bishop, the adjutant general, issued "Oplan Hurricane," a disaster support plan that alerted military units throughout Texas.[174] Texas coastal residents like Rentfro were advised to track Beulah themselves and plan accordingly.[175] At 10 a.m., the weather service placed the South Texas coast under a hurricane watch. Beulah was more than five hundred miles away, but it pushed the tides higher and sent massive waves crashing onto the beaches.[176]

State agencies, hospitals, and local, county, and regional governments also realized that Beulah would partially or directly strike South Texas. Tense officials gathered in the Civil Defense Emergency Operations Center (EOC), located in the Department of Public Safety's underground compound in Austin, to watch Beulah's progress and coordinate "the biggest disaster operation" in Texas history.[177] Representatives from "the State Health Department, Texas Employment Commission, Department of Public Safety (DPS), Texas Highway Department, Board of Insurance, Department of Public Welfare, Adjutant General's Department, Railroad Commission, Texas Aeronautics Commission, plus the American Red Cross, the regional Office of Civil Defense, and the Office of Emergency Planning" all comprised the State Disaster Council. Men wearing ties and dark suits sat around a rectangular conference table covered with papers, maps, and books.[178] Gov. Connally moved into an office next to the EOC

[174] "Guardsmen Called to Storm Duty," *Texas Defense Digest*, Texas Department of Public Safety, 15, no. 8 (October-November 1967), box 4za428, Moore Papers, 6.
[175] Lenora Going Rentfro, "Hurricane Beulah," box 4za428, Harry Estill Moore Papers, 1915-1977, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin (hereafter cited as Rentfro memoir, Moore Papers), 1. Rentfro donated a nine-page memoir of her Beulah experience to the Disaster Research Center.
[176] Sugg and Pelissier, "The Hurricane Season of 1967," 247; Anderson, "Beulah: A Report in Retrospect."
[177] "Hurricane Beulah Third Largest," *Texas Defense Digest* 15, no. 8 (October-November 1967), box 4za428, Moore Papers, 3. For a short description of Public Law 81-875 and the Disaster Relief Act of 1950, which assisted with regional recovery, see "Session No. 7: The Political and Policy Basis of Emergency Management," Objective 7.3, Emergency Management Institute, Federal Emergency Management Agency, http://tinyurl.com/o8dd66w, 6-7.
[178] "It Happened in Texas," *Texas Archive of the Moving Picture*. DPS director Col. Homer Garrison Jr., administered the EOC, which was built to withstand a nuclear attack on Texas and coordinate recovery efforts.

from where he administered state government while managing the galaxy of agencies.[179] The Council activated an array of emergency plans to deal with the hurricane.

That afternoon, according to a report published three months after the storm, trucks carried "cots and blankets from federal depots" to 622 shelters from Brownsville to Austin, which collectively could "house and feed a half million persons."[180] Hospitals verified the number and locations of their tetanus and typhoid vaccines, and technicians checked their backup power systems. The state highway department prepared to block off any flooded streets, roads, or highways. Long caravans of telephone repair trucks "loaded with men, equipment, and supplies" snaked southward toward the Valley.[181]

In Corpus Christi, the local weather bureau's Russell Mozeney urged people to leave "the Gulf side of Padre, Mustang, and St. Joseph Islands." Instead of heeding his advice, some people "rushed to the islands to see why they shouldn't be there." From Corpus Christi to the border, radio stations issued regular updates on the storm. Newspapers published lists of hurricane kits readers should prepare to use while enduring the storm or fleeing from it. Offshore, oil rigs shut down operations and secured their equipment.[182]

The U.S. military in the region also took precautions. The Navy transferred aircraft from naval air stations in Corpus Christi, Beeville, and Kingsville to Pensacola, Fla. It also ordered the aircraft carrier *USS Lexington* to delay its scheduled exercises off the Texas coast and instead wait in the eastern Gulf of Mexico. More than two hundred personnel from Matagorda Air Force Base sheltered at Victoria County Airport, and civilians fled to San Antonio's Lackland Air

[179] Rhodes, "A Fury Named Beulah," 37-39.
[180] Lynwood Mark Rhodes, "A Fury Named Beulah," *Today's Health*, December 1967, 38.
[181] Rhodes, "A Fury Named Beulah," 38-39.
[182] Anderson, "Beulah: A Report in Retrospect."

Force Base.[183] The Coast Guard evacuated the Port Mansfield station and dropped leaflet warnings about the hurricane to any boat or fisherman they could find. The National Guard prepared its personnel to mobilize "on three hours' notice." Connally ordered 680 soldiers from the Texas National Guard's 49th Armored Division to help evacuate and secure South Texas.[184]

The Rev. George W. Crofoot of Harlingen traveled to Corpus Christi with his wife Marian on Sunday. The petroleum engineer attended a meeting, and then he and his wife visited their daughter Elizabeth, a teacher. But the news of looming Beulah overshadowed the reunion, and the couple decided to return to Harlingen that same day to prepare their home for any possible problems. As the week began, they felt ready for whatever Beulah might bring.[185]

Monday, September 18

In Miami, forecasters at the National Hurricane Center watched Beulah strengthen in the Gulf of Mexico. Beulah's erratic behavior throughout the Caribbean likely taught them that this storm defied any of storm models, data sets, or general meteorological rules. They worried that Beulah's eventual target was Corpus Christi. Their prediction made it to the *Corpus Christi Times*, and headlines in Monday's evening edition warned that Beulah might target the city. But Beulah kept a westerly track, and Weather Service scientists adjusted their storm tracks southward, tracing probability lines from the hurricane right into Tampico, Mexico. When Beulah slowed from its steady 12 mph to 8 mph, Monday night's final advisory stressed that "a possible shift to a more northwestward movement [will] increase the threat to the Texas

[183] Kenneth Carter, "Victoria, Port Lavaca Become Refugee Cities," *Corpus Christi Caller*, September 20, 1967, box 4za441, Moore Papers.
[184] Rhodes, "A Fury Named Beulah," 38-39; Gary Garrison, "Connally Mobilizes Guard," Associated Press, *Corpus Christi Caller*, September 20, 1967, Moore Papers.
[185] George W. Crofoot, "A Newsletter from Beulahland: A blow by blow description," October 26, 1967, box 4za428, Moore Papers (hereafter cited as Crofoot memoir, Moore Papers), 1. The Presbyterian minister donated a three-page memoir of his Beulah experience to the Disaster Research Center.

coast."[186] Images from NASA's Nimbus II weather satellite informed their updated estimate that Beulah would probably strike Wednesday near Brownsville and then move north along the Texas coast.[187] Scientists did not expect the hurricane to move too far inland.

In Brownsville, some residents only shrugged at the Weather Bureau's hurricane watch. Rentfro and her junior high school colleagues remembered Hurricane Inez the year before – lots of buildup, warnings, preparations, and then no hurricane, not even rain. It hit Tampico instead. No one, she remembered, "seemed to be anxious to begin elaborate preparations" as they listened to radio reports on Beulah's status. Another Brownsville resident, Rodolfo Flores, shared Rentfro's initial blasé attitude, and he enjoyed surfing the roaring waves instead. Despite her doubts, Rentfro went to the store to stock up on some supplies, just in case.[188]

Throughout more than two dozen Texas counties, especially along the coast, residents prepared for some sort of bad weather. Storeowners and homeowners stretched tape across their windows. Residents filled their bathtubs with fresh water.[189] Fishermen moved their fleets of shrimp boats into safer channels. Boat owners moved their sailboats and other pleasure craft into secure dry docks. South Padre Island "[h]otel operators … followed their departing guests across the Queen Isabella Causeway to Brownsville," and most other islanders were close behind them.[190] Port Isabel Mayor Leo Sanders remembered police drove up and down the island town's streets, warning all residents to leave immediately. He requested National Guard soldiers to help secure the town. "We were preparing for the worst and hoping for the best," he

[186] "Beulah May Hit City Wednesday," *Corpus Christi Times*, September 18, 1967, Newspapers.com; Anderson, "Beulah: A Report in Retrospect;" "Hurricane Beulah: Preliminary Report with Advisories and Bulletins Issued," U.S. Weather Service, 27-29.
[187] "Satellite Nimbus II tracks Hurricane Beulah," September 20, 1967, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, accessed October 15, 2014, http://www.trumanlibrary.org/photographs/displayimage.php?pointer=21757.
[188] Rentfro memoir, Moore Papers, 1-2; Aaron Nielsen, "Beulah," *Monitor* (McAllen, TX), September 15, 2007, accessed November 10, 2014, http://www.themonitor.com/news/local/article_c40bac7e-7a5b-5c80-b696-53726c6dc600.html.
[189] Nielsen, "Beulah."
[190] Rhodes, "A Fury Named Beulah," 38-39. The article specified twenty-seven counties.

recalled.[191] In North Texas, insurance companies alerted five hundred claims adjustors "to head for South Texas." They also presciently reminded homeowners "that most insurance policies covered wind and rain and tornado damage, but not rising water."[192]

Beulah also worried the Valley's citrus industry. Growers overseeing 80,000 acres of orchards estimated that the 1967-1968 crop, consisting of oranges and grapefruit ready to be picked and packed into more than nine million boxes, was potentially worth $10 million. But storm winds could damage or rip the ripe fruit from their branches, assuming winds had not already ripped the trees from the saturated ground. Floods could ruin farms, cripple shipping routes, and injure or kill members of a workforce of 100,000 people. Any delays in the harvest and processing schedules threatened December's gift-fruit market, "a specialty field in which choice oranges and grapefruit are sent all over the world as Christmas gifts."[193]

On Monday, Ramirez's associate Cuellar left Roma for Del Rio. He planned to return by Wednesday to fill in for Ramirez, who intended to leave that same day for a meeting of the American Academy of General Practice in Dallas.[194] But those plans were about to change.

Tuesday, September 19, and Wednesday, September 20

At 5 a.m., the Weather Bureau's New Orleans office issued a new advisory. It was headlined, "Severe Hurricane Beulah heads towards the mouth of the Rio Grande River."

At 5:30 a.m., Rentfro's phone rang. Her husband's secretary was calling. She had just heard that Brownsville was placed under a hurricane warning -- Beulah was headed straight for Brownsville. "My husband and I groaned at being awakened so early," Rentfro remembered. But, they were up, so they turned on the radio to get updated. Beulah was on the move, and

[191] Leo Sanders, "Remembering Beulah," YouTube video, 4:19, posted by "spiIslandbreeze," August 4, 2007, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Cr8qsxwygc.
[192] Anderson, "Beulah: A Report in Retrospect."
[193] "Hurricane Is Threat to Citrus," *Corpus Christi Caller*, September 19, 1967, Moore Papers.
[194] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 4.

scientists declared that its "center [would] move inland near the mouth of the Rio Grande River tonight. …"[195] The Weather Bureau's new hurricane warning stretched from Port Aransas to Brownsville to northeastern Mexico.[196] Rentfro then learned that classes were canceled. Her boys rejoiced; her daughter did not -- she anticipated a boring, friendless day ahead.[197]

Also in Brownsville, Ruth and "Skip" Weaver saw Beulah as entertainment more than danger, at least at first. "The challenge," she wrote, "of meeting nature head-on was exhilarating though it may sound strange." Like Renfro, Weaver recalled how often hurricanes missed her part of Texas. "It was a little amusing to see how frightened others were," she remembered, "bolting in all directions to get away from what might or might not come." As the executive secretary at the Rio Grande Valley Gas company smiled at the local activity, she determined nevertheless to make herself useful at the office. But company gas crews were focused on post-storm deployment and gas-leak repair schedules, and there was not much for office workers to do, so Weaver went back home. She and her husband, a real estate agent, stocked up on just a few items since they already had plenty of food, but they made sure to pick up "a bottle of 'snake-bite medicine' to take the edge off our nerves."[198]

Near Freeport, a Gulf Coast city just south of Houston, 15-year-old surfer Bridgette Laverne Anthony paddled her board onto the growing swells, watching for the right wave. When

[195] "Hurricane Beulah: Preliminary Report with Advisories and Bulletins Issued," U.S. Weather Service, 30.
[196] Sugg and Pelissier, "The Hurricane Season of 1967," 247.
[197] Rentfro memoir, Moore Papers, 2.
[198] L.A. "Skip" Weaver, Jr., and Ruth Weaver, "Our Experiences of Hurricane Beulah," December 28, 1967, box 4za428, Moore Papers (hereafter cited as Weaver memoir, Moore Papers), 1. They donated a six-page memoir of their Beulah experiences to the Disaster Research Center.

it came, she stood on her board and rode it back to shore. But she lost her balance, fell into the hissing waves, and drowned. Beulah's tempest had just killed its first U.S. citizen.[199]

Statewide preparations continued. Dr. James E. Peavy of the Texas Department of Public Health, commanding state health services, assigned ham radio operators to hospitals. He also assigned an operator to Dr. Charles R. Queen, Edinburg Municipal Hospital chief of staff and the district disaster chairman who oversaw the twenty counties that might feel Beulah's fury.[200] Public Health officials also ordered the repositioning of a packaged disaster hospital (PDH) and its 200 cots from vulnerable Brownsville to higher ground in Edinburg.[201] But despite the prudent preparatory moves, there were systemic problems. Queen later noted in a report that Valley hospitals did not adequately prepare for the storm. When Peavy organized the ham radio net, Queen reported, not all hospitals participated. The McAllen hospital representative "was found to have little influence in the McAllen hospital operation." As for Starr County, he wrote, it had "no pre-organized Civil Defense or Medical organization" with which he could coordinate storm preparations.[202]

Long rivers of cars flowed northward out of the Valley. More than 5,000 people packed Civil Defense shelters in Brownsville. The American Red Cross counted more than 14,000 people in shelters from Brownsville to Harlingen. Reporters were peppered throughout the

[199] Associated Press, "Beulah Claims Victim in Texas," *Mexia Daily News* (Mexia, TX), September 19, 1967, accessed November 29, 2014, http://www.newspapers.com/image/10797088; Anderson, "Beulah: A Report in Retrospect."
[200] "Hurricane Beulah Blew, But Hospital Staffs Stood Pat," *Hospital Topics*, November 1967, 22.
[201] Charles R. Queen, "Hurricane Beulah Critique: Medical Activities Report and Recommendation for Future Planning Based on the Experiences Gained from Hurricane Beulah," Texas Department of Health, November 15, 1967, "Hurricane Beulah" scrapbook (hereafter cited as Queen, "Hurricane Beulah Critique"). Appendix B is the U.S. Public Health Service's description of the PDH.
[202] Queen, "Hurricane Beulah Critique," 4.

Valley, and newspaper reporters packed Brownsville's Fort Brown Motor Hotel.[203] Everything was in place to study, record, endure, and confront one of the biggest hurricanes in history.

By late afternoon, rains from Beulah's outer bands drenched the South Texas coast and the Valley's eastern end. Waves pounded Port Isabel and Port Mansfield.[204] Gulf Coast communities "had a semi-ghostlike look." Guard soldiers strolled silent streets.[205] Corpus Christi Mayor Jack Blackmon ordered residents to evacuate low-lying areas and beaches.[206]

The weather service issued its regular 5 p.m. advisory on Beulah at 5 p.m. Then, only an hour later, it flashed an emergency advisory: "Beulah becomes extremely dangerous." Weather aircraft "discovered an intensification" of Beulah, with 160 mph winds near its eye. "Emergency evacuations," the weather service urged from behind its somber prose, "should be completed immediately" for regions within fifty miles of the mouth of the Rio Grande. A second and more detailed advisory at 7 p.m. made similar warnings.[207] The scientists did everything possible to warn the public. Now, all they could do was watch and record what Beulah did to Texas.

In Brownsville, the Weavers watched and heard the weather worsen, and their self-assurance "turned into a gnawing anxiety." The children's thrill for storm preparations faded, and they were getting restless. "They had a grand time experimenting with the candles," Weaver remembered, until she began to worry that they might set the house on fire. Tree limbs smashed against the house. The winds howled. They listened to radio updates from the weather service

[203] Jim Davis, "Brownsville Fear Growing: Civil Defense Director Concerned About Winds;" Garrison, "Connally Mobilizes Guard;" Hoyt Hager, "Thousands Flee as Mighty Beulah Churns to Landfall: Valley Braced for Storm," *Corpus Christi Caller*, September 20, 1967, box 4za441, Moore Papers.
[204] Hager, "Thousands Flee."
[205] Rhodes, "A Fury Named Beulah," 39.
[206] Anderson, "Beulah: A Report in Retrospect."
[207] "Hurricane Beulah: Preliminary Report with Advisories and Bulletins Issued," U.S. Weather Service, 33-34.

office at the Brownsville airport. As the forecaster spoke, she remembered, "[w]e could hear the awful flapping and grinding in the background," and then "communications were lost."[208]

Rentfro's family had stocked up on games, things to read, candles, "fuel for the Coleman lantern," and "extra batteries for the transistor radios." They decided, despite reports of evacuations of coastal communities, that their home was still the safest place. Besides, she recalled, "civil defense had never told Brownsville citizens to evacuate." They tried to watch a TV movie "but the weather reports became increasingly more ominous."[209] Rentfro remembered that at 9:30 p.m. a TV newscaster advised viewers to leave Brownsville if they did not "feel their homes could withstand 170 mile per hour winds." She thought incredulously, "How could anyone make such a judgment?" The rain, she remembered, was "blinding." And then the house went dark. All power was lost."[210]

On Wednesday at 1 a.m., the hurricane's full force struck south of Brownsville, with 136-mph winds and an 18-foot storm surge.[211] The U.S. Air Force's High Altitude Clear Air Turbulence program sent a specially-equipped U-2 plane from Patrick Air Force Base in Florida to measure stratospheric conditions above Beulah as the storm smashed into Texas. The plane took thirty minutes to circle twice over the highest clouds. At an altitude of almost 54,000 feet, the plane measured the hurricane's temperature and wind speed, providing useful information to the emergency planners and making priceless contributions to the program's database.[212]

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[208] Weaver memoir, Moore Papers, 2-3.
[209] Rentfro memoir, Moore Papers, 3-4.
[210] Rentfro memoir, Moore Papers, 3-4.
[211] Metz*, South Texas Weather Journal*; "Hurricane Beulah, Sept. 8-21, 1967," U.S. Corps of Engineers, 3; "It Happened in Texas," *Texas Archive of the Moving Picture*.
[212] David E. Waco, "Temperatures and Turbulence at Tropopause Levels Over Hurricane Beulah," *Monthly Weather Review*, 98, no. 1 (October 1970): 749-755.

FIGURE 5
Hurricane Beulah's track. Different colors indicate its intensity.
Source: "Hurricane Beulah," Wikipedia.com

In Port Isabel, the hurricane seriously damaged old and weaker buildings while the few newer and stronger buildings survived the winds and waves. [213] Floods submerged Brownsville's airport. Winds destroyed the city's weather station and shattered buildings and homes. The Guadalupe, Lavaca, San Antonio, and Nueces rivers all began to rise.[214]

"Rentfro's children slept peacefully as the weather worsened, but she did not. She could hear debris swirling past the house and loud crashes as the winds crushed, toppled, and swept away weaker structures, trees, and other items of everyday life. "It is a near shattering experience," Rentfro remembered, "to hear such violence and try to visualize the resulting

[213] Sanders, "Remembering Beulah."
[214] "Floods – Hurricane Aftermath Kills 11 in Texas," 1967, Universal Newsreel, 1:08, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, *Texas Archive of the Moving Picture*, accessed July 14, 2014, http://www.texasarchive.org/library/index.php?title=Floods_-_Hurricane_Aftermath_Kills_11_in_Texas; Rentfro memoir, Moore Papers, 5.

destruction." The worst part, she felt, was her sense of "utter helplessness before the awesome forces of nature."[215]

In Harlingen, ten-year-old Alyse Deaton and her family sheltered their friends, the Bryant family – mother, father, two boys, two girls, and Penny, a "very cute dog … a Chiwawa." As the adults braced for the storm and listened to the news, Alyse and the girls went to her room. "We played store," she wrote later, "and had very much fun."[216] As she tried to go to sleep, Alyse noticed a tree outside "bending down like it had never done before." A loud snapping sound outside startled them. She gathered her sleepy guests and moved into the bathroom.[217]

Beulah weakened slightly when its well-defined eye moved from over water and onto land south of Brownsville around 8 a.m.[218] The storm's eye brought brief calm. Renfro's mother in Port Arthur called because, Rentfro recalled, "she feared for our lives." As Rentfro reassured her that they were still safe, her daughter looked outside and discovered that Beulah's winds ripped huge 50-year-old trees right out of the ground, "leaving gaping holes in our yard." As the rains began again and the family braced for Beulah's next attack, Rentfro thought grimly, "What lay ahead of us in the forthcoming hours?"[219]

In Harlingen, Beulah's eye passed overhead around mid-morning and offered a momentary but eerie calm to the Deatons' neighborhood. Alyse and her young guests persuaded their parents to let them go outside to "skip rocks on the street" in front of her home. "There was water halfway up our knees," she remembered. It was sprinkling.[220]

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[215] Rentfro memoir, Moore Papers, 3-4.
[216] Alyse Deaton, "The Lasting Days of Beulah," box 4za428, Moore Papers (hereafter cited as Deaton memoir, Moore Papers). The little girl wrote a short remembrance on September 23, 1967. It was lost until October 1968, when her mother typed it and submitted it to the Disaster Research Center.
[217] Deaton memoir, Moore Papers.
[218] "Hurricane Beulah, Sept. 8-21, 1967," U.S. Corps of Engineers, 3.
[219] Rentfro memoir, Moore Papers, 5.
[220] Deaton memoir, Moore Papers.

In Roma, the weather steadily worsened but Ramirez remembered not feeling too concerned. "We were having some rain," he recollected later, "but not excessive." The projected track for Beulah remained generally stable. Even if Beulah moved inland, Ramirez remembered, it was not expected to seriously affect a town more than 100 miles from the coast because it would lose so much of its wind velocity as it fell apart over South Texas. But some problems in Roma emerged as the stormy weather intensified. Phone service and TV signals were intermittent. Cuellar called to say he could not immediately return to Roma. Grim and frightening radio reports conveyed Beulah's destruction on the coast.[221]

Beulah's storm surge and waves shattered coastline structures. Winds flattened buildings, ripped trees apart, and blew away homes and boats like withered fall leaves across cold ground. By late Wednesday, Beulah was essentially over. Businesses slowly reopened. Ferries resumed operations. Public schools were cleaned and prepared for the resumption of classes. But for the Valley, Beulah's most destructive consequences had only begun.

Thursday, September 21

By 5 a.m., the last hurricane warning issued for South Texas expired as Beulah weakened to a tropical storm near Alice, Texas. The weather calmed in some parts of the area, and helicopters searched for missing or stranded people, cargo planes raced to bring food and supplies to drowned communities, and other kinds of aircraft surveyed Beulah's destruction.[222] As the new day began in Roma, Ramirez recalled, the rain fell "hard and continuously [and] winds were moderately strong." Some sewage plants were down, and health officials used both English and Spanish radio broadcasts to advise residents to boil water before drinking it.[223]

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[221] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 4. Ramirez did not include Cuellar's reason for not returning, though deteriorating conditions due to Beulah probably played some part.
[222] Anderson, "A Scorecard on Beulah" in "Beulah: A Report in Retrospect."
[223] Rhodes, "A Fury Named Beulah," 41.

Ramirez saw patients and then reviewed the situation. The Rio Grande was rising. Floods cut off some roads. Refugees from communities east of Roma filled shelters in nearby schools.[224]

Beulah's floods surprised everyone. Ramirez expected wind damage, but he remembered that no one anticipated the flooding. "[O]ur major disaster came from torrential rains," he wrote, "which caused the river … to flood and [caused] major damage to our neighboring border communities in Mexico," including Camargo.[225] In Rio Grande City, Ricardo Sanchez, then a member of his high school's Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC), remembered that "[t]here was no panic or evacuation plan implemented to prepare for Beulah's arrival." Everyone knew it was coming, but, like Ramirez, his family was worried most about potential wind damage. The weather was worse than anyone expected. No one, Sanchez recalled, expected "the flooding and massive evacuations that occurred, especially the people from Mexico."[226] As communities flooded on both sides of the border, people climbed onto roofs to escape. One family found shelter in a boxcar.[227] Drivers fleeing the floodwaters in one town sometimes found themselves surrounded by floodwaters in the next town. Roma and nearby communities, Ramirez wrote, faced problems that "were profound."[228]

Ramirez likely decided at that point to take the initiative and try to help find shelter space. This inaugurated a new phase in his experience with Beulah. At first he had seemed unconcerned with the storm, all but certain that it posed little danger to a town dozens of miles from the coast. He also attempted to maintain his regular schedule of seeing patients. But when the situation worsened, and when he saw people who needed shelter and protection, instead of

[224] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 4.
[225] Ramirez, "Hurricane Beulah" scrapbook, 5-6.
[226] Sanchez, email interview with author.
[227] George F. Tuley, "Flood in Mexico," Dr. Mario E. Ramirez Hurricane Beulah Photograph Collection, UTHSC Digital Archive, University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, http://tinyurl.com/ncuh7af (hereafter cited as Tuley photograph collection).
[228] Ramirez, "Hurricane Beulah" scrapbook, 1.

worrying about himself, he worried about them. He became more than a medical authority – in this extreme situation he became a storm relief coordinator, a role that organically grew larger once Beulah passed. The first step was securing a refuge for people who needed it. He asked a Catholic priest if a convent, which might hold up to five hundred people, could be turned into a shelter, and the priest agreed. Creeks, he remembered, near the towns of Fronton and Garceno flowed "with greater force than we had ever seen it." By noon, swollen creeks cut off Roma's road to Rio Grande City. Residents of Escobares evacuated their homes. Farmers tried to save their cattle from rising waters. Cars floated or sank into the brown floods.[229]

As the stormy day ended, shelters set up at the veterans' halls were crowded, and they had little food and even less comfort. "There were no beds or mattresses available anywhere," Ramirez recalled, "and there were no blankets or covers of any type." Ramirez tried one last time to make time for his regular hospital patients but the escalating refugee crisis quickly eclipsed his normal duties. He scrambled to figure out how to house an influx of friends and colleagues stuck in Roma because of the flooding. Some stayed in his home; others stayed with neighbors. He also treated the people in the shelters.[230]

The weather worsened, and the makeshift shelters filled to capacity. The Escobares evacuees, the Valley refugees, travelers stuck in Roma, and locals quickly mixed with a new influx of people from Ciudad Miguel Aleman, the Mexican town across the river. A priest opened his church to house the people from the Mexican city. Ramirez opened his hospital's waiting room to shelter anyone that did not fit into the church. A gymnasium and a theater also quickly filled with hundreds of frightened and tired people.[231]

[229] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 4.
[230] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 4-5.
[231] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 5.

FIGURE 6
Flooding near Comales, Tamaulipas, Mexico. Photographer George F. Tuley.
Part of the Dr. Mario E. Ramirez Hurricane Beulah Photograph Collection, Mario E. Ramirez, M.D. Library, UT Health Science Center Regional Academic Health Center, Harlingen, TX.

By 10 p.m., Ramirez and his brother Roel visited the shelters one last time, cared for the sick, and promised to return the next day. “It was raining very hard,” Ramirez remembered, “and water and mud was more than ankle deep.” He then faced his own crisis. His staff told him that water broke through second-floor ceilings at the hospital. As Ramirez raced back, he worried that the old building might “collapse and injure someone.” Second-floor patients were moved downstairs, and their relatives helped the staff keep the leaks from becoming cascades of storm water. But as the rain worsened, the leaks also worsened. The x-ray room flooded. Water six inches deep poured into the waiting room. Ramirez remembered that the water swirled from the

waiting room "into the private office, the hall, into the two larger examining rooms, and outside the back door." Staffers and volunteers rushed to save x-rays and medical files. An electrical short behind a wall sent a chilling scent of smoke through the offices before it was pinpointed and repaired.[232] Ramirez's oldest son, 17-year-old Mario Jr., aided him as he surveyed the situation. The high school student, Ramirez wrote later, "expressed a desire to study medicine [and so] I felt that it would be good for him to be with me during the entire disaster operation."[233]

Friday, September 22

As late Thursday night turned into early Friday morning, Ramirez visited the international bridge crossing. Border agents told him that more than 5,000 Mexicans crossed the river from Miguel Aleman, and Ramirez saw that cars "were still coming practically bumper to bumper." Roy Johnson, a border agent, told Ramirez that "the Camargo bridge at Rio Grande City" was closed as floodwaters cut off the road leading to the international overpass. Johnson told him 10,000 Mexicans fled from Camargo into Rio Grande City.[234] Ramirez wrote that the Mexican refugees came by "foot, bikes, cars, trucks, and buses, and later, when the [International Bridge] gave way, by helicopter."[235] Johnson's two-way radio still worked. Ramirez asked him to contact KRIO, the McAllen radio station, for information on weather conditions and storm damage. "We told them that we had several thousand refugees," Ramirez recalled, "and that we would need (food), bedding, and probably some clothes for these people by morning. …" Ramirez returned to Roma and slept for about an hour.[236]

[232] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 5-6.
[233] Ramirez to John Connally, October 5, 1967, 2. Mario Jr. became a lawyer and a judge instead.
[234] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 6-7.
[235] Porterfield, "The Lunas' Story."
[236] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 7.

Dawn illuminated the extent of Beulah's effects on the river and its tributaries. Mexican refugees filled Roma, and Ramirez's riverside tour quickly explained why. "The [Rio Grande] was at an all-time high … and many houses in Miguel Aleman appeared flooded," he wrote later.[237] Floodwaters still cut off Roma from Rio Grande City, and when Cuellar finally returned to Roma he reported that floods also cut off Roma from the Falcon Dam.

The Army and Air Force worked together to bring 125,000 pounds of food to Roma. Five C-130 cargo planes from Dyers Air Force Base in Abilene flew to El Paso, loaded the food, and then flew on to Laredo. Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio sent two helicopters to fly food to Roma.[238] Army trucks brought food to shelters. By midmorning Friday the 3,000 refugees in Roma were not yet fed, but a truck from Rio Grande City filled with food at last crossed the floodwaters and made it into Roma. It brought powdered and canned milk, "sliced cheese, cold meats, peanut butter, crackers and bread." When Joe C. Guerra, Roma's mayor, directed the truck to the local school cafeteria, Ramirez interrupted and asked that the truck stay with him "so that the people at the Convent, the Church, and [at one of the veterans' buildings] who depended on us and our hospital could be fed." Republican Ramirez recalled later that he told Democrat Guerra "that it was necessary that all our efforts be united and coordinated [regardless] of previous political alienations so that this job could be completed efficiently."[239]

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[237] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 7.

[238] "Air Force, Army Unite Efforts To Fly 60 Tons of Food to Roma," *Corpus Christi Caller*, September 23, 1967, Moore Papers.

[239] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 8; "Political Infighting Continues: Suits, Counter Suits Threatened for Roma," *Valley Morning Star* (Harlingen, TX), January 6, 1964, 1, Newspapers.com, accessed November 7, 2014, http://www.newspapers.com/image/51391213/?terms=mario+ramirez+guerra+roma. The memory of a bitter court battle between Ramirez and the Guerra family following a 1961 school board election likely loomed large over Ramirez's vague reference to "previous political alienations." Chapter 4 focuses on Ramirez's political involvement and explores that contest. Their relationship was hardly improved when, in early 1964, Ramirez secured a temporary restraining order prohibiting public rallies within 500 feet of the Ramirez Hospital. Mayor Guerra, whose "faction" led the rallies, vowed to take the fight "all the way to the Supreme Court."

FIGURE 7
Ramirez and his son, Mario Jr. (left). Photographer George F. Tuley.
Part of the Dr. Mario E. Ramirez Hurricane Beulah Photograph Collection, Mario E. Ramirez, M.D. Library, UT Health Science Center Regional Academic Health Center, Harlingen, TX.

Sarah Ramirez led a team from the hospital to make sandwiches, and smaller children received some much-needed juice and milk. Nearby dairy companies contributed more milk to the hungry people.[240]

[240] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 7.

The first wave of disaster responders in Roma looked to Ramirez as the "disaster leader." Ramirez surmised that the authority stemmed from the fact that "I was the only local physician who responded and remained there throughout the ordeal, and … had practiced medicine there for 17 years. I knew 'my' people and our neighbors well."[241] But the commissioners' court had long-since appointed him Public Health Service director for Starr County. He was likely seen by both outsiders and residents as the one who could best lead a relief operation.

Ramirez confronted the immediate problems before him. He found shelter, food, and fluids for refugees. He cared for the thousands of people for whom he assumed medical responsibility. He moved quickly to counter damage to his hospital and monitor worsening conditions throughout the community. He set aside any political sentiment to work with the people he knew were key to a successful relief operation. Beulah's floodwaters insulated Roma and Ramirez from the rest of Texas, from where more help was needed. And that help tried to reach Ramirez.

Radio stations in Edinburg and McAllen managed to broadcast throughout the storm. Ramirez checked in with KRIO station and learned that Queen was attempting to make contact with him. The storm cut telephone lines, and so Ramirez managed to find a sheriff's radio to call Queen in Edinburg. A news story captured Ramirez's sense of urgency: "Charlie," Ramirez said, "get the hell down here. I've got 10,000 refugees and no doctors, nurses, food, or medicine. It's just a big damned mess."[242] Ramirez's team needed "food, cots, mattresses, diapers, blankets, and a few medical supplies that probably would become essential."[243]

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[241] Ramirez, "Hurricane Beulah" scrapbook, 6.
[242] Bill Porterfield, "The Lunas' Story: A Floodtide, a Baby and a Peasant's Last 50 Pesos," *Houston Chronicle*, September 29, 1967.
[243] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 8.

FIGURE 8
Flooding near Comales, Tamaulipas, Mexico. Photographer George F. Tuley.
Part of the Dr. Mario E. Ramirez Hurricane Beulah Photograph Collection, Mario E. Ramirez, M.D. Library, UT Health Science Center Regional Academic Health Center, Harlingen, TX.

Queen alerted the National Guard, the Salvation Army, and the American Red Cross. Charles E. King, director of Disaster Health and Medical Services, and his staff arranged for the Air National Guard to fly medical supplies from the Hospital Reserve Disaster Inventory in Bastrop to the Valley.[244]

Despite meager resources and mounting problems, Ramirez remained optimistic. He knew help was coming. He noted that some people in Roma had even returned to their homes in

[244] Queen, "Hurricane Beulah Critique," 5.

other parts of the Valley and in Mexico. But then the rain intensified again. Ramirez later learned that "close to 30 inches of rain" – which was, he noted, "twice as much as normally falls in this area in a period of two years" – poured into and around Roma and Rio Grande City.[245]

Ramirez heard that Connally was touring Rio Grande City and would soon visit Roma. "We were told to find an appropriate landing place" for the governor's helicopter, he recalled. He chose Roma's town plaza in front of his hospital. Connally emerged from his helicopter with U.S. Rep. Eligio "Kika" de la Garza and Peavy from the Texas Department of Public Health. As Connally entered the Ramirez Hospital, he asked that Mayor Guerra be notified of his arrival and that he come to the hospital. According to Ramirez, Guerra never showed. Connally was told the mayor was in Rio Grande City. The governor toured shelters and spoke to refugees. His visit impressed Ramirez: "It seemed to give courage to the refugees and to us."[246]

Beulah's remnants crossed into Mexico and fell apart over the mountains near Monterrey, sending fresh floods through the jagged valleys. Eddie Lucio Jr., was 21 years old when the hurricane hit. His father, who had survived a 1933 hurricane that destroyed Brownsville, packed his family into a Pontiac Le Mans and took them to Hondo. Beulah's tornados threatened the town, so they relocated to Laredo. But the remnants of Beulah crossed overhead as it moved into Mexico. So there seemed to be no escape. "One of the bridges we went through washed away after we crossed it," Lucio remembered.[247]

For the Weather Bureau, the storm born in the Caribbean that blasted its way into the history books was finally gone. The 5 p.m. update said it simply: "This is the last bulletin which

[245] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 8.
[246] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 8-9.
[247] Eddie Lucio, Jr., interview by Ron Whitlock, *Ron Whitlock Reports*, June 8, 2008, http://www.theshepgroup.com/RWR/transcripts/2008/RWR060808-TRANSCRIPT.txt.

will be issued on Beulah."[248] But in the Valley, Beulah was still felt and seen everywhere. In Weslaco, a town between McAllen and Harlingen, an amateur radioman assessed conditions in the Valley with black humor: "The only way in is by air … or submarine."[249]

Saturday, September 23

On Friday, officials at San Antonio's Santa Rosa Medical Center sent word to the EOC in Austin that a "volunteer medical team of physicians and nurses" were ready for service wherever they were needed. They were assigned to Roma and Rio Grande City. On Saturday morning, the Air National Guard flew the team on a C-47 from Kelly Air Force Base in San Antonio to McAllen. By 4 p.m. they were treating patients in Rio Grande City.[250] Red Cross workers, an x-ray technician, and more doctors and nurses joined them at McAllen's staging areas before dispersing throughout the flooded landscape. One of the flights also carried a PDH, "a 200-bed hospital, the only one that was actually uncrated and used during the hurricane."[251]

The U.S. Army designated its Beulah relief efforts Operation Bravo and sent Task Force Bravo to the Valley. Lt. Gen. George R. Mather and Maj. Gen. Richard G. Stilwell were in command. Army units set up emergency medical units at the Fort Ringgold high school annex and at Rio Grande City High School.

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[248] "Hurricane Beulah: Preliminary Report with Advisories and Bulletins Issued," U.S. Weather Service, 42.
[249] Grice, "An Investigation of the Tornadoes," 7; Garth Jones, "Rio Grande Threatens Valley with New Floods: Hurricane Blows Out in Mexico," Associated Press, *Corpus Christi Caller*, September 23, 1967.
[250] "Santa Rosa Volunteers Serve Beulah Victims," *Rosa Scope*, Santa Rosa Medical Center, October 1967, in Ralph Yarborough, "Spirit of Service Displayed by Santa Rosa Medical Team, San Antonio, Tex., in Hurricane Beulah: Extension of Remarks," *Congressional Record*, November 13, 1967, A5543-A5544 (hereafter cited as "Santa Rosa Volunteers"). The Texas senator requested the inclusion of the Santa Rosa Medical Center magazine article into the official U.S. Congress publication.
[251] Rhodes, "A Fury Named Beulah," 41.

FIGURE 9
Flooding near Comales, Tamaulipas, Mexico. Photographer George F. Tuley.
Part of the Dr. Mario E. Ramirez Hurricane Beulah Photograph Collection, Mario E. Ramirez, M.D. Library, UT Health Science Center Regional Academic Health Center, Harlingen, TX.

They also set up a landing zone on the former fort's parade grounds. They built army kitchens "that fed the multitudes of people" and eventually provided more than 16,000 cots and 33,000 blankets.[252] Ramirez remembered that soldiers sat on automobile fenders or on the ground to "help spoon-feed some of the little refugees."[253]

[252] Ramirez, *Oral history*. "Examination room," Tuley photograph collection; "General Orders No. 17: General George Robinson Mather," August 2, 1993, Department of the Army, Washington D.C., accessed June 5, 2014, http://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/pdf/go9317.pdf; "General Orders No. 2: General Richard Giles Stilwell," February 3, 1992, Department of the Army, Washington D.C., accessed June 5, 2014, http://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/pdf/

There was one element of the crisis that angered Ramirez as he moved back and forth between Roma and Rio Grande City. He did not think local young people were doing enough to help the relief efforts. He pointed to McAllen Boy Scouts helping at shelters. Where were Roma's and Rio Grande City's teens, he wondered. "I felt that at that specific time a big lesson needed to be learned by all our children," he recalled. "Christian charity and dignity were at stake."[254] Ramirez saw an opportunity to challenge young adults to help strangers, enrich themselves with real-world experience, play a part in confronting a crisis that threatened their community, and then help rebuild that community. It was, to use a modern phrase, a teachable moment, in which youths could build character through self-sacrifice, hard work, and "Christian charity." Eventually, teens appeared for duty and were deployed throughout the efforts.

Whatever Ramirez thought of the area's young people, Sanchez and his JROTC unit did not hesitate to help out at the shelter set up at his school. He recalled that "we did everything from cleaning areas to distributing meals. …" They also provided security, helped at the clinics, and translated for the medical teams when they treated non-English speakers. He remembered that his home was not affected but flooding displaced his brother's family. Relatives from Camargo were also displaced but they found shelter with Sanchez's family.[255]

Ramirez estimated that by Saturday morning about half of the refugees in Roma left the town, either for Mexico or for their homes elsewhere in the Valley. He later learned that some of the Mexican refugees left "because their city government ordered them back." Ramirez explained in a letter to Connally that he thought that "Mexico was acting under some form of

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go9202.pdf. Mather, who built a career with close ties to Latin America, including studying in Mexico and teaching Spanish at West Point, commanded the III Corps at Fort Hood, Texas, during the Beulah crisis. After a tour of duty in Vietnam, Stilwell took command of the 1st Armored Division, III Corps, only a few weeks before the storm.

[253] Ramirez to Eligio "Kika" de la Garza, 16 October 1967, 1.

[254] Ramirez wrote two letters to de la Garza, one formal and one personal. This refers to the personal letter (hereafter cited as Ramirez to Kika de la Garza, Letter 2, 16 October 1967), 1-2.

[255] Sanchez, email interview with author.

pride, or rather 'false pride.' " Ramirez and his volunteers did not resist the ill-advised orders to return "lest we create an incident, or cause embarrassment to you or to our nation."[256] This was the first significant example of his diplomatic sensitivity to the "pride" of the Mexican state. That sensitivity moderated his response to potentially risky instructions to citizens who needed medical care and reliable shelter. Ramirez met with Dr. Manuel Gonzalez, a physician from Ciudad Miguel Aleman, who told him that the city set up a committee to deal with the flooding crisis. Gonzalez and the committee wanted to know about the Mexican refugees in Roma. Ramirez assured him that his team cared for and fed the refugees, and they would do so for as long as necessary. Gonzalez returned to his city with the fresh information.

"[M]any people were still coming to the hospital for medical care" or for food, including Roma residents who had housed the first wave of refugees. Ramirez and his staff distributed the limited food supplies to this group of people with skepticism, he recalled, "because we felt that some attempt at verification was needed."[257] He did not explain his distrust of members of his own community, which ran counter to every other impulse he expressed throughout this crisis.

Despite the flooding, Ramirez felt the situation in Roma – at least the situation within his purview as a medical coordinator -- was under control. Refugees were able to move around the area. He had made contact with Roma's sister city in Mexico. Food and supplies were flowing. The hospital was up and running. Ramirez's confidence showed when he heard that Queen was leading a Santa Rosa team to Roma. Ramirez waved off the intended visit and advised Queen to stay in Rio Grande City. But the message evidently did not make it through. A team of doctors and nurses, along with Jack Coughlin, the director of public relations, arrived in Roma around 11

[256] Ramirez to Connally, 5 October 1967.
[257] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 10.

a.m., and Ramirez gave them a tour of his shelters.[258] "The situation," the Santa Rosa report noted, "was well under control in Roma under Dr. Ramirez's able and competent leadership."[259]

Ramirez met more Mexican doctors, Mexican army officers, and Miguel Aleman officials. "They were going from shelter to shelter," he remembered, and "ordering their people to return to their country immediately." Ramirez learned that Mexican officials believed that "all their national refugees should receive equal treatment – in their own country." But the Mexican doctors told Ramirez that "they had meager medical supplies, and there was no water in the city … and that they had little food [or power]." Ramirez offered to set aside water and medical supplies for them but could do little else in the face of official Mexican directives.[260] Ramirez then turned his attention to Rio Grande City, where larger public health problems endured.

As the floodwaters severing Roma from Rio Grande City finally subsided, Ramirez asked Cuellar to stay in Roma as he and the Army and Santa Rosa medical teams raced "to deal with the much greater problems in Rio Grande City." Ramirez established contact with Jean Neal and Frances Garza, two school nurses caring for U.S. and Mexican refugees at shelters there. Ramirez learned that about "10,000 people [were] housed in 30 makeshift shelters, and countless others were in private homes." After three days, sickness among the people from Rio Grande City and Camargo was rampant, and no doctor had yet treated them. "[T]he nurses themselves had just taken charge that morning," Ramirez recalled. They told him that "conditions were chaotic … and that it could be disastrous from a public health standpoint. …"[261] The official Santa Rosa report filed weeks later agreed: "The town was in complete chaos." No one seemed

[258] "UTMB Medical Team in the Valley After Hurricane Beulah," 1; Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 10.
[259] "Santa Rosa Volunteers," A5543.
[260] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 10-11.
[261] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 12.

to be in overall command. Ramirez remembered that at the Fort Ringgold shelter there was "filth, food, and dirt everywhere … and many people had the look of despair."[262]

That was a decisive moment for Ramirez. "Here for the first time," he wrote later, "I felt that immediate action was imperative … we needed organization, and much leadership."[263] He split the available personnel into smaller units of one doctor and one nurse, split up responsibility for the 30 shelters among them, and deployed them. Nurses from Santa Rosa fanned out to determine who needed immediate medical care. Priority cases were placed on buses and sent to a church converted into a clinic.

Among the first patients from the floods, Santa Rosa nurse Maxine Cadena told a reporter, was a little boy with reddened eyes. His father accompanied him as a doctor treated the eye infection. The doctor noticed the father's eyes were also red. The father said that he had been crying. As he and his son waited on their home's roof for the rescue helicopter, he explained, he noticed that the family next door – father, mother, and six children – had also climbed onto their own roof to be rescued. Just as a helicopter spotted the family and swooped down to recover them, raging floodwaters submerged the family's home. He watched the entire family swept away. He and his son were rescued instead. "There was no medicine that could help the man's agony," Cadena said sadly.[264]

A medical team from Camargo met with Ramirez and offered their services. Ramirez knew they could not practice medicine due to Texas law. But their expertise was not discarded.

[262] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 13.
[263] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 13.
[264] "Santa Rosa Medical Team Treats Hundreds in Valley," *San Antonio Express*, September 25, 1967, "Hurricane Beulah" scrapbook.

They were added to the small teams to help communicate with Spanish speakers. The Mexican doctors, Ramirez recalled, triaged the patients but did not treat any of them.[265]

By 4 p.m., small rooms at Fort Ringgold were set up to treat patients. Volunteers made medical records for every patient, noting their name, address, medical problem, diagnosis, treatment prescribed, and other necessary notes. Medicine was routed to a dispensary to monitor its supply.[266] Ramirez, Neal, Mario Jr., and a designated driver braved the rain again to visit about eight shelters before their medical teams arrived to evaluate the conditions. Ramirez asked the refugees to observe simple hygiene, group together the sick among them so the medical team could see them quickly, and put any able-bodied persons to work to clean up their shelter areas. "It was our opinion," Ramirez wrote later, "that work would serve as occupational therapy" for the healthy people in the shelters.[267]

By the end of the day, Ramirez and local officials discussed their next steps. They agreed that "it was imperative that our county government resume function as soon as possible." First, they would have to centralize refugees in a few large shelters, which, Ramirez remembered, would limit health problems and improve refugees' access to the Army's new field kitchens.[268]

Ramirez and his team brought order to the chaos. He carefully respected Mexican nationalist sensibilities, respectfully established professional contacts with his Mexican counterparts, found ways for Mexican physicians to legally participate in U.S. operations, and wove a cautious but swift path through diplomatic issues and medical expediency. He made an overt effort to set aside Valley politics to focus on people who needed help from both their physicians and their civic leaders. Ramirez, born in the region of dual identities, dual languages,

[265] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 13.
[266] "Santa Rosa Volunteers," A5543; Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 15.
[267] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 14.
[268] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 15-16.

and dual loyalties, maneuvered between, through, and over the political and nationalist sensibilities as natural disaster meted out devastation to every class, race, and nationality.

Sunday, September 24

In Rio Grande City, Ramirez advised Queen that the refugees needed a larger hospital. Queen contacted Dr. Roy Stewart in Edinburg, and ordered the PDH's transfer to Rio Grande City. A post-storm USPHS report noted that "Fort Ringgold ROTC cadets and other students unloaded and set up the equipment in the school."[269] In Austin, Peavy sent out statewide requests for volunteers to staff the hospital. "Nurses from the State migrant health program responded at once," the report added. Dr. Truman Blocker at the University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB) sent in teams from Galveston and San Antonio.[270] Two Civil Air Patrol planes flew UTMB's team of "three doctors and three senior medical students" to Harlingen.[271]

On Sunday morning Ramirez and other officials searched Fort Ringgold for more space to facilitate the centralization of the refugees. They selected the high school gymnasium, other school buildings, and a recently remodeled laundry building.[272] More than 1,800 refugees were eventually housed in the gym, making it Rio Grande City's biggest shelter.[273]

Help and contributions finally poured into Rio Grande City. A second Santa Rosa team, including pediatrician Dr. Katherine Rodgers, nurse Kay Zimmerman, and Sister Mary Josephine relieved the first responders that accompanied Ramirez from Roma.[274] Task Force Bravo

[269] "Wrap up report on PHS Activities During Hurricane Beulah," October 5, 1967, Division of Health Mobilization, U.S. Public Health Service, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Ramirez Collection, "Hurricane Beulah" scrapbook, 2.
[270] "Wrap up report on PHS Activities During Hurricane Beulah," "Hurricane Beulah" scrapbook, 3.
[271] "UTMB Medical Team in the Valley After Hurricane Beulah," 1.
[272] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 17.
[273] "Rio Grande City High School gymnasium," Tuley photograph collection.
[274] "Santa Rosa Volunteers," A5543.

"arrived with field kitchens [on Sunday night] and was operational by breakfast-time."[275] Army helicopters transported equipment, relief personnel, patients, parents, and frightened barefoot children.[276] Private companies also played a role. Borden donated milk. San Antonio's Pearl Brewery donated bottles from their McAllen facility for baby formula. Pier One Imports in Corpus Christi donated 10,000 candles for people who lost power.[277]

Creative improvisation blossomed throughout the undersupplied medical facilities. The Rio Grande City High School shop class under the direction of Humberto Cavazos designed and built special poles to hold IV bottles.[278] Empty soda and beer bottles were cleaned, filled with baby formula or fresh water, and capped with pieces of foil.[279] Pieces of plastic duct-taped to cardboard boxes and lined with linens became temporary incubators for premature newborns.[280] Medical personnel and volunteers recorded patient information on schoolroom blackboards.[281] "It is because of this type of cooperation," Ramirez recalled later, "that deaths were averted and disastrous public health catastrophes prevented."[282]

Long lines of people snaked through drab tents as volunteers served food from huge silvery metal pots and distributed Army rations.[283] Stern-looking women in horn-rimmed glasses held forward cardboard boxes filled with clothes as tired men and women peeked at the offerings. Student volunteers and ROTC cadets helped guide patients and sort equipment. Pants, sheets, shirts, and other items of clothing were neatly arranged to dry on a chain link fence

[275] Rhodes, "A Fury Named Beulah," 41.
[276] "Infant en route to hospital," Tuley photograph collection.
[277] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 7, 27; Rhodes, "A Fury Named Beulah," 41; "Santa Rosa Volunteers," A5544.
[278] "Hospital ward set-up," Tuley photograph collection.
[279] "Examination room. [alternate view]," "Infant formula, [alternate view]," Tuley photograph collection.
[280] Ramirez, *Oral history*; "Incubator," Tuley photograph collection.
[281] "Dr. Mario E. Ramirez," Tuley photograph collection.
[282] Ramirez, "Hurricane Beulah" scrapbook, 2.
[283] "Children," Tuley photograph collection.

outside a church. Sheets of metal, broken signs, and shards of shattered windows -- some still bearing the tape meant to limit their fragmentation -- littered rain-soaked streets.[284]

Patients' ages ranged from a few days to 108 years. Children suffered from diarrhea. Older patients endured pneumonia, bronchitis, asthma, infected ulcers, and cuts and bruises. Some pregnant women went into early labor during the storm, and more babies were born in the emergency hospitals. Sixteen babies were born in Roma. Three newborns were named Beulah.[285] Ramirez and his nurse assistant Stella Molina also delivered two babies under mesquite trees during their relief visits to Mexico.[286] When three babies needed more intensive care, Rodgers led a team of nurses and volunteers that placed them in makeshift cardboard incubators and flew them by helicopter to an Edinburg hospital. Back on the ground, they gingerly carried the boxes into the facility. Other personnel walked alongside and held IV fluid bottles above their heads.[287] Overall, Ramirez was finally satisfied. The medical staff was finally large enough to care for locals and refugees. Supplies poured into the city and more was on the way. There "were no epidemics," he recalled, "and no one was acutely ill."[288]

In Harlingen, Crofoot felt lucky. "The church building," he wrote later, "was not damaged by the hurricane, only the trees." Beulah's winds uprooted a mesquite tree, knocked down a fence, and superficially damaged a door. But Crofoot eventually noticed a problem many throughout the Valley had already confronted: "The rain continued and continued and

[284] "Patients at the disaster hospital," "ROTC volunteer," "Setting up Army cots," Tuley photograph collection.
[285] Ramirez, "Facilities used as Shelters at one time or other," Ramirez, *Hurricane Beulah: Prologue*, 5-6; "List of Patients," "Hurricane Beulah" scrapbook, page not listed; Porterfield, "The Lunas' Story."
[286] Ramirez, "Hurricane Beulah" scrapbook, 4; Leonidas Cigarroa, *Mario Ramirez M.D.*, "Documents and Personal Letters," 8. Cigarroa contributed a ten-page letter celebrating Ramirez's relief efforts.
[287] "Transporting infants," Tuley photograph collection.
[288] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 18.

continued." On Sunday he pressed on with his regular schedule: church services and Sunday school. "Then," he recalled, "the trouble began."[289]

Raging waters from the Arroyo Colorado, one section of a multi-million dollar U.S.-Mexico system built to control floods, crashed through a concrete dam near Mercedes, "drawing a watery trap around thousands of those who live along the normally grassy little floodway." Crofoot thought his church was situated "high enough to escape the flood waters."
But there was more flooding than he thought, and more than a foot of water filled his church. Texas DPS ordered residents of "Mercedes, La Feria, Rio Hondo, and Lozana" to evacuate low-lying areas along the arroyo immediately, and Crofoot and his wife joined the general exodus. They sheltered at the First Presbyterian Church.[290]

Monday, September 25

An Army truck transported Dr. Charles Moore and his UTMB team to Fort Ringgold's makeshift hospital in Rio Grande City.[291] They were impressed with what they saw. The facility was divided up into "examination rooms, an area for registration, a pediatric treatment room, and an office on the first floor. The second floor was for inpatients with wards for pediatrics, obstetrics, medicine, and geriatrics." High school students registered all the patients, served as interpreters, helped in nursing care, and in dispensing medicines."[292]

Ramirez, who must have been exhausted, admitted with his usual understated style that "I overslept a little bit" that morning. As bright sunshine returned to the Valley, he and the UTMB reinforcements brought further order to the chaos with "organized echelons of care," which the UTMB team later described in their post-storm report.

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[289] Crofoot memoir, Moore Papers, 2.
[290] Associated Press, "Thousands Warned to Flee When Levee in Valley Breaks," *Corpus Christi Caller*, September 25, 1967, box 4za441, Moore Papers; Crofoot memoir, Moore Papers, 2.
[291] "UTMB Medical Team in the Valley After Hurricane Beulah," 1.
[292] "UTMB Medical Team in the Valley After Hurricane Beulah," 2-3; Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 14.

FIGURE 10
Dr. Kay Rodgers (right) in the PDH's pediatric ward. Photographer George F. Tuley.
Part of the Dr. Mario E. Ramirez Hurricane Beulah Photograph Collection, Mario E. Ramirez, M.D. Library,
UT Health Science Center Regional Academic Health Center, Harlingen, TX.

FIGURE 11
Incubators made out of cardboard, tape, plastic, light bulbs, and portable oxygen tanks were used to care for premature infants at the PDH. Photographer George F. Tuley.
Part of the Dr. Mario E. Ramirez Hurricane Beulah Photograph Collection, Mario E. Ramirez, M.D. Library, UT Health Science Center Regional Academic Health Center, Harlingen, TX.

The first echelon consisted of a nurse, a medical student, and an interpreter. This initial wave of medical evaluation was sent out to all shelters to find patients who needed urgent medical care. They also handled minor ailments like sore throats, infections, or sores. The second echelon was the PDH at Fort Ringgold, where medics treated patients suffering from diarrhea, pneumonia, infected wounds, and children with serious ailments or injuries. The third echelon was the Ramirez Hospital in Roma. Its equipment could take x-rays, perform surgery, and deliver babies. Larger hospitals in Edinburg, Weslaco – other PDHs expanded their capacities -- McAllen, San Antonio, Galveston, and Harlingen handled more complicated ailments requiring more complicated treatments: septicemia, meningitis, heart disease, and premature babies. The Edinburg and Weslaco facilities tripled their patient capacity to accommodate those cases.[293] "Evacuation was expedited … by Army helicopters," the UTMB report added.[294]

At the center of the operation stood Ramirez, who "coordinated the efforts of a vast manpower concentrated in the area." The Army coordinated with the Air Force, which based a communications unit at Fort Ringgold. The National Guard provided manpower. The Red Cross also provided food and its own medical teams for the Roma shelters. The Salvation Army provided clothes. Local volunteers helped out wherever they were needed. UTMB physicians also filled in for Ramirez at the Roma hospital and medical office whenever he toured the shelters, served at the PDH, or flew across the border to assist Mexican medical relief efforts.[295]

A reporter who accompanied a Coast Guard rescue mission near Reynosa, Mexico, remembered seeing people camped on small temporary islands surrounded by waters, crowded together with "donkeys, pigs, and dogs." Everyone, he remembered, seemed to be on horseback.

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[293] Queen, "Hurricane Beulah Critique," 3; "People Returning To Soaked Homes," *Corpus Christi Caller*, September 26, 1967, box 4za441, Moore Papers.
[294] "UTMB Medical Team in the Valley After Hurricane Beulah," 3; "It Happened in Texas," *Texas Archive of the Moving Picture*.
[295] "UTMB Medical Team in the Valley After Hurricane Beulah," 2-3.

Groups of vultures feasted on carcasses of dead livestock the Mexican farmers and ranchers abandoned as they escaped the storm's floodwaters.[296]

Army pilots and health officials crowded together to coordinate missions to bring Mexicans to the medical facilities or fly medical teams into Mexico, and Ramirez consistently stood at the center of those meetings.[297] The Mexican medical teams requested penicillin, Ramirez wrote. The Santa Rosa team routed "several cases" to Ramirez, who prepared teams of doctors and nurses to fly into Camargo.[298] Ramirez explained to Queen why he needed a helicopter, and Queen promised to send one. Mather and Stilwell arrived around noon to tour the Fort Ringgold operation, and Stillwell "was very impressed." No helicopter for the Mexico mission had yet arrived, and Stillwell promised to send one once he arrived in Harlingen.[299]

Political officials, including U.S. Sen. Ralph Yarborough and U.S. Rep. de la Garza, arrived in helicopters around 2 p.m. and toured the shelters. "It seemed for a while we were receiving as many congressional and government officials as we were patients," the Santa Rosa report later joked.[300] Ramirez briefed them as he anxiously awaited his own helicopter.[301]

"Finally our helicopter arrived," and Ramirez led about 20 nurses, physicians, and George F. Tuley, a teacher and an amateur photographer who documented the crisis, first to Camargo and then on to Comales.[302] Santa Rosa's Father Charles Brower, who arrived on Monday, and Sister Mary Josephine joined the team.

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[296] "People Returning To Soaked Homes," *Corpus Christi Caller*.
[297] "Dr. Mario E. Ramirez and volunteers," Tuley photograph collection.
[298] "Santa Rosa Volunteers," A5544.
[299] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 23-24.
[300] "Santa Rosa Volunteers," A5544.
[301] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 24.
[302] "Dr. Mario E. Ramirez and Army personnel," "Dr. Mario E. Ramirez and son," Tuley photograph collection; Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 24. See Appendix C to learn more about Tuley.

The aerial perspective conveyed to Ramirez the extent of Beulah's devastation of the borderlands. Water shimmering in the sunshine smoothed out the landscape. It appeared as if a giant hand picked up entire towns and dropped them into lakes. The strange beauty both contrasted with and highlighted the bizarre tragedy of natural disaster. Only the roofs of warehouses, farmhouses, barns, and other buildings stood above water, alongside battered treetops, hedges, and only the tallest white crosses at a drowned cemetery.[303]

Upon landing in Comales, Sister Mary Josephine, wearing black Ray-Ban sunglasses and a large cross on her waist belt, joined the inoculation operation. Brower utilized his Spanish fluency as he mingled with the locals. "It was most touching," the Santa Rosa report remembered, "to see the people kneeling in the center of the school playground to receive Father Brower's blessing."[304] The Comales team set up in a school, and more than 200 people lined up for treatment. The medics treated diarrhea, respiratory infections, and skin infections. The storm knocked out the town's power and cut off radio and phone connections, and the townspeople had little food and no clean water. Homeless families sheltered under blankets strung up between bushes or lived in railway cars.[305] Patients requiring intensive care were seat-belted into a helicopter and flown to the Fort Ringgold hospital.[306] By sunset both teams were back in Rio Grande City. Ramirez briefed Queen on the day's efforts. Queen shared news of the mission with "our state medical society," which passed the information on to the Connally administration, which then passed on the information to officials in Washington D.C. The Johnson administration, Queen reported, consulted with the Mexican government, which "felt that they had adequate facilities and supplies, and that future trips would not be necessary." Ramirez knew

[303] "Hurricane Beulah, Rio Grande Valley (1967)," *South Texas Weather Updates*; "Aerial view of Tamaulipas Mexico," Tuley photograph collection.
[304] "Santa Rosa Volunteers," A5544.
[305] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 24.
[306] "Evacuees from Comales," Tuley photograph collection.

that was absolute nonsense. He had flown over flooded cities, cared for hundreds of starving and ill Mexican people, and helped exhausted and sparse Mexican physicians deal with an overwhelming medical crisis. But Ramirez yet again accepted the diplomatic realities and returned to Roma sometime after midnight.[307]

Tuesday, September 26

Tuesday morning shone light on the fruits of the medical teams' efforts. Ramirez recalled with pride that the nurses' office at the makeshift Rio Grande City hospital became "a real center of communication and a centralized point for coordination." Teenagers were everywhere, running errands, helping transport medics and patients, and cleaning the hospital. Local residents opened their homes for volunteers to shower, sleep, eat, and re-energize themselves.[308]

A new issue emerged among the community leaders: educating Rio Grande City's children. The considerations in place for migratory and employed portions of the student body added another somber color to the realities of life in the Valley. Officials realized the longer refugees were housed in local schools, the longer it would take for schools to re-open and resume fall classes. "The superintendent," Ramirez recalled, "felt that the lost time would have to be made up." If make-up classes were held on Saturdays, students working jobs on that day could not attend. He added that if more days were added to the end of the school year, teachers who "who regularly attend summer school would be impeded from doing so." Migrant students who attended only a fragment of the regular school year would face even less time in the classroom. But regardless of what schedule they formulated going forward, they concluded the schools had to be emptied, cleaned, and re-opened soon. Ramirez met with a Red Cross contingent to find a

[307] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 26.
[308] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 26.

new home for the refugees. They considered building a tent city. Ramirez consulted with the Civil Defense authority in Austin, which agreed "that a tent city might be the logical answer."[309]

The UTMB reinforcements gradually relieved the worn down Santa Rosa team. The Santa Rosa team did not officially see their last patient until 8:30 a.m. Wednesday, but by Tuesday night their role on Beulah's stage was effectively over. For five days, the fifty-seven Santa Rosa physicians, nurses, and students cared for more than 2,100 people in Rio Grande City. "When we left Rio Grande City Wednesday morning," their report recalled, "it was with mixed emotions. It seemed a part of us was staying behind. … The team was exhausted but each had a feeling of fulfillment, making the strenuous efforts worthwhile."[310]

Wednesday, September 27

By Wednesday, about 8,000 refugees remained in Rio Grande City. Relief officials emptied the courthouse and other temporary shelters of refugees. Some refugees were sent to Roma. Queen approved the idea of a tent city and scouted for a suitable location.

Ramirez remained very sensitive to how Mexican physicians and officials perceived themselves in this crisis. For example, by Wednesday morning Ramirez and his colleagues received an updated assessment of conditions in Camargo. The town "suffered great losses [and was] virtually destroyed." A team of interns from a medical school in Monterrey, Mexico, visited the Rio Grande City hospital and asked the U.S. team to take them into Camargo, Comales, and anywhere else they were needed. They also offered to lend their services to the U.S. relief operation. Ramirez knew he did not need more personnel, but, he recalled, he "did not want to disappoint them or to hurt feelings."[311] Again, just as he had done with Mexican physicians on

[309] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 28-29.
[310] "Santa Rosa Volunteers," A5544.
[311] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 28-29.

September 23, Ramirez embraced their professionalism and dedication but walked a careful diplomatic line as to how he would utilize their expertise. On Wednesday, the Americans prepared a boat filled with supplies the Santa Rosa team had left behind and floated the interns into the Mexican disaster zone. They were on their own. Ramirez also spoke with physicians who recently returned from Comales, where they treated families "who were living in caves [and were] desperate for food." They said that Mexican planes with supplies had not yet reached these people. They hoped for another U.S. trip across the border. But Ramirez stood firm and redirected their requests to the Mexican military command in Reynosa, which had assumed responsibility for the situation south of the Rio Grande. The physicians made their report to the command. They were told help was coming but "that it would come from Mexico."[312] As Mexico asserted its state sovereignty over its own people, Ramirez carefully respected that assertion, even if food or medical care took longer to reach hungry people.

When a United Press reporter visited Rio Grande City and asked to take photos of the shelters, the medical teams, and their patients, Ramirez hesitated. He thought that publication of such photos might "create international ill-will and repercussions." However beneficial publicity of Ramirez and his team might have been, he placed the request in a dual context: borderlands relations and medical concern. Those relations were more than ever in the shadow of a sovereign state – Mexico – striving to maintain its authority, either real or perceived, and its capacity to care for its own citizens. Mexico, Ramirez explained to the reporter, was trying "to do what they felt was right and dutiful." The Mexican government quietly let some of their refugees stay in Rio Grande City a little longer, Ramirez reasoned, because it had no viable place to which to return them. But if the national press splashed news of American physicians caring for hungry

[312] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 30.

and sick Mexican refugees, Ramirez feared that the embarrassed government might impulsively round up all of those citizens and return them to Mexico before they had the capacity to care for them. He "feared that if they were not fully ready for them, some lives might be lost … and all the efforts of our teams would be lost." The reporter agreed to hold off on the story.[313]

Ramirez and Queen joined a helicopter team sent to recover two Mexican physicians left behind to aid storm victims in Camargo. Ramirez thought the situation looked better from the air, but fresh reports from the physicians reported enduring "public health hazards and problems."[314]

Thursday, September 28

Near Harlingen, Crofoot and his wife trudged across a half-mile of muddy plowed farmland to learn how badly the Arroyo Colorado's floods had damaged their home and church. They discovered that at least two inches of water had filled their home, damaging the carpeting and some of the furniture. During their pre-storm preparations, Marian Crofoot had "been real thoughtful and put the legs of the furniture, in so far as was possible, in jelly glasses," and that had been somewhat effective in saving most of their furniture. The house was unlivable, so they returned to their shelter. Their inspection of their own church had to wait one more day.[315]

The first UTMB team in Rio Grande City "remained on duty 24 hours a day [until] replacements arrived from Galveston. …" Those replacements included John Carrick.[316] The senior UTMB medical student arrived in Rio Grande City around noon. The challenge thrilled him and his colleagues. "As senior student," he wrote later, "this was extremely valuable and gratifying for us … [This was] a chance to practice shirt-trail medicine."[317]

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[313] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 30.
[314] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 31.
[315] Crofoot memoir, Moore Papers, 2.
[316] "UTMB Medical Team in the Valley After Hurricane Beulah," 4.
[317] John Carrick, "RGC," "Documents and Personal Letters," Ramirez Collection, 1-2.

FIGURE 12
Ramirez (right) and Army personnel discuss their mission to Comales. Photographer George F. Tuley. Part of the Dr. Mario E. Ramirez Hurricane Beulah Photograph Collection, Mario E. Ramirez, M.D. Library, UT Health Science Center Regional Academic Health Center, Harlingen, TX.

FIGURE 13
Sister Mary Josephine (center) discussing a medical relief mission to Comales. Photographer George F. Tuley. Part of the Dr. Mario E. Ramirez Hurricane Beulah Photograph Collection, Mario E. Ramirez, M.D. Library, UT Health Science Center Regional Academic Health Center, Harlingen, TX.

FIGURE 14
Father Charles Brower joined the medical mission to Comales. Photographer George F. Tuley. Part of the Dr. Mario E. Ramirez Hurricane Beulah Photograph Collection, Mario E. Ramirez, M.D. Library, UT Health Science Center Regional Academic Health Center, Harlingen, TX.

FIGURE 15
President Lyndon B. Johnson and Ramirez on September 28, 1967. Photographer George F. Tuley.
Part of the Dr. Mario E. Ramirez Hurricane Beulah Photograph Collection, Mario E. Ramirez, M.D. Library,
UT Health Science Center Regional Academic Health Center, Harlingen, TX.

In the midst of the relief efforts, five helicopters landed at Fort Ringgold, and President Lyndon Baines Johnson stepped out of one of them. His administration had just included two dozen South Texas counties in its disaster zone declaration and set aside $2.5 million in relief funds. The president, "looking gray and sleepy," came to see the situation for himself. Connally

and de la Garza accompanied the president on his tour. They first visited Harlingen, where Johnson toured shelters and spoke with refugee families. Ninety minutes later, after viewing the devastation from the air, they were in Rio Grande City, where Ramirez was waiting.[318]

When Ramirez heard Johnson was coming, he prepared four "'human interest' cases including the little dehydrated boy that our team had evacuated from Comales."[319] Jerry Hudson, the liaison between the relief workers and the president's advance team, determined who could remain in the hospital during the presidential visit. He tagged them with stickers with red crosses drawn on them.[320] Ramirez, wearing a stethoscope around his neck, and a small group -- including his wife Sarah, Queen, and Stewart -- met Johnson in the high school annex building and briefed him on the medical situation.[321]

Large black news cameras aimed their lenses at Johnson's face as he took in the scene. The president towered over Ramirez as he intently nodded and somberly listened. Johnson spoke to a mother and child as they ate off white paper plates. Aides, workers, and citizens pressed around them.[322] Johnson spoke in Spanish to some women.[323] Ramirez remembered that the president "looked extremely tired, worried, possibly depressed – and close to exhaustion." He was not the "usual jovial LBJ that one reads about."[324]

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[318] "The White House, President Lyndon B. Johnson, Daily Diary," Research Collections, LBJ Presidential Library, accessed September 16, 2014, http://www.lbjlibrary.net/assets/lbj_tools/daily_diary/pdf/1967/19670928.pdf, 6-9; "Senator Eligio 'Kika' de la Garza," Tuley photograph collection.
[319] Ramirez to Jack Coughlin, 4 October 1967, "Documents and Personal Letters," Ramirez Collection, 1-2; Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 33.
[320] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 32.
[321] "President Johnson and Dr. Mario E. Ramirez," Tuley photograph collection.
[322] "The President – September 1967," September 1967, White House Naval Photographic Center, LBJ Presidential Library, *Texas Archive of the Moving Picture*, accessed on November 13, 2013, http://www.texasarchive.org/library/index.php/The_President_-_September_1967. The Beulah segment began at the 22:49 mark. Ramirez was seen at the 23:12 mark; Porterfield, "The Lunas' Story." In a letter, Leonidas Cigarroa wrote that Connally and Johnson were impressed with "the makeshift facilities."
[323] "Hurricane Beulah blew," 23.
[324] Ramirez to Coughlin, 1-2; Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 33.

After a thirty-minute tour, Johnson left, and Ramirez was thrilled. "I feel that this is one of the greatest honors that has been bestowed on me," Ramirez later wrote. The honor was "undeserved," Ramirez added, "since what was accomplished at Rio Grande City was the combination of efforts of so many." Conservative Republican Ramirez felt no affection for the liberal Democrat but he respected the office and sympathized over the "tremendous burden that President Johnson has to bear."[325] But Ramirez considered the visit much more important than a simple morale boost. The president, Ramirez wrote later, also came to Rio Grande City to personally demonstrate to the Mexican government that his administration would care for its citizens in their moments of extreme need. Johnson demonstrated to "Mexico the sincerity of our intentions and the veracity of our good will."[326]

Ramirez again set aside his political differences with a Democrat and focused on the larger diplomatic opportunity. Beulah's devastation offered a tantalizing opening to all Americans who recognized it – they would not just save lives but also improve relations with an old historical enemy over the very region they had spilled so much blood to control. Ramirez knew he could play a small part in that long process.

The arrival of the USPHS team underlined the practical realities of the relief efforts. For seven days, Ramirez, the Santa Rosa and UTMB medical teams, and other valiant volunteers took a makeshift series of emergency actions and molded them into the foundation of an effective lifesaving operation. Ramirez and his colleagues melded numerous relief groups, civilian volunteers, and military units into a larger and malleable entity that consistently cared for shocked, sick, and exhausted people on both sides of the flooded river. They made intense connections with harried Mexican doctors, new mothers, elderly survivors, and with each other.

[325] Ramirez to Coughlin, 2.
[326] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 63.

But now the operation had entered – or perhaps needed to enter -- a new phase. The USPHS team, led by Dr. Nicholas C. Leone, informed Ramirez "that they would take over complete command of the hospital and medical facilities at our installation." At first, some of Ramirez's team resisted the transfer of authority and responsibility to people, however qualified, who had not experienced the drama of Beulah's destruction nor the horrific crush of frightened and sick refugees fleeing the floods. Ramirez recalled that he worried that "tempers might erupt" among his exhausted team.[327] But they also realized it was time to return to normal lives and responsibilities. Ramirez gave the USPHS team a tour of the shelters, the PDH, and other facilities. Nurses exchanged notes. The transfer took place peacefully. Ramirez sheepishly admitted later that "we were to blame because we unconsciously did not want to relinquish complete command of the situation which had been so difficult to establish, and we were tired, and at that stage not very benevolent. …" Ramirez spoke for his colleagues, and he spoke from the heart: "We felt that a part of us was in those shelters. …"[328]

Ramirez ended Thursday with one last examination. A little girl, about five years old, suffered abdominal pains, fever, diarrhea, and vomiting. Her worried parents mentioned that the girl was weak and would no longer speak. Ramirez and McFadden found little more than dehydration. The girl was placed on overnight observation.[329] Ramirez returned to Roma, his mind undoubtedly reviewing the day's momentous events and changes.

Ramirez left lasting impressions on many departing colleagues, and the UTMB team was no exception. Their report's author noted that "the honor of working side by side with [Ramirez]

[327] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 34.
[328] Ramirez to Coughlin, 1-2.
[329] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 35.

– a truly compassionate, humble, loved, and respected physician -- will remain an inspiration to each of us to be a better doctor and a better man."[330]

Friday, September 29

Ramirez returned to the "little hospital" in Rio Grande City the next morning and rushed to the girl's bedside. She was "gasping her last breaths." Medics gave her oxygen and tried to resuscitate her. Nothing worked. The little girl died. Ramirez urged the family to authorize an autopsy. He had to learn quickly why the child died. "We did not know," he wrote later, "if we were dealing with … encephalitis, a meningitis [case], a septicemia [problem], or what."[331] At first, the family agreed only to a spinal tap and blood tests, which, Ramirez learned later, indicated nothing. Her father later agreed to an autopsy that did not include her head. The physicians opted to do nothing rather than perform an incomplete examination.[332] Her death left Ramirez "somewhat depressed." He must have been crushed. He treated and oversaw medical treatment for thousands of people. No one died. This singular and sudden death must have shocked the entire Rio Grande City team, just as they were preparing to leave the relief efforts behind, so soon after the president of the United States inspected and admired their work, and after more than a week of facing down one of the worst natural disasters in Valley history.

Ramirez and some medics toured the shelters again. The crowds of refugees were smaller, in part because more Mexican citizens returned to their homes. When someone asked if "the refugees had been deloused" before they re-crossed the border, Ramirez was instantly offended. First, he explained, there was no evidence that delousing anyone was necessary. Second, he asserted, the Mexicans would rightly "consider it a personal affront and insult if we

[330] "UTMB Medical Team in the Valley After Hurricane Beulah," 4-5.
[331] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 35.
[332] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 36.

attempted any such action." They were guests, he added, not prisoners. Again, Ramirez demonstrated his awareness of the diplomatic delicacy required throughout the crisis. He actively worried that "we might unintentionally create [an] international incident." [333]

In Harlingen, Crofoot finally inspected his church on Friday afternoon. "It was a sad-looking affair," he remembered. He estimated the floodwaters in the building had exceeded five feet. Slime covered everything. Water-logged books and furniture were scattered everywhere. Even the church organ was damaged. But there was a glimmer of hope. "We do not think," he wrote weeks later, "that the church building suffered any structural damage." He and his associates went right to work cutting sheetrock, repairing the air conditioning, and restoring electricity. Crofoot also remembered some good news. Before Beulah emerged as a threat, he had ordered pews and a new carpet, and they all sat safely in a nearby warehouse. Crofoot was hopeful: "Not every preacher and his people get to both build and rebuild a church."[334]

In San Antonio, Beulah made minor religious history. Hundreds of Valley refugees were sheltered at Trinity Baptist Church, and Dr. Buckner Fanning, the pastor, "felt that the evacuees should have a religious service of some kind." Fanning shared his idea with a local Catholic colleague, Father Stephen Leven, who approved the gesture. Leven asked Father Lawrence Steubben from Our Lady of Grace Church to conduct a Mass for the refugees. Spanish-speaking priests from Harlingen traveled to San Antonio and joined Steubben. They all re-assured their Catholic audience that, under the circumstances, a Mass in a Baptist church would be acceptable. Fanning later told a reporter that a "Catholic Mass in Trinity Baptist Church was the first in the history of the Baptist church anywhere."[335]

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[333] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 36.
[334] Crofoot memoir, Moore Papers, 2.
[335] Associated Press, "Refugee Mass: Beulah Creates Religious History," *Corpus Christi Caller*, September 30, 1967, box 4za441, Moore Papers.

FIGURE 16
A helicopter transports an infant to Galveston. The child's mother holds a note about the baby's condition. Photographer George F. Tuley. Part of the Dr. Mario E. Ramirez Hurricane Beulah Photograph Collection, Mario E. Ramirez, M.D. Library, UT Health Science Center Regional Academic Health Center, Harlingen, TX.

Humans were not the only ones the floodwaters tormented. Helicopters swooped down over isolated patches of ground crowded with thousands of starving cattle and dropped bales of hay for the animals to devour.[336] Jack Keever, a reporter from the *Corpus Christi Caller*,

[336] Stratford C. Jones, "Some See Benefits Due To Flooding in Mexico," Associated Press, *Corpus Christi Times*, September 29, 1967, box 4za441, Moore Papers.

described the Valley as a swampy, bizarre, and brutally humid world filled with splintered tree limbs, water-logged trash, dazed survivors, and a rancid stench. "Bushes sticking above the water," he wrote, "are black with tarantulas clinging to anything they can find above the waterline." Sightseers gawked at flooded and shattered homes. Some neon signs still worked, he wrote, and they "present a garish picture as they blink out over flooded streets." Merciless clouds of mosquitos, he wrote, "get into everything – your nose, eyes, and hair."[337]

Health officials like Peavy recognized the danger mosquitos posed. "Cattle were actually killed by mosquitos clogging up their noses and bronchial tracts," he also noted. He asked the Air Force to set aside spray planes to help. On Friday, Air Force C-123 planes began spraying the insecticide malathion. "Four twin-engine [civilian] planes" helped widen the operation's reach. The effort lasted until November 4. The planes dispersed 75,000 gallons of malathion over more than 3,000,000 acres in fifteen counties.[338]

Saturday, September 30, and Sunday, October 1

The quiet weekend marked the beginning of the end of the relief efforts.

Ramirez accompanied a USPHS team to Camargo. Red Cross medics joined them. They landed next to the remnants of a church. Conditions had improved, Ramirez recalled, despite mud 16 to 18 inches deep that still filled some streets and homes. A rumbling tractor gradually cut a path through the mess. Two Mexican physicians briefed the team on the generally grim situation. Camargo still had no water supply, and it was still cut off from Rio Grande City.

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[337] Jack Keever, "Harlingen Life Unending Fight," *Corpus Christi Caller*, September 28, 1967, box 4za441, Moore Papers.

[338] James E. Peavy, "Hurricane Beulah," *American Journal for Public Health and the Nation's Health* 60, no. 3 (March 1970): 481-484. "Unfortunately," Peavy added, "one of these [civilian planes] crashed into the Rio Grande River, killing the pilot and totally destroying the plane." Investigators did not know why the Alpha-Twin Beach plane crashed more than two miles east of Brownsville. See "Spray Plane Pilot Dies in Rio Crash," *Brownsville Herald*, October 22, 1967.

Because of the flooding, a direct road trip that usually took five minutes under normal conditions, they said, now required a "round about" trip of a few hours.[339]

Upon returning to Rio Grande City, Ramirez met with Stillwell, who informed city officials that Mexican helicopters would land in the area on Monday, October 2, and gather together the remaining Mexican refugees for a final trip home.

On Sunday, Ramirez remembered, "things were rather quiet."[340] Doctors made their rounds. Hospitals were managed. Patients with enduring ailments were monitored. Medical team leaders prepared their personnel to leave in the coming days.

Monday, October 2, and Tuesday, October 3

Ramirez was back in Rio Grande City in time to see the relief efforts' final chapter begin. Stillwell hosted Mexico's Lt. Gen. Gomez-Cueva as he thanked the U.S. teams and informed the Mexican refugees that "Mexico was now ready to receive them." Gomez-Cueva added a chilling warning: He had asked U.S. officials to prosecute "to the fullest" any Mexican citizen who opted to remain in the U.S. Ramirez thought the refugees "appeared sad to be leaving," but they obeyed the army commander.[341] Helicopters soared over the wrecked landscape and soared south towards Camargo. Fascinated and smiling children delighted to be flying over the region stared out the windows as they raced over frayed palm trees, empty fields, and muddy roads.[342] By sunset, all the Mexican refugees were gone.

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[339] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 37.
[340] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 38.
[341] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 38; Ramirez to Connally, 5 October 1967, 2.
[342] "Outside the Fort Ringgold Complex," "Preparing to return to Mexico," Tuley photograph collection; "Mexican Refugees Return Home," 1967, *Universal Newsreel*, 0:43, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, *Texas Archive of the Moving Picture*, accessed July 14, 2014, http://www.texasarchive.org/library/index.php?title=Mexican_Refugees_Return_Home. The repatriation began on October 2.

The USPHS team departed that evening. Ramirez took McFadden and some medical students out for dinner. "For the first time," Ramirez remembered, "we relaxed."[343]

Helicopters took the remaining UTMB team members to Harlingen, and Civil Air Patrol planes flew them home. A USPHS pharmacist stayed behind "to complete the operation and close it." The PDH went back to Edinburg. Medical supplies were packed up. Shelters were broken down or cleaned out.[344]

During the storm, residents throughout South Texas reported legions of snakes swiftly slithering away from flooded fields. Many expressed fears of widespread snakebites. One expert scoffed at the fears and explained that the snakes were just as frightened as the people. Essentially, the expert explained, during such a crisis, a snake "wouldn't bite you unless you put your hand in its mouth." After the storm, snake catchers "wearing green uniforms and protective boots" poked around the Nueces River and filled their bags with rattlesnakes and other reptiles still searching for refuge from the floods.[345]

One of Beulah's unexpected consequences linked the far past to the present. For months, coastal residents from Corpus Christi to Tampico discovered remnants of Spanish-era ships and artifacts along the beaches. Beulah's strong currents and winds had swept away the sand, exposing wrecks and other historical treasures that lay buried for three centuries. When William W. Clements and Gene French found a ship near Corpus Christi, they stood "guard over the spot with loaded rifles at night to protect their holdings." The Mexican military also investigated a dozen more discoveries north of Tampico.[346]

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[343] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 38.
[344] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 39.
[345] Anderson, "Beulah: A Report in Retrospect;" "Snake Hunters Have Field Day in Floodwaters," *Corpus Christi Caller*, September 25, 1967, box 4za441, Moore Papers.
[346] "Hurricane Bared Gold on Beaches," *Reading Eagle* (Reading, PA), January 7, 1968, 51, accessed November 7, 2014, http://tinyurl.com/m2vcesp.

Aftermath and significance

Scientists studied Hurricane Beulah for decades. Storm tracks showed that after landfall it turned northwest towards Alice. It then swung southwest, crossed into Mexico, and dissipated over the northwestern Mexican mountains near Monterrey. It spawned more than 100 tornadoes throughout South and Central Texas, though "most of the tornadoes were small, occurred in rural areas, and inflicted only minor damage."[347] One was spotted as far north as Austin, and another struck New Braunfels. The storm dumped from 15 to 25 inches of rain. The rains eventually flooded more than one million acres throughout more than three dozen South Texas counties, including more than 4,200 square miles in the Valley.[348] One National Hurricane Center expert later compared the amount of energy Beulah released to the "release of energy in 3,600 ten-megaton bombs."[349] Beulah was blamed for almost four dozen deaths, including at least fifteen in Texas.[350] The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) estimated approximately 200,000 Texas were left homeless. The Nueces River, it added, rose to more than 49 feet because of Beulah's rains, contributing to "the worst flood on the Rio Grande … in 34 years."[351] Eleven Mexican states were flooded, and more than 100,000 Mexicans were left homeless. Almost

[347] Grice, "An Investigation of the Tornadoes Associated with Hurricane Beulah," 7; Sugg and Pelissier, "The Hurricane Season of 1967," 247. Grice estimated 141 tornadoes from September 19 to September 23, five times greater than the previous record: Hurricane Carla's 26 twisters in 1961. Most touched down in an area between Corpus Christi, San Antonio, Austin, and Houston.

[348] Metz*, South Texas Weather Journal*; "Hurricane Beulah, Sept. 8-21, 1967," U.S. Corps of Engineers, 5, 16-26; "Angry Waters – Worst Flood in Texas History," 1967, *Universal Newsreel*, 1:05, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, *Texas Archive of the Moving Picture*, accessed July 14, 2014, http://www.texasarchive.org/library/index.php?title=Angry_Waters_-_Worst_Flood_in_Texas_History, accessed July 14, 2014; Grice, "An Investigation of the Tornadoes," 17.

[349] Lynn Pentony, "Head of Storm Center Says City Was Lucky," *Corpus Christi Caller*, September 28, 1967, box 4za441, Moore Papers.

[350] Associated Press, "Damage is Light in 1967 Storms Even with Beulah," *Lawrence Journal-World* (Lawrence, KS), November 25, 1967, 3, accessed November 7, 2014, http://tinyurl.com/p6uopxo. Despite the deaths and damage from Beulah, according to the National Hurricane Center, the 1967 hurricane season was overall less deadly and less expensive season than previous seasons.

[351] "Foreign Disaster Emergency Relief: Seventh Report, July-December 1967," U.S. Agency for International Development, accessed July 8, 2014, http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PDACL008.pdf (hereafter cited as "Foreign Disaster Emergency Relief," USAID), 31-36.

eighty percent of the Valley's vegetable and citrus crop was destroyed.[352] The hurricane killed an "estimated 3,000 head of cattle."[353] In 2014, Beulah's damage was calculated to about $1.5 billion, though when considering "the additional wealth and population in the area today, the actual price tag could have reached $4 billion in today's money."[354] The World Meteorological Organization retired "Beulah" from its list of future storm names.[355] Bluesman Lightin' Joe Hopkins later sang about the storm.[356] In 2014, Beulah still stands among the twentieth-century's most powerful hurricanes.

On September 26, Hoyt Hager, a reporter with the *Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, analyzed with a tinge of disgust the psychological maelstroms Beulah's victims unleashed on themselves and each other throughout the Valley. He pointed to "[r]umors, inaccuracies, exaggerations, and unfounded gossip" that caused "panic and alarm." One rumor claimed that Beulah swept away Padre Island. Gossip worsened what had really happened at the Arroyo Colorado. Another story claimed Matamoros and Reynosa were evacuated. Much confusion, he concluded, stemmed from overly vocal citizens and residents who shared an "ignorance of geography, topography, meteorology, and other subjects." He also condemned "sight-seers" and "joyriders" who obstructed evacuating residents and emergency teams.[357]

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[352] "Hurricane Beulah: Preliminary Report with Advisories and Bulletins Issued," U.S. Weather Service, 2; "A Blow Called Beulah," *CPL News*, September-October 1967, box 4za428, Moore Papers (hereafter cited as "A Blow Called Beulah", Moore Papers).
[353] Nielsen, "Beulah."
[354] Aaron Nielsen, "Beulah," *Monitor* (McAllen, TX), September 15, 2007, accessed November 10, 2014, http://www.themonitor.com/news/local/article_c40bac7e-7a5b-5c80-b696-53726c6dc600.html.
[355] Metz*, South Texas Weather* Journal; "The Retirement of Hurricane Names," National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, accessed September 1, 2014, http://www.aoml.noaa.gov/general/lib/retiram.html.
[356] Sam John Hopkins, "Hurricane Beulah – Sam Lightin' Hopkins (Live)," YouTube.com video, 3:33, posted by "Eric Cajundelyon," July 14, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X1mDRDf_ThY. Learn more about Hopkins here: http://tinyurl.com/ycnbatt.
[357] Hager, "Gossip Caused Panic, Alarm In the Valley," *Corpus Christi Caller*, September 26, 1967, box 4za441, Moore Papers.

FIGURE 17
Medical staff treated infants suffering from diarrhea and dehydration in the PDH's pediatric ward following Hurricane Beulah. Dr. Kay Rogers, a San Antonio pediatrician, gave intravenous fluids to about two dozen infants. Rio Grande City High School shop students built the IV stands. Photographer George F. Tuley. Part of the Dr. Mario E. Ramirez Hurricane Beulah Photograph Collection, Mario E. Ramirez, M.D. Library, UT Health Science Center Regional Academic Health Center, Harlingen, TX.

Hager returned to the Valley four months later and found little improved. Reminders of Beulah were everywhere, he wrote, "reflected in flooded orchards, closed roads, abandoned homes and thousands of acres of stagnant, stinking water." Farmers, he said, rushed to prepare fields for springtime cotton and grain planting. Agricultural experts predicted "salt damage to the

land" would be Beulah's longest-lasting damage to the flooded Valley. In thousands of acres east of Raymondville, Hager wrote, "standing water has raised the salt table to the surface. Years of leaching will be required, after the water table drops, to remove the salt from the surface soil."[358]

Many men and women paused to reflect on what Beulah meant to their professions, to their communities, and to their lives. Instead of taking a grim Hager-like view, they strived to find some benefit from the flooded plains, wrecked homes, and staggered societies. For example, Peavy was upbeat when he reviewed the lessons learned. He wrote optimistically that his health department team "confirmed that a massive spraying operation will effectively control a large mosquito population." More importantly, he said, they "learned to mesh [their] activities with other agencies more efficiently," and they confirmed that state officials could rely on federal, military, and Mexican assistance when disaster struck.[359]

In Brownsville, Rentfro was grateful that she and her family survived the storm. She also felt pride in her community. The "crisis brought out the best in people," she recalled. "A great deal of courage was exhibited by many in the face of physical danger and emotional stress." Perhaps, she mused, "all of the effects of Beulah were not destructive, after all."[360] Weaver mourned over how Beulah turned the "pride and joy of the Valley, our lovely green growth," into "a grotesque disarray." She kept her family busy sawing branches, sweeping, and cutting brush. Debris and garbage were everywhere, she recalled. Buzzing flies and squirming maggots seemed inescapable. Snakes, lizards, bugs, and rats slithered and skittered among the wreckage. The sound of rescue helicopters thumped throughout the humid days and nights.

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[358] Hager, "Beulah's Wet Ghost Haunts Lower Valley," *Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, February 11, 1968, box 4za441. Moore Papers.
[359] Peavy, "Hurricane Beulah," 484.
[360] Rentfro memoir, Moore Archive, 8-9.

FIGURE 18
Ramirez (right) and a medical team prepare to transport an infant to Galveston. Photographer George F. Tuley. Part of the Dr. Mario E. Ramirez Hurricane Beulah Photograph Collection, Mario E. Ramirez, M.D. Library, UT Health Science Center Regional Academic Health Center, Harlingen, TX.

Despite the frightening experience, Weaver shared Rentfro's optimism. She and her family endured "a common fear and hope to survive against an uncontrollable force." Watching her neighborhood work together to recover, she wrote, "did a great deal of good in restoring and reinforcing faith in mankind." Beulah, she added, also "erased a lot of local eyesores" and

provided reconstruction jobs for the unemployed.[361] Like Crofoot, who looked forward to rebuilding his church, Sanders, the Port Isabel mayor, felt optimistic about the future. He reflected the mood of most of his citizens: "We built it, and we will rebuild it, and we will rebuild it better than it was before."[362]

In Rio Grande City, Sanchez never forgot "the massive force of nature as the waters rose and homes were flooded. All human efforts to channel the waters … were to no avail." He never forgot the "thousands of children that had nothing but what they had on their backs." He never forgot how shelters posted lists of the names of the people inside. He never forgot "the crowds that formed to see if their loved ones were on the lists." But he was also thrilled to see Army soldiers and their equipment in action, and he was proud. "We all came out of this experience with a huge sense of accomplishment," he remembered, "and in my case [I had] further reinforcement that service to country was the correct azimuth for my life."[363]

South of the Rio Grande, some Mexican government officials saw massive benefits buried beneath all of Beulah's rubble. The floods, they explained, "have spread rich topsoil over farmlands and left the normally parched county with full reservoirs." The Mexican president even determined that Beulah's destruction "did not constitute a national disaster."[364]

In the essay anthology *Uncommon Ground*, historian William Cronon perceived "complicated and contradictory ways in which modern human beings conceive of their place in nature." Before Beulah, people considered nature oppressive but endurable, reflected in droughts or heavy August rains. It was strong but controllable, reflected in the region's dams, canals, and seawalls. It was only rarely dangerous or even just a tease, reflected in citizens' blasé attitude

[361] Weaver memoir, Moore Papers, 5-6.
[362] Sanders, "Remembering Beulah."
[363] Sanchez, email interview with author.
[364] Jones, "Some See Benefits Due To Flooding in Mexico," Associated Press, *Corpus Christi Times*.

after Hurricane Inez's near-miss of Brownsville in 1966. Beulah's powerful rains, waves, tornadoes, floods, and winds, however, represented the "radical otherness of nature," of a "nonhuman world." Beulah's dangerous and oppressive strength represented nature at its worst, when humans' perceptions of their place in its swirling insanity were reduced to the same fate as the spiders on a bush, as snakes fleeing for higher ground, or as starved cattle bawling as buzzards circled overhead. They could only wait in the dark, hope for the best, and rebuild what nature ripped out of their lives. Post-storm opinions reflect the contradictory perception of nature Cronon highlighted. Beulah was destructive, some said, but it also brought benefits. Mexican officials pointed to filled reservoirs and fresh topsoil. Weaver pointed to local decrepitude washed away and more employment. Sanchez felt immense pride in himself and his community. Rentfro, Crofoot, and Sanders saw opportunities to rebuild better societies. Beulah as a "demonic other" became, perhaps only briefly, a necessary evil within human hopes for a better world.[365]

Ramirez and other relief workers also reflected on what they experienced. Ramirez wrote that UTMB estimated that more than 10,000 refugees were cared for between Roma and Rio Grande City, and about half of those were in Roma.[366] In a letter to Connally, Ramirez readily admitted that he and his volunteers "were inexperienced in that we had never had to work under these circumstances."[367] But his newly-exercised leadership, his regional expertise, and his steady hand made it work. Many participants felt as deeply as he did about the experience. Few forgot his leadership, medical performance, or diplomatic sophistication under impossible circumstances. Their subsequent letters to him sparkled with their praise and admiration.

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[365] William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 20, 25, 48, 52.
[366] Ramirez, Beulah memoirs, 38.
[367] Ramirez to Connally, 5 October 1967, "Documents and Personal Letters," Ramirez Collection, 1.

FIGURE 19
A volunteer mops the floor in the PDH. Photographer George F. Tuley.
Part of the Dr. Mario E. Ramirez Hurricane Beulah Photograph Collection, Mario E. Ramirez, M.D. Library, UT Health Science Center Regional Academic Health Center, Harlingen, TX.

Rodgers, writing soon after returning to San Antonio, beautifully encapsulated what many felt. "I personally consider my short stay in the valley as one of the most rewarding experiences of my life," she wrote to Ramirez. "The joy of working together for a common cause, the new friends made, and the determination to survive and rebuild seem to make the tragedies wrought a little less tragic." Rodgers added that "I shall always remember the great admiration, respect, and sincere love that all of the people there had for you. Certainly your life is fulfilling a glorious cause."[368] Connally wrote that "your around-the-clock work with the people in your area fully merits the gratitude of all Texans." Coughlin, member of the first Santa Rosa team, told Ramirez simply, "You are truly a splendid man."[369] Starr County judge and physician M.J. Rodriguez wrote Ramirez that "you have indeed brought added honor to the medical profession."[370] Ramirez later received the Distinguished Service Award from the Texas Academy of Family Practice for his leadership during the relief efforts.[371]

Federal officials also celebrated Ramirez shortly after the storm efforts and for long afterwards. Leone, the leader of the USPHS team, admitted that "I don't know what the community would have done without you and your personal services."[372] On October 17, Dr. Henry C. Huntley, a USPHS official, announced that U.S. Surgeon General William H. Stewart cited Ramirez and Queen "for their services in the Texas area struck by floods." The *Rio Grande Herald* wrote that Ramirez "brought honor to himself, his family, his profession, and Starr

[368] Katherine Rodgers to Ramirez, 17 October 1967, "Documents and Personal Letters," Ramirez Collection.
[369] Connally to Ramirez, 9 October 1967; Coughlin to Ramirez, 27 September 1967, "Documents and Personal Letters," Ramirez Collection.
[370] M.J. Rodriguez to Ramirez, 10 November 1967, "Documents and Personal Letters," Ramirez Collection.
[371] "Mario E. Ramirez MD. Selected Career Highlights, Service on Committees & Councils and Awards and Honors Received," Cabinet 14, Item 11, Ramirez Collection (hereafter cited as Ramirez, "Career Highlights").
[372] N.C. Leone to Ramirez, 9 October 1967, "Documents and Personal Letters," Ramirez Collection.

County." [373] In 1968, Stillwell wrote to Ramirez that "[b]eyond question, the story of Rio Grande City as a key refugee center is … the story of Doctor Ramirez. ... None of us associated with Task Force Bravo will ever forget the heroic figure of Doctor Ramirez of Roma."[374] UTMB's Carrick said it best: "[Ramirez's] response to the problems was in keeping with highest standards of the most idealistic philosophy of medicine. He is a real doctor."[375]

"I do not deserve any special 'thanks,' commendations, or praise of any kind," Ramirez wrote to Rodriguez. "You and all of us worked together for the common cause of helping [our] brothers and neighbors."[376] He felt guilty: "I feel that I have gotten too much recognition and that I really didn't [do] much. I appreciate it very, very much."[377]

Certainly, Ramirez did not work alone, as he said in letters to his contemporaries, in interviews to reporters, and in his memoirs. High school shop teacher Cavazos devised the IV stands to hold the fluid-filled bottles. San Antonio pediatrician Rodgers, who cared for dozens of infants, fought an epidemic of infantile diarrhea that spread among evacuee children.[378] Zimmerman, Dr. Pauline Wallace, and Dr. W.M. Moncrief handled one medical crisis after another.[379] Sister Mary Josephine comforted dazed and frightened Comales residents.[380]

Father Brower circulated among the storm refugees and victims on both sides of the border, offering spiritual comfort in English and Spanish. A team from Sisters of Charity of the

[373] "Dr. Mario Ramirez Cited By Surgeon General" and "Editorial," *Rio Grande Herald*, October 26, 1967; "MDs Cited for Disaster Aid," *Medical Tribune*, November 30, 1967.
[374] Richard G. Stillwell to Ramirez, 9 February 1968, "Documents and Personal Letters," Ramirez Collection.
[375] Carrick, "RGC," 3.
[376] Ramirez to Rodriguez, 12 November 1967, "Documents and Personal Letters" Ramirez Collection.
[377] Ramirez to de la Garza, Letter 2, 16 October 1967, "Documents and Personal Letters," Ramirez Collection, 1. Ramirez wrote two letters to de la Garza, one formal and one personal. This refers to the personal letter (hereafter cited as Ramirez to Kika de la Garza, Letter 2, 16 October 1967).
[378] "Pediatric ward," "Premature infant," Tuley photograph collection.
[379] "Pediatric volunteers," Tuley photograph collection.
[380] "Sister Josephine," Tuley photograph collection.

Incarnate Word fed and comforted evacuated children.[381] Edna Ramon from the Ramirez Hospital "prepared hundreds of bottles of infant formula and homemade electrolyte solutions"[382] Judy Morin, a pediatric ward clerk, worked tirelessly to keep operations running smoothly.[383] Legions of Boy Scouts, high school students, local residents, Republicans and Democrats alike, and members of the Ramirez family – notably his wife Sarah and their son Mario Jr. – all made crucial contributions every day. Ramirez sang their praises in his correspondence and memoirs as often as others praised him. He was proud of himself, but he was prouder of his family, volunteers, and colleagues. "It is difficult to put into words," he wrote Coughlin, "how much we really appreciated everything that you did for us."[384] He likely felt similar appreciative sentiments to members of every organization that helped save so many lives.

The Beulah experience reminded Ramirez of both the fragility and resiliency of the Valley. The people endured one of the great storms in history and improvised creative ways to help babies, the elderly, and each other. But medical personnel in the area had been dangerously sparse to begin with, underequipped, and overextended. Beulah's floods cut roads and ruined crucial drinking water. Its high winds crippled communications and destroyed buildings. Heroic actions, creative improvisation, and finally massive outside assistance by civilian and military forces confronted the catastrophic effects of a powerful and historic hurricane. That was enough to win the battle against a singular event, but Ramirez realized that much more was needed to win the war against a legacy of poverty, neglect, and ill health. For the next forty years he would use every opportunity to tactically and strategically wage his campaign for a healthier and stronger Valley.

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[381] "Sisters of Charity volunteer," Tuley photograph collection.
[382] "Infant formula," Tuley photograph collection.
[383] "Judy Morin," Tuley photograph collection.
[384] Ramirez to Coughlin, 1.

CHAPTER 4: THE ARENA

As 1967 turned into 1968, life as a Roma physician returned to its normal rhythms and challenges. A writer from *Texas Medicine* found Ramirez working "an average of 16 to 18 hours a day, seeing from 40 to 100 patients between breakfast and dinner." Because of his brutal schedule, the reporter added, Ramirez is "aged beyond his 42 years." The five-foot-seven doctor had gray hair but was "very quick in his movements and always smiling." The writer noticed that when one of Ramirez's patients improved, the religious physician simply explained that it was "thanks to God."[385] Leonidas Cigarroa and his "Paisano Patrol," his team of nurses and doctors, still made the weekly evening trip from Laredo to perform major surgeries at the hospital.[386] Those rhythms changed after 1968 when Ramirez re-opened his life to the turmoil of politics.

"Politics in South Texas," Ramirez said in an oral history, "are very volatile" because of "the Spanish temperament."[387] He held little respect and even less patience for the Valley's chaotic political world. After only a cursory review of the Valley's creatively corrupt political history, few would disagree with Ramirez's disdain. His family's Republican history in a Democratic county likely contributed to that disdain. Yet when political doors opened to him, even when Democrats opened them, he did not disregard the opportunities that lay just beyond their thresholds. "Since the physician plays such an important part in the life of a small town," he explained later, "it's not uncommon to find him delving a little into politics – and such was the case with me too."[388] Any distracting volatility, he likely reasoned, was a small price to pay for the practical and positive social progress that might be achieved if his hands were on the levers

[385] Ivey, "How is Dr. Mario," 115.
[386] Stan Redding, "The Country Doctor Had a Dream," *Houston Chronicle Magazine*, November 19, 1972, "Scrapbook," Cabinet 14, Item 6, Ramirez Collection. The team, according to Redding, included Dr. Oscar Elizondo, nurse Adelia Arce, and technicians Dan Torres and Hortencia Buerger.
[387] Ramirez, *Oral history*.
[388] Ivey, "How is Dr. Mario," 118.

of political influence. Ramirez's use of that power again illustrated his four central beliefs in action -- conscience, community, commitment, and most important of all, education.

By 1969, Ramirez had waged a twenty-year campaign to care for his Valley communities. He built two small medical facilities, realized his ambition to serve in the military, presided over a robust family, and cared for thousands of people who needed medical care, whether from normal ailments or after one of the strongest hurricanes in U.S. history. He was proud of his accomplishments and proud to be a useful part of his community. That pride comprised the core of his commitment to care for and improve their lives. His people deserved the best care when sick, the best nurses and doctors to care for them, the best information to help them maintain their well-being, and the best medical infrastructure that could reach every Valley resident who needed it. Education was key to achieving every one of those ambitions. In order to achieve them, intelligent Valley students needed better schools to prepare them for universities and medical schools. Medical students needed more hospitals and medical schools to train them. He needed selfless, tireless, sacrificing health care professionals who were as driven by conscience as he was to commit to stay in or return to their Valley communities. They would expand the medical infrastructure he knew Valley patients needed. They would strengthen the medical network he knew Valley doctors needed.

In 1969, Ramirez took advantage of a unique political opportunity to build the educational world he envisioned. His subsequent political involvement enabled him to pursue long-term educational ambitions. His educational triumphs made him more politically valuable to state and national political leaders. His stellar medical career afforded him unassailable credentials and credibility on countless political and educational issues. Those elements of his standing as an influential Valley figure energized each other for the next four decades.

Presidents, governors, senators, and congressmen respected Ramirez's career, lauded his accomplishments, and draped him with awards, resolutions, and special assignments that took him beyond the Valley and beyond Texas. Those new journeys began in 1969, in the long jagged shadows of Valley political history.

"Families and dynasties existed for many years," Ramirez explained, "and remnants of these are still with us. In Roma, the town, the schools -- just about everything was controlled by one family when I was young."[389] Ramirez probably referred to the Guerra family, one of Roma's founding families. Democrat Manuel Guerra founded the extraordinary Roma dynasty in the 1870s, historians Alicia A. Garza and Evan Anders explained, when the "rancher and merchant asserted control of [Starr County] as political boss." Guerra was a *patron,* historian Jesus Perez explained, who utilized a "paternalism developed from the necessity to protect those in a lower socio-economic position … on both sides of the Rio Grande."[390] Starr County was in "the heart of the so-called patron system, a semifeudal arrangement derived from Hispanic colonial roots. The patron was a political overlord who controlled [and protected] ranch *peones* through social and economic patronage." County society carried this system into the twentieth century as new bosses like Archie Parr, Jim Wells, and Guerra built party machines.[391]

Perez wrote that the Democrats in Starr County ruled for different reasons than Democrats in other parts of the U.S. South. The Democratic Party beyond the Valley based its power "on the ideology of white supremacy, meaning Anglo American supremacy and the disenfranchisement of minorities." In Starr County, however, Anglos had to work with Latino landowners "who controlled the votes of their peasants." The result, Perez concluded, was a

[389] Ramirez, *Oral history.*
[390] Jesus Perez, "Manuel Guerra and the Politics of Starr County, Texas 1880-1920" (MA thesis, University of Texas-Pan American, 2014), 44.
[391] Arreola, *Tejano South Texas*, 190.

political party devoted to Anglo supremacy that had no choice but to build itself on a foundation of Latino support.[392] In the 1880s, Republican and businessman Edward C. Lasater challenged the county's Democratic power structure, and he steadily exploited cracks in the Democratic alliance, which regional Democratic boss Wells struggled to hold together from Brownsville.[393] The Guerra family helped Wells maintain control in Starr County.

Manuel Guerra's first direct foray into politics was his 1894 election to Starr County's commissioners' court, which he held until he died in 1915. The board controlled county budgets and tax revenues, and from that position of power Guerra and fellow Democrats decided which Latinos and Anglo allies would build the society they wanted. After 1902, the Texas legislature imposed a poll tax on any voter. Guerra used his wealth to purchase the taxes for his legions of Mexican and Mexican-American voters, and the election victories he and his allies achieved served as a racial bulwark against Anglo newcomers, like Lasater, who tried to re-engineer county politics to their long-term advantage.[394] Historian Jovita Gonzalez wrote that Guerra was a "magnetic personality [who] became a political boss because the people were willing to follow him and wanted him to be one." He exercised and maintained his power in three ways, she wrote: "family relations, financial aid, and giving out political positions." Marriage ties connected him to many Starr County landowners. Ranchmen came to him for credit. Political supporters received lucrative teaching certificates.[395]

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[392] Perez, "Manuel Guerra and the Politics of Starr County, Texas 1880-1920," 56.
[393] Perez, "Manuel Guerra and the Politics of Starr County, Texas 1880-1920," 56-57.
[394] Perez, "Manuel Guerra and the Politics of Starr County, Texas 1880-1920," 71-72, 76-77; Arreola, *Tejano South Texas*, 190-191; Garza, "Starr County," *Handbook of Texas Online*; Evan Anders, "Guerra, Manuel," *Handbook of Texas Online*, Texas State Historical Association, accessed October 26, 2014, http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fgu14. The building that served as Guerra's home and store is the centerpiece of Roma's 15-block National Historic Landmark district. His descendants eventually spread throughout the Valley and became cattle merchants, lawmen, politicians, artists, and collectors of rare artifacts. Also see Gene Fowler, "An Interwoven Legacy: The Guerra Family Cultivates New Culture with Deep Roots," *Texas Highways*, August 2014, accessed October 26, 2014, http://www.texashighways.com/culture-lifestyle/item/7512-an-interwoven-legacy-guerra-family.
[395] Gonzalez, "Social Life in Cameron, Starr, and Zapata Counties," 89.

FIGURE 20
The Guerra store, Roma, Texas. November 2014.
Photograph by author.

Starr County Democrats were also called Reds, and Republicans were also called Blues. The different colors – red/*colorado* or blue/*azul* -- were used to help illiterate or non-English speakers select Democratic or Republican candidates listed on English-language ballots. In other counties, blue applied to Democrats and red applied to Republicans, echoing twenty-first century political distinctions.[396] Historian Cynthia E. Orozco explained that the color codes were just one element of a colorful late nineteenth-century Valley political process that spilled into the

[396] Garza, "Starr County," *Handbook of Texas Online*; Cynthia E. Orozco, "Reds and Blues," *Handbook of Texas Online*, Texas State Historical Association, accessed October 22, 2014, http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/pqrsu.

twentieth century, when primaries eventually replaced direct voting, not long before Ramirez's birth in 1926. Political teams of Guerra's generation, she wrote, regularly gathered men from both sides of the border, corralled them in holding areas, entertained them with food, dancing, and music, instructed them on how to vote and who to vote for, paid them, and then delivered them to the polling stations on election day. According to Texas law, these Mexican recruits only had to express to county clerks their "intent to become a [U.S.] citizen" before they were allowed to vote in a U.S. election. Presumably, the clerks pretended to believe them, the recruits voted for the right candidate, and then the political recruiters "freed" them, until the next election. The unabashed nature of these tactics endured into the late 1920s.[397]

From the mid-1900s to the late 1960s, Valley politics, particularly in Starr County, saw a string of scandals, legal investigations, violence, strange ideas, and shifts in power between the Guerras' Old Party and challengers like the New Party. Tensions between Guerra's forces and Anglo leaders in then-northern Starr County turned violent, leaving a Democratic district judge and a Republican political activist dead.[398] But some peace came when Brooks County, carved out of Starr County, took those Anglo opponents with it. Manuel Guerra expanded his small political empire until he died in 1915.[399] Since 1936, Garza explained, Texas Rangers investigated the Guerra factions for various violations, weakening their political machine, and after 1948 they lost their grip on county power for almost twenty years. On April 11, 1938, Arreola wrote, Anglo political leaders in Harlingen proposed to turn Cameron, Willacy, Cameron, and Starr counties into the forty-ninth state, based on "a thriving agricultural

[397] Orozco, "Reds and Blues," *Handbook of Texas Online*.
[398] Joe Baulch, "The Murder of Stanley Welch and the 1906 Starr County Election," *The Journal of South Texas* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 33-46.
[399] Anders, "Guerra, Manuel," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

economy." The proposal, like other similar ideas before and after it, went nowhere.[400] In the 1960s, investigations into Valley political activities discovered "fraudulent applications for absentee ballots, false notarization of applications, and forged poll-tax rolls."[401] Ramirez grew up and built his medical practice in the midst of political investigations and rises and falls of one faction after another. J.G. Guerra, who was first elected Roma mayor in 1953, and his allies dominated the scene Ramirez entered.

Ramirez was not a political novice. His father had served as postmaster -- a classic political appointment -- for two decades beginning in the 1920s. He had also been the county's Republican Party chairman.[402] Ramirez was also no stranger to political fights. By 1961, the Guerras were back in control, led by "Poncho" Guerra.[403] That same year Ramirez personally entered politics and learned a bitter lesson he never forgot. Ramirez and three allies decided to run in a Roma school board election in order, he said, to refresh the board's power structure. "It was a heated, difficult election," he recalled, "which I did not enjoy." He remembered that he faced the harsh reality that "if you controlled the school, each teacher or employee had to physically bring in five or six voters, and thus you immortalized yourself in office." He, his allies, his friends, and his relatives decided to make a quiet and dignified campaigning effort, "and we limited ourselves to a correspondence campaign."[404] Ramirez won more votes in the early April contest. However, the opposition led by Roma Mayor Virgilio H. Guerra declared

[400] Garza, "Starr County," *Handbook of Texas Online*; Arreola, *Tejano South Texas*, 189-190. The idea echoed old separatist ambitions of the 1915 Plan de Diego and the brief life of the 1839 Republic of the Rio Grande, which claimed as its territory almost all of the Valley north and south of the Rio Grande and made Laredo its capital.
[401] Garza, "Starr County," *Handbook of Texas Online*.
[402] Roberts, "Starr Pioneer Ramirez Succumbs."
[403] Garza, "Starr County," *Handbook of Texas Online*.
[404] Ivey, "How is Dr. Mario," 118.

victory, and Ramirez protested the vote count in the 79th State District Court.[405] The election court had invalidated 200 absentee votes, and Ramirez knew if they were counted he would win. Ramirez knew he had greater electorate support than the tallies indicated. Lawyers tied up the election in the courts.[406] After a recount, appeal followed appeal. After one district court victory, it was time for Ramirez and his elected colleagues to take office. When they arrived on November 9, 1962, to take their school board seats, the superintendent and the board president were missing. Ramirez could not take office until they were officially served with district court orders validating Ramirez's election victory and his school board seat. Without official authority, he could not re-open Roma public schools that had closed the previous afternoon.[407] As court battles dragged on, and by the time the Texas Supreme Court ruled that Ramirez had officially won the election, the term he was elected to serve had expired. The first step of his plan for more physicians in the Valley was a quality education for Starr County children. He must have resentfully realized that if the current board members could not provide that education then he would try to improve it himself. Instead, he came face to face with a political power structure he could not circumvent, regardless of a victory one court after another legitimated.

The physician also resented the experience for a reason unique to his profession: "[M]any of my patients were on the opposite side (of the election fight)," he remembered, "and I believed that it might be painful for them to come to see me professionally."[408] He did not despise simply the illegitimate loss of a legitimate victory. It was for him a fundamentally disturbing experience

[405] "Roma Election Contest Filed," *Valley Morning Star* (Harlingen, TX), April 14, 1961, 15, accessed November 7, 2014, http://www.newspapers.com/image/47594400/?terms=mario+ramirez+guerra+roma.
[406] Guerra v. Ramirez, 351 S.W.2d 272 (Tex. App. 1961), *Court Listener*, accessed September 28, 2014, https://www.courtlistener.com/texapp/d8vB/guerra-v-ramirez; Alvarez v. Laughlin, 362 S.W.2d 915 (Tex. App. 1962), *Court Listener*, accessed September 28, 2014, https://www.courtlistener.com/opinion/2417914/alvarez-v-laughlin; Guerra v. Ramirez, 364 S.W.2d 720 (Tex. App. 1963), *Court Listener*, accessed September 28, 2014, https://www.courtlistener.com/opinion/1748762/guerra-v-ramirez.
[407] "No School for Roma Children," *Brownsville Herald*, November 9, 1962, 1, accessed November 7, 2014, http://www.newspapers.com/image/24016230/?terms=mayor+guerra+roma.
[408] Ramirez, *Oral history*.

when he saw how it affected and even endangered the fragile and crucial doctor-patient relationship, a connection he cultivated with some people for years if not decades. In a 1968 remembrance, he wrote tellingly that "I've set out to erase that portion of our experience here." He did not specify how he did that. Certainly, five years later, he was willing to illustrate it for and immortalize it in an article in *Texas Medicine*.[409]

Disgusted with the experience, Ramirez re-focused his energies on his practice and on his patients. But he did not ignore opportunities to make his political opinion known. In October 1967, for example, when he still had Connally's attention after the Beulah relief efforts, Ramirez wrote, "[Please] accept the nomination to run for governor. We need you very much."[410]

In 1969, Randall Nye left the Starr County Commissioners' Court to become district attorney for the 229th Judicial District. The court offered the county judge seat to Ramirez, who hesitated. The 1963 battle likely still burned in his memory. He was not an attorney, he was not a Democrat (he was Republican), and his medical practice kept him busier than ever. But Ramirez also sensed a singular opportunity. Starr County was home to a population that mostly lived "on an average annual family income of less than $3,000." Less money meant less nutrition, fewer healthy people, and few facilities for them to turn to for medical treatment.[411] A county judge, Ramirez realized, could potentially lead the effort to "build a county hospital" and pursue federal financial assistance.[412] Ramirez realized no one else seemed determined to build a much-needed hospital, and so he agreed to the appointment.[413] Building a hospital might be one of many accomplishments within reach – a key element of his plan to improve Valley health care and bring more medical professionals to its communities. In 200 years, Ramirez explained, Roma's

[409] Ramirez, "Opportunities," 12. Also see Ivey, "How is Dr. Mario?"
[410] Ramirez to Connally, 5 October 1967, "Documents and Personal Letters," Ramirez Collection, 1.
[411] Lana Henderson, "Where Medicine Means a Sun-Scorched Journey," *Dallas Times Herald*, July 13, 1975.
[412] Ramirez, *Pioneer Physician Interview*.
[413] "Dr. Mario Ramirez Named To County Judge Chair," *Rio Grande Herald*, September 11, 1969.

leaders built little infrastructure and improved even less. "It's a shame to say," he told a reporter, "but Mexico right across the border looked better than we did."[414] He determined to change that.

Ramirez explained his objectives and ambitions in an op-ed in September 1969. He introduced himself to his readers as a physician with deep familial roots in Roma. He emphasized a sense of obligation to his community and an ambition to improve that community. He also pointed to his "hope of unifying our people," likely referring to political divisions between the Guerras and their enemies. "Progress," he wrote, "has been impeded, not by outsiders, but by ourselves, because of political strife, distrust for one another, and emotional involvements." He asked his audience to "forego personal ambitions for power and political prestige, hopes or personal gains, and jealousies and animosities towards our neighbors." He called for initiatives to raise employment rates and improve housing, "equitable and fair labor conditions," construction of a trade school and a county hospital, and plans to bring more doctors into the county. He promised his patients in the audience that their needs would always remain "prime and foremost." He vowed that "I owe political allegiance to no person, or persons."[415]

The appointment secured, Ramirez was eager to focus on the new hospital, but some housecleaning had to come first. Almost 1,000 unresolved cases buried the court over which he would preside. Using common sense and legal advice from county attorneys John Pope III and Alex W. Gabert, and under the gaze of an Abraham Lincoln bust, Ramirez threw out some cases and quickly adjudicated others.[416] He tried to be, if nothing else, "just, lenient and consistent." He also deliberately retained his humility. He asked people to continue to address him as "Dr.

[414] Smith-Durk, "'Dr. Mario:' He's the Star in Starr County."
[415] Ramirez, "A Pledge Made in 1969: Dr. Mario E. Ramirez, County Judge," n.p., September 1969.
[416] Ramirez, "Note of Thanks: Dr. Mario E. Ramirez, County Judge, 1969-1978," *The South Texas Reporter*, January 11, 1979, 2.

Ramirez" rather than "Judge Ramirez."[417] He also helped to straighten out the county finances and pay down debts.[418] "I believe I was a strict, compassionate judge," he remembered later. "I believe that more was accomplished for our county than at any other similar period."[419]

The county commissioners asked Ramirez "to form a bipartisan committee of leading community citizens and medical personnel to assess the need for a hospital."[420] On May 23, 1970, Starr County voters overwhelmingly approved the creation of a hospital taxation district to help fund the hospital's operations. The necessary taxes, Ramirez recalled, came from "mainly the wealthier citizens," though he never specified who they were. He may have referred to "oil producers who operate in a small portion of the county," a profile explained, "since on the basis of assessed valuation they pay most of the taxes."[421] His first application for federal funding for the hospital, filed with the State Board of Health, was rejected. But Ramirez tried again and succeeded. Federal funding came from the Hill-Burton assistance program, which finances health care facilities as long as they provide health care at little or no cost for qualified low-income patients.[422] "We got funding for 90 percent," Ramirez recalled in a 1985 interview, "which was unprecedented at the time." Owners of a nearby ranch donated land for the 15-acre campus, three miles from Rio Grande City. Ramirez also worked on the new hospital's design,

[417] Smith-Durk, "'Dr. Mario:' He's the Star in Starr County."
[418] Roger Williams, "One Who Did Not Escape," *Alcalde*, March 1972, 4-5, Ramirez Collection, "Documents and Personal Letters."
[419] Ramirez, *Prologue.*
[420] Kenneth Roberts, "Starr Hospital Nearing Tenth Birthday," *Rio Grande Herald*, February 14, 1985, 2, *Portal to Texas History*, accessed May 14, 2014, http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth194963.
[421] Ramirez, *Oral history*; Roberts, "Starr Hospital Nearing Tenth Birthday;" Sharon Cobler Watson, "Dollars Alone Won't Do the Job," *AMA News*, March 28, 1980. Voters approved the bond issue, for which the county would raise $400,000, by a 5-to-1 majority.
[422] "Hill-Burton Free and Reduced-Cost Health Care," Health Resources and Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, accessed May 14, 2014, http://www.hrsa.gov/gethealthcare/affordable/hillburton/index.html.

with "lots of arches, sort of Spanish architecture."[423] The journey from the first committee meeting to actual construction took years, but Ramirez knew it was worth it.

Ramirez's court proceedings, like his practice, exposed him to a wide variety of people, including young people who had simply made mistakes and might have been lost in the criminal justice system. He counseled them, gave them second chances, and watched to see what they made of the opportunities he provided for them. For example, when thirteen-year-old Juan Mills -- charged with a misdemeanor for drinking beer -- appeared before Ramirez, the county judge told him to find a job. Ramirez then went a step further and added Mills to his clinic staff. Mills stayed with Ramirez for years, learned as much as he could about the clinic, and eventually took charge of the Memorial Hospital's x-ray department.[424]

Ramirez cared about the social influence the job afforded him, but he also embraced the political value that came with it. In July 1972, a member of U.S. Sen. John Tower's staff asked if they could help him with the Hill-Burton application. Ramirez did not need the assistance. But he used the opportunity to offer his political backing to the Texas Republican. "You have always had my support and that of my family …" he wrote in a response letter. "We will do anything that we can to help. I believe that for the first time in many years, many local hard-core Democrats will be switching to our side. This is good – we must keep you in the Senate!"[425]

He also urged Tower to encourage President Richard M. Nixon to visit the Valley. The year before, Ramirez helped to chaperone a group of Rio Grande City High School students, including his daughter Patsy, on a tour of Washington D.C. The students worked for weeks to save up six thousand dollars to fund the visit. When they visited the White House, Nixon met

[423] Raul Trejo, "Funds Approved for Starr Memorial Hospital," *Rio Grande Herald*, March 16, 1972; Roberts, "Starr Hospital Nearing Tenth Birthday;" Ramirez, *Oral history.* Jack Rice Turner of Corpus Christi architecture firm Turner, Roma and Cotton was the project's chief architect.
[424] Little, "A Man's Dedication."
[425] Ramirez to John Tower, 27 July 1972, "Documents and Personal Letters," Ramirez Collection.

them in the Rose Garden. He congratulated them, and they invited him to their school. "I feel that such a visit would help the president [public relations]-wise," Ramirez wrote to Tower. "This is the poorest county in Texas," he added, "and there are more Mexican Americans in this county than in any other one in Texas, and possibly the nation. … It is extremely important and imperative that we re-elect him." Ramirez was possibly signaling to the Republican president that a visit would not only help Ramirez highlight the Valley's needs but also help Nixon secure some Latino votes in his bid for re-election, especially with a beloved physician-county judge with genuine grassroots support at his side.[426]

The day after he wrote to Tower, Ramirez wrote personally to the president. The letter is historically significant because it demonstrates how Ramirez wanted the premier political figure in the U.S. to view him. "Notwithstanding the fact that in South Texas we have always been with the meager minority," Ramirez wrote, "our family has <u>always</u> been Republican." He explained to Nixon that he was in his third year as county judge, working alongside "the local Democratic administration" and trying "to promote good government." Economic development in the Valley, Ramirez felt, "had literally passed us by." However, Ramirez added, "little by little we are seeing change."[427] The self-portrait Ramirez offered to Nixon aligned with his initial motivations for joining the commissioners' court: He was a selfless and dignified public servant standing above party politics, an intelligent and accomplished citizen willing to work with people from opposing viewpoints to make his community a better place. He was the son of a long line of loyal and moderate Republicans who stood virtually alone and endured the ebb and flow of Democratic power in Starr County. Ramirez hoped the president would come and see the county for himself.

[426] Ramirez to Tower, 27 July 1972; OVAL 486-1, April 22, 1971, White House Tapes, Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, Yorba Linda, California, accessed August 26, 2014, http://www.nixonlibrary.gov/forresearchers/find/tapes/finding_aids/tapesubjectlogs/oval486.pdf.
[427] Ramirez to Nixon, 28 July 1972, "Documents and Personal Letters," Ramirez Collection, 1.

In August 1972, Rio Grande City High School student council officers, including Ramirez's son Norman, also urged the president to come. "If by some chance, you are planning to visit Texas this Fall," they wrote to Nixon, "please accept our invitation to visit our school and our community. Our town has never had such an honor, and we know that all the students and all of our people would appreciate it very much."[428]

All the encouragement was effective. On September 21, 1972, Nixon and H.R. Haldeman, his White House chief of staff, decided that the president would visit the Valley. They optimistically reviewed the benefits of visiting the Rio Grande City students after a stop in Laredo. Haldeman considered it merely a "courtesy call" to a "rinky-dink school." Nixon thought voters would think it was "damn nice" if they saw a "personal, friendly" president spending some time with the high-schoolers. When they discussed what Nixon might say to the crowd, Haldeman reminded Nixon to "throw in a little Mexican touch" in his remarks and remember to refer to his California roots. Haldeman explained that upon arrival in Rio Grande City, Nixon would meet Ramirez, a "big wheel" in county politics and Patsy's father. "I think," Haldeman said, "that it will be a very good night." They also saw the political advantage of meeting with conservative Texas Democrats during the Valley visit. They thought that might exude to the electorate an image of a moderate Republican president willing to work with Democrats, thereby neutralizing the appeal of Nixon's potential presidential election rival, South Dakota Sen. George McGovern, to conservative Democratic voters.[429]

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[428] Donald Gebhart and Norman Ramirez to Nixon, 3 August 1972, "Documents and Personal Letters," Ramirez Collection.

[429] OVAL 784-21, September 21, 1972, "White House Tapes," Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, Yorba Linda, California, accessed August 26, 2014, http://www.nixonlibrary.gov/forresearchers/find/tapes/finding_aids/tapesubjectlogs/oval784.pdf. The conversation takes place between 25:00 and 27:30. Audio online here: http://www.nixonlibrary.gov/forresearchers/find/tapes/tape784/784-021a.mp3.

Nixon did visit the school, he did mention his California roots, and he was suitably charming and gracious with the excited crowd of students, parents, school and city officials, and citizens. Ramirez was the official greeter.[430] Ramirez glowed after the visit. "Patsy commented," Ramirez wrote in a thank-you note to Nixon, "that this has been one of the happiest days of her life. … You and your family have brought much dignity and respect to the White House. You have done more than any president to preserve our national honor and to bring about peace and understanding throughout the world. … My family and I will do everything possible for your election in our county."[431] The president responded graciously. "The opportunity to come to your city was indeed a most welcome one," he wrote, "and Mrs. Nixon and I shall never forget the tremendous reception we received there."[432] Ramirez's correspondence and memoirs do not mention if his opinion changed after the Watergate scandal and Nixon's resignation in 1974.[433]

Ramirez ran for election to the county judgeship in 1974 and won. The new hospital was finished during this first full term. The Manuel Ramirez Hospital in Roma closed and the $2 million, 44-bed Starr County Memorial Hospital opened, both on February 15, 1975.[434] "Ramirez," a reporter wrote months later, "is exceedingly proud of the new hospital with its Spanish architecture, art work, center courtyard, and patient rooms which open onto small patios."[435] About seventy people worked at the new hospital, and Ramirez was chief of staff.[436]

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[430] "County Judge and Nixon," *Rio Grande Herald*, September 28, 1972, Ramirez Collection, "President Nixon Visit," Cabinet 14, Item 3, Ramirez Collection (hereafter cited as Ramirez Collection, "Nixon"). Item 3 was a binder filled with newspaper clippings from nearly a dozen national and state newspapers chronicling the September 1972 visit, interspersed with correspondence between Ramirez and the White House and congressional representatives. Cabinet 8 contained a DVD of film footage of Nixon's speech to Rio Grande High School students and ended with Ramirez walking Nixon back to the Marine One helicopter, his and Nixon's arms draped around each other – a physical gesture strangely uncharacteristic for the famously awkward Republican president. Also see Nixon's Daily Diary for September 22, 1972, online here: http://nixontapes.org/pdd/1972-09-22_30.pdf.
[431] Ramirez to Nixon, 30 September 1972, "Documents and Personal Letters," Ramirez Collection.
[432] Nixon to Ramirez, 17 October 1972, "Documents and Personal Letters," Ramirez Collection.
[433] Ramirez, *Prologue*; Ramirez Collection, "Nixon."
[434] Ramirez, "Career Highlights," 3; Roberts, "Starr Hospital Nearing Tenth Birthday."
[435] Henderson, "Where Medicine Means a Sun-Scorched Journey."

Also in 1975, Ramirez moved his practice to Rio Grande City, probably to be closer to the hospital and his many more patients. He also had a partner by then, Dr. Roberto Gonzalez, who moved from Mexico to Roma in 1972. Gonzalez met Ramirez when Gonzalez injured himself and crossed into Texas to receive a tetanus shot. Ramirez knew of him and proposed a partnership. Gonzalez accepted. Together they operated the Ramirez-Gonzalez Medico-Surgical Family Clinic next to the Starr County Memorial Hospital. When asked what he thought of Ramirez's approach to his patients, Gonzalez said, "[He] pampers them. His patients often refuse to wait in the waiting room. … He's so nice, he'll say, 'There are 100 patients ahead of you, and it's 3 a.m., but I'll see you as soon as I can.' "[437] Dr. Antonio Falcon joined them in 1980.[438]

By 1978, Ramirez had won re-election for the second time and neared the end of his second full term. The 52-year-old Ramirez maintained a strenuous routine in order to juggle his dual roles of physician and county judge. He began his days at 8 a.m. He drove a blue station wagon from his home to the Starr County Courthouse for about an hour of work as county judge, except for Fridays, which were entirely spent on county business.[439] By 10 a.m., he was treating patients at his clinic or preparing for surgery. Meetings, conferences, and many more patients made up the rest of the day. Lunch usually consisted of something sparse, like soda and peanut butter crackers. Sometimes he might even hear a court case at the clinic. If there was still work to be done, he slept in a bed in his office. If the work eased enough to convince him to go home, he was back home by 2 a.m. He ate any dinner Sarah left in the oven, relaxed with some photo work in his darkroom, and went to bed. Four or five hours later the day began again.[440]

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[436] Roberts, "Starr Hospital Nearing Tenth Birthday." Ramirez served as chief of staff from 1976 to 1977, 1980 to 1981, and 1987 to 1988.
[437] Smith-Durk, "'Dr. Mario:' He's the Star in Starr County."
[438] Washington, "A Doctor in the Family," 354.
[439] Little, "A Man's Dedication."
[440] Smith-Durk, "'Dr. Mario:' He's the Star in Starr County."

From 1969 to 1978, Ramirez and other commissioners authorized construction of a new airport, a new auditorium, a four-lane highway between Roma and Rio Grande City, three community centers, a public pool, a county jail, and a bridge from Roma into Mexico. The courthouse was remodeled and air-conditioned. His accomplishments were significant. But by the end of his second term in 1978, Ramirez was weary of the county judgeship. He had handled more cases than any judge in Starr County history. He felt his duty to judge and decide punishment was diametrically opposed to his role as a doctor, which was to ease physical ailments without judgment. "I don't like that contrast," he recalled later.[441]

Ramirez opted not to run again. "The decision to not seek office again was mine alone," he wrote in a 1979 op-ed, "but it was encouraged and supported by all of my family." His primary motivation for stepping down, he wrote, was that he "wanted to devote all of my time to the practice of medicine." He made sure to thank Gonzalez "for his patience and understanding." Reviewing his tenure of "nine years and three months," he emphasized that "what has been accomplished [was due] to the collective endeavors of many." He celebrated the new dental clinic, coupled with a deal with the National Health Service Corps to have "at least one dentist assigned to this area."[442] He took great pride in his fiscal impact. "Our community has one of the lowest tax rates in the nation," he wrote, almost "all the old debts have been retired," and his court collected about "$100,000 in fines." He felt his work or at least his participation in the

[441] Smith-Durk, "'Dr. Mario:' He's the Star in Starr County."
[442] Raul Trejo, "New Dentist Joins County Health Services," *Rio Grande Herald*, September 14, 1972, accessed November 7, 2014, http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth194372/m1/1/zoom/?q=; "Dr. David Woodburn," Office of the President, Amarillo College, 2010, accessed November 7, 2014, https://www.actx.edu/president/index.php?module=article&id=159. The Amarillo native and UT Dental School graduate was assigned to Starr County. He met his future wife there, and in 1975 he returned with her to Amarillo.

arena, was done. "I leave the office with mixed emotions," he wrote, and "I do not intend to ever run for public office again. …"[443]

Ramirez's tenure as county judge is illustrative of what he wanted to accomplish and of what he could accomplish when armed with political influence. The Republican worked with Democrats to expand and improve county infrastructure, build a county hospital, streamline the criminal justice system, inspire wayward youth towards more productive lives as lawful citizens, and make hard decisions in order to improve the county's finances. His hard-won political standing in part convinced Nixon to visit Starr County, and in 1980 he was a valuable team-member when Reagan supporters, including a young Jeb Bush, flew in a small plane urging South Texans to vote for the Republican presidential candidate.[444] He demonstrated how a commitment to community and to rising above partisanship could achieve significant goals.

Ramirez saw untapped potential, intelligence, and excellence in his Starr County communities, and he never accepted any suggestion that it was inferior to any other part of the U.S., especially when it came to medical care. "Some of the best medicine in the world," he asserted in a 1991 profile, "is being practiced in the Valley." Despite Starr County's material and financial limitations, Ramirez added, no woman under his watch died in childbirth. The Starr County Memorial Hospital never "dumped" poor patients onto hospitals in larger cities simply because it could not afford to care for them. "Charity," he said, echoing his sentiments during the Beulah relief efforts, "is a responsibility that all of us should participate in."[445] But that charity was meant to help people help themselves. His belief in his community's capacity to grow and blossom fit well with his message of self-sufficiency. "[T]here exist government programs to

[443] Ramirez, "Note of Thanks," 1.
[444] Ramirez, *Prologue*.
[445] Fatherlee, "Valley Profiles … Mario Ramirez"; Richard Vara, "Valley's Dr. Ramirez Among Wealthiest Despite Being in Debt," *Houston Post*, June 24, 1979, "Newspaper Clippings. Mario E. Ramirez M.D. and Family, Scrapbook" Cabinet 14, Item 2, Ramirez Collection.

help communities such as ours help themselves," he wrote in his 1969 op-ed, "to prepare to be more self-sufficient in the future."[446] Some initial help was acceptable, he seemed to say -- following his own experience of family assistance when he began his medical practice or federal start-up funds for his hospital -- but citizens eventually had to tighten their belts, find their own way, and not rely on charity, largesse, or welfare. He would also echo those arguments and sentiments in a 1993 article that urged health professionals and leaders of Latino communities to medically empower their patients and constituents by teaching them health prevention/disease prevention (HPDP) strategies. "Sufficiently empowered," the article explained, "people are able to replace maladaptive behaviors with adaptive and productive ones." A healthier community meant better students, more of that Valley potential utilized, and a fuller realization of personal and professional ambitions. The key, again, was the presence of more health professionals in the Valley who could build programs culturally relatable and financially sympathetic to their impoverished patients.[447] There were larger ideals – community, commitment, conscience, and education -- to which every community had to aspire and fulfill if it would ever progress.

Fatherhood

The immense pressures of two exhausting and important jobs, coupled with family responsibilities, likely left him exhausted and perhaps contributed to his guilt. Family always weighed heavily on his mind. Ramirez knew he was a good doctor, and he knew he was a good county judge. But he worried he was not the best father. "I am often afraid that I am not devoting enough time to my own children," he once wrote to Connally, "and for [this] reason we try to take them with us whenever possible when we travel to meetings, etc."[448] He regularly took the

[446] Ramirez, "A Pledge Made in 1969."
[447] Marilynn Aguirre-Molina, Amelie Ramirez, and Ramirez, "Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Strategies," *Public Health Reports* 108, no. 5 (September-October 1993): 559.
[448] Ramirez to Connally, 5 October 1967, 2.

entire family to American Medical Association conferences. Sunday dinners at his small ranch also maintained strong familial bonds.[449]

He kept a close eye on the children, particularly Patsy. Ramirez once took her and her boyfriend to visit J. Cash King, Ramirez's medical school mentor who was in McAllen for a medical conference. When she and her boyfriend were about to leave for a date, Ramirez asked them who was accompanying them, which movie they were going to see, and what time she would be home. King jokingly asked Ramirez why he had not asked his daughter "how many times she was going to breathe." Ramirez replied "that in my culture, I would have been derelict if I had not asked the questions I did." Ramirez did not waver in his social outlook, no matter who challenged it.[450] Whenever possible, he would be the good father he wanted to be.

His efforts and the example he set for his children resonated deeply within them. After an award ceremony in Austin – possibly the TMA's 1972 honor -- Mario Jr. wrote to his father that the experience "made me realize what a sacrifice it has been for you to give up most of the rich things in life" in order to make a difference in their beloved community. "I only hope," he wrote, "that I can have the courage to love the people there as much as you have."[451]

The September 22, 1975, edition of *Newsweek* asked readers "Who's Raising the Kids?" and its lead story, "The Parent Gap," examined the confusion parents felt over childrearing, over which values were significant enough to instill in children, and over delinquency, poverty, and child abuse. It also explored how modern parents interpreted old values in a new era of gender equality, civil rights, smaller families, and greater individual isolation from communities.[452]

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[449] Smith-Durk, "'Dr. Mario:' He's the Star in Starr County."
[450] Ramirez, *Oral history*.
[451] Mario E. Ramirez Jr. to Ramirez, undated, "Documents and Personal Letters," Ramirez Collection.
[452] Kenneth L. Woodward and Phyllis Malamud, "The Parent Gap," *Newsweek*, September 22, 2014, LexisNexis Academic, accessed November 17, 2014, http://tinyurl.com/ocdky9n.

A week later, Ramirez was in San Antonio at the Texas Catholic Conference General Assembly.[453] He gave a speech titled "Health Care Delivery to the Rural Poor," clearly a reaction, partially at least, to that article, which he referenced in the text. It encapsulated the values of family and community that he treasured. Ramirez reassured his audience that "the family unit" in which the "father is the patriarch" was far from extinct in his Valley society. He compared Latino culture with "Anglo Saxon" culture when noting that Latino children felt "responsibility toward the parent," while Anglo parents mistakenly felt "an obligation and a debt toward their" children. Ramirez's society saw "veneration and unqualified respect and obedience towards the elders." It was "unthinkable," he said, "to consider placing" the elderly in nursing homes. If a relative was hospitalized, he added, at least one family member remained at their side around the clock. As Patsy well knew, when dating, young people were chaperoned or participated in "group activities." Marriage "that was not solemnized" by the Catholic Church, Ramirez explained, was "held invalid," and "divorce is silently condemned." Ramirez also noted that machismo still dominated his society, and he admitted that there were "double standards when it comes to moral codes" for men and women.[454] The speech captured the key features of the social and moral foundation upon which he built his life, ambitions, and worldview.

Diabetes

Since at least 1960, the high rate of diabetes in Roma deeply concerned Ramirez, especially when he saw how many newborns were born overweight. He determined to find out why it seemed so high. In 1963, he tested almost 90 percent of Roma residents after their dinnertime. His data suggested that "the incidence of diabetes in Roma was likely highest in the

[453] "Valley Medic Gives Views at Catholic Church Meet," *Valley Morning Star* (Harlingen, TX), October 1, 1975, 7, Newspapers.com, accessed November 7, 2014, http://www.newspapers.com/image/41305273/?terms=mario+ramirez+roma.
[454] Ramirez, "Health Care Delivery to the Rural Poor," 1975, Cabinet 10, Item 10, Ramirez Collection (hereafter referred to as Ramirez, "Health Care Delivery"), 1-4.

country." The state's health department helped him figure out why. Ramirez believed that "years of intermarriage among relatively few founding families has caused the unusual concentration of the gene."[455] Throughout his terms as a county official, Ramirez remained focused on diabetes. In 1973, Ramirez sharpened his sights on "diabetes mellitus, commonly called sugar diabetes," which can lead to "heart attacks, arteriosclerosis, vision problems, and gangrene." Ramirez helped establish and direct a screening program – taking blood samples from patients, analyzing the composition – that focused on "finding and treating diabetes." But it also would, Ramirez said, "test the efficiency and value of using television media in reaching the people." Ramirez embraced the potential of technology and mass media. He called it "an untapped resource." [456]

He later succeeded with a similar campaign to find cervical cancer early enough to treat it. "There had been a rumor," he remembered, that Latinas "died more from cancer of the cervix than any other racial group." He used television advertisements to ask every Valley doctor to check their patients. What "we found out," Ramirez said, was that race had nothing to do with the higher death rate. Women simply were not getting checked early enough. Ramirez's campaign likely saved the lives of countless women throughout the Valley.[457]

These were both examples of his ambitious agenda to reach as many Valley residents as possible, "including those that are economically deprived" with information that might improve their well-being. If he could not treat them personally, he would utilize technology to at least send out advice and information that might prevent or alleviate potentially deadly problems. Education of the public by any means remained at the forefront of his mind. Throughout the next twenty-five years, Ramirez would pursue that ideal farther than he ever had before.

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[455] Ivey, "How is Dr. Mario," 116.
[456] Al Williams, "Starr, Hidalgo Counties – The Search for Diabetes," *Texas Health Bulletin* 26, no. 11 (November 1973): 8-9.
[457] Ramirez, *On Serving as a Regent* transcript, 29.

CHAPTER 5: THE PIPELINE

Ramirez flexed his new political muscles to build and expand both civic and medical infrastructure, like the county hospital. He accomplished what he could within the political system and established and promoted educational initiatives wherever possible. He loved mentoring high school and college students, advising younger doctors, and reaching out to the public. He took every opportunity to serve on boards, committees, and task forces. Greater responsibilities and vantage points, he likely realized, promised greater capacity to empower more people who might otherwise remain powerless. This era of his life saw personal losses, professional triumphs, and a fundamental re-organization of his life. But it also saw key decisions and initiatives that expanded and strengthened the foundation of his historical legacy.

One of his early opportunities to mentor came with the UTMB's preceptorship program, which was essentially an internship, in which select medical students served at the Ramirez hospital, shadowed him, and were exposed to Ramirez's daily kaleidoscopic variety of patient issues. But it was not a top-down dynamic. Ramirez realized that being a teaching physician required that he determine what he wanted students to learn and how he would teach those lessons, as well as update himself on the latest medical procedures and issues so he could answer their steady stream of questions. But Ramirez learned from the students as well. They brought to him a sense of what and how medical schools were teaching the latest generation of physicians, the philosophy of creating a modern doctor, and the latest research upon which their studies and questions and explorations were based. Ramirez enjoyed being the challenging and generous teacher, but he also gladly served as the eager, ever-learning medical student.[458]

[458] Ivey, "How is Dr. Mario," 118. Along with UTMB, Ramirez served as preceptor for Baylor College of Medicine, Northwestern University School of Medicine, and Michigan State College of Medicine.

Throughout the 1970s, during and after his county judgeship, Ramirez's colleagues did not let his efforts and accomplishments as a physician, as "one of the best qualified men in the state to speak on the practice of rural medicine," go unnoticed or unappreciated.[459] In May 1972, the 100-year-old Texas Medical Association honored him, a former president of the TMA's Valley chapter, with its Distinguished Service Award. At the time, Ramirez was the award's eighth recipient. At 46 years old, he was its youngest recipient, and, most significantly, its first Latino recipient.[460] Four years later, the American Medical Association graced the Mexican-American with the Dr. Benjamin Rush Bicentennial Award for Citizenship and Community Service, an honor that particularly flattered Ramirez because he received it during the U.S. bicentennial year.[461] In 1978, the American Academy of Family Practice and the magazine *Good Housekeeping* named Ramirez the "Family Doctor of the Year." Again, Ramirez was the first Latino to receive the honor. On May 18, 1978, President Jimmy Carter honored his achievements at the White House. As soon as Ramirez left the White House, he called his father. Ramirez remembered that his father cried when he learned his son had stood in the Oval Office. "Never in my life," Ramirez recalled, "had I heard my father cry."[462] The next day, Ramirez learned that he won his campaign for the presidency of the Texas Medical Association. He was its first Latino president. In 1979 he received the "Presidential Citation," an alumni award from UT Austin

[459] Ivey, "How is Dr. Mario," 118.
[460] "Dr. Mario Ramirez Receives TMA's Top Award," *GP Press*, July-August 1972, 11. A list of recipients, as of 2014, is online here: http://www.texmed.org/Template.aspx?id=467&terms=Distinguished%20Service%20Award.
[461] Washington, "A Doctor in the Family," 354-355.
[462] Ramirez, *Oral history*; Ramirez, *Pioneer Physician Interview*; "Family Doctor of the Year," *Good Housekeeping*, October 1978; *Jimmy Carter, 1978, Book 1: January 1 to June 30, 1978,* Pub. Papers, Fed. Reg., 934. The jeweler Cartier designed the trophy. Nixon congratulated Ramirez on June 8, 1978: "You richly deserved the award and I wish you the best in the years ahead."

President Lorene L. Rogers. It came on April 21, the thirty-ninth anniversary of his little brother's death.[463] In 1980, *Texas Monthly* named Ramirez the state's "Best Doctor."

The recognition overwhelmed modest Ramirez. But he likely recognized the professional and political glitter it added to his career, especially in the eyes of state and national political leaders. However, he also likely realized he could turn the awards into keys to new doors of opportunity, but not into keys to the Valley's enduring problems. "[N]o amount of political power," reporter Lana Henderson wrote in 1975, "not from the local, state, or federal governments … has yet been able to solve the most critical problem still facing Starr County: the shortage of physicians."[464] Starr County had, at most, three full-time physicians. Ramirez and his partner, Robert Gonzalez, Henderson wrote, saw "150 patients a day" throughout workdays of "12 to 18 hours." It was not physically nor mentally sustainable for Ramirez or anyone else, and something had to change to alleviate that fundamental problem. One solution, thought Ramirez, might be medical schools changing how they trained students. He perceived a trend in which schools trained students to become specialists instead of generalists, like him, who could address a wide array of medical problems, especially in an impoverished region. He felt people needed a physician with whom they could connect and care for their entire family throughout their lives. "If educators and planners," he explained to a *Texas Medicine* reporter, "agree that there is a need for more general practitioners in the small towns," then they could change the procedures and curriculums to reflect that recognition. He also wondered if medical residencies could require the doctor serve in underserved regions, if only for the "invaluable experience."[465] He hoped for the best but also determined to make a change himself. "During the year that I served

[463] Ramirez to Rogers, 24 April 1979, "Distinguished Alumnus" scrapbook; "Award winners: UT alumni to receive new honor," *Austin American-Statesman*, April 18, 1979; Richard West, "The Best Strikes Back," *Texas Monthly*, July 1980, 116, accessed November 7, 2014, http://tinyurl.com/me9kvgm.
[464] Henderson, "Where Medicine Means a Sun-Scorched Journey."
[465] Ivey, "How is Dr. Mario," 119.

as president of the Texas Medical Association," he recalled later, "one of my primary missions was to promote health education at our public schools."[466] Linking improvements in early education to fine-tuned medical training – it was a calculation he explored for decades.

Three days before Christmas 1981, a newspaper item caught Ramirez's eye. It was headlined, "Doctor Won't Aid Town That Paid for Education." The Associated Press story explained that residents of Cherokee, Okla, a town of more than 2,100 people, made a deal with Oklahoma's Physician Manpower Training Commission. They would fund a medical student's education, and once that physician finished his or her residency, he or she would begin their medical practice in the small town. The town raised $18,000 to send Mark Cameron to medical school, but after seven years of education and medical residency, Cameron chose to repay the money instead of moving to Cherokee.[467]

Ramirez responded with "Letter to a Young Doctor," a June 1983 article in *Good Housekeeping*. He wrote the article in first-person and spoke directly to Cameron and to anyone else doubting that a small-town medical practice was a professional dead-end with few if any benefits. He addressed Cameron as "Dr. X," and he insisted that Cameron "missed a wonderful opportunity." Ramirez outlined his life story, his sacrifices, the joy he felt from helping children survive their own births, overcome illness, and blossom into vibrant Valley residents. In just a few pages, Ramirez, working with writer Jean Libman Block, essentially composed an autobiography – Beulah, the county judgeship, the county hospital, meeting Nixon, meeting Carter – with which he argued (like no one else could) that a physician, just like any other committed and principled individual, could and should blossom wherever they were planted.

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[466] Ramirez, *My Years as Vice President*, 1.
[467] Associated Press, "Doctor Won't Aid Town That Paid for Education," *New York Times*, December 22, 1981, accessed November 19, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/1981/12/22/us/around-the-nation-doctor-won-t-aid-tow-n-that-paid-for-education.html.

More importantly, Ramirez demonstrated his realization that the community he spent so long enriching had in return enriched him. The Valley's greatest wealth, he seemed to argue, consisted of the people who needed him in their lives. Basing a life and career on his quartet of beliefs – community, conscience, commitment, and education – reassured him that the "real sacrifice would have been not to have returned here to practice." In Ramirez's eyes, Dr. X left behind people who needed him. However, Ramirez suggested, "maybe you need them as much as they need you."[468] Ramirez's article received widespread praise. For example, Charles Butt, chairman of Texas grocery chain H-E-B, congratulated Ramirez for demonstrating to "a national audience" that "Mario Ramirez is a very special citizen."[469]

In between the publications of those two articles, in 1982 Ramirez shared with the UTMB graduating class some wisdom gained from decades of life as a physician and as husband to Sarah Ramirez: "Get your spouses interested in your work," he told them, "[and] give him or her that same support …" To spouses, he asked them to "Be patient!" He reassured them that "you can make a place for yourself in almost any community … be supportive … be understanding."[470] The life of a family physician or of any physician was exhausting, demanding, and challenging to the entire family. But, he promised, the work, sacrifice, and anguish was worth it. The sentiments formed the core of his June 1983 *Good Housekeeping* article.

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[468] Ramirez and Jean Libman Block, "A Letter to a Young Doctor," *Good Housekeeping*, June 1983, Scrapbook, Cabinet 10, Item 4, Ramirez Collection (hereafter cited as Ramirez, "Letter to a Young Doctor"). Ramirez included a note with his archived copy of the article, in which he explained that he purposely blacked out Cameron's name from the original story, presumably for privacy. Ramirez added that after his piece was published, Cameron contacted him to justify his decision to leave Oklahoma town. Ramirez did not detail their conversation.
[469] Charles Butt to Ramirez, 30 May 1983, Ramirez, "Letter to a Young Doctor."
[470] Ramirez, "I Will Practice My Profession with Conscience and Dignity: Commencement Address, Graduating Class, University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston," May 30, 1982, "Presentations, Speeches, Lectures, etc., Volume One. Medical – Surgical Conferences of the Rio Grande Valley. Scrapbook. (1969-1992)," Cabinet 10, Item 10, Ramirez Collection.

By the mid-1980s, two new challenges immersed Ramirez in new roles as educator and physician. In September 1985, President Reagan nominated Ramirez, who campaigned for the victorious candidate in 1980, to a six-year term on the nine-member Board of Regents of the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences. The university, which primarily trained military doctors, oversaw Walter Reed Medical Center, Bethesda Naval Hospital, Malcolm Grow Air Force Medical Center, and Wilford Hall Air Force Medical Center.[471]

In 1989, when Republican Texas Gov. Bill Clements nominated Mineral Wells oil businessman Chester Upham, Houston accountant Robert Cruikshank, and former Texas congressman Tom Loeffler of Mason to the UT Board of Regents, sixteen Texas state senators scoffed at the lack of a minority or woman nominee and protested that their addition would mean the next complete Board would have no minority or women members at all. Upham dropped out, "allowing Clements to avoid a showdown with the Senate." Clements then selected Ramirez. The advantages of Ramirez's experience were clear. He was a Latino, a more-than-credible voice for the Valley region, and a widely respected physician. He had decades of experience as a teacher and mentor to students, and, the *Austin American-Statesman* noted, he was an "adviser [to the UT System] on medical, educational and alumni issues." Those aspects were particularly valuable to the System, the newspaper added, as it prepared to welcome Pan American University to the UT family of institutions. Roy Vaughn, an official with the Ex-Students' Association, emphasized to the newspaper Ramirez's advantages: "I don't know how many students there are who would never have even made it out of Roma or the Valley if it had not been for Mario's help." Vaughn added that Ramirez's "encouragement and belief in them … made the difference for so many." When a reporter asked Ramirez what he might bring to his

[471] "Ramirez Nominated for Services Board of Regents," *Rio Grande Herald*, October 3, 1985. He served until 1994.

six-year term on the Board, he said that "my strengths on the board will be my involvement in medicine [and my] experience with … the problems [of] health-care delivery." [472] Ramirez considered the appointment an honor that truly energized the once-insecure Longhorn undergraduate and only the second Valley Latino appointed in the Board's history.[473] His excitement eclipsed the dreary recovery from a recent gall bladder operation. "My interest in higher education as well as the education at our public elementary and high schools intensified," he recalled later. From the Board's special committee focused on health care, Ramirez monitored and advised four medical schools, the MD Anderson medical center in Houston, and a group of medical researchers in Tyler.[474] He was very proud of his time on the board. "It was a very, very high honor. I think the six years I served on the Board of Regents were the best six years of my life. … "[475] He also found time to serve on the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, which monitors how and where Texas students obtain a college education, and the Texas Blue Cross-Blue Shield Board of Directors.[476]

Ramirez consistently reached out to young medical professionals. From 1973 to 2007, he held assistant professorships or clinical professorships at UTHSCH and UTHSCSA. He urged every young doctor to follow his example: choose "a career in primary medicine [and practice]

[472] Monty Jones, "Ramirez has Strong Links to UT: Leaders Praise Appointee as Tireless Worker on Education Issues," *Austin American-Statesman*, February 9, 1989, A9; Laylan Copelin, "Senate Panel Endorses Ramirez: UT Regent Nominee Praised as Role Model," *Austin American-Statesman*, February 22, 1989, B1.
[473] "UT Board in Need of Valley Member," *San Antonio Express-News*, February 12, 2003, B8. Brownsville pharmacist Mario Yzaguirre served from 1983 to 1989. Ramirez served from 1989 to 1995.
[474] Ramirez, *My Years as Vice President*, 1. In March 1991, he was elected to a one-year term as first vice chairman and twice elected chairman of the Health Affairs Committee. He served until 1995.
[475] Ramirez, videotaped interview by Erin Purdy, *On Serving as a Regent*, 1:16, accessed December 7, 2013, http://www.cah.utexas.edu/projects/ut_oral_history_ramirez1.php. This was only a clip of a much longer interview. The transcript of the entire interview is in Box 2x116, Folder 17, UT Oral History Project, 2005-present, also in the Briscoe Center, (hereafter cited as Ramirez, *On Serving as a Regent* transcript), 15-16; Keely Coghlan, "UT Officials' Aircraft Use Questioned: Regents Defend Flights, Say Criteria Tightened," *Dallas Morning News*, June 17, 1996, A11. In 1996, the *Dallas Morning News* and the *Bryan-College Station Eagle* investigated how regents, their relatives, and their friends utilized official UT aircraft. Ramirez defended his use of the aircraft due to his schedule as a physician, his commitment to represent the University in an official capacity at certain events, and the long and complicated travel between Austin and Rio Grande City.
[476] Ramirez career timeline.

in areas where there is great need for them."[477] His overall strategy as an educational leader was clear: "I always tried to impress [on young health professionals and physicians] that in a poor community such as the one that we lived in [that] education is the principal and probably the best tool for success. It is imperative that they continue in school and attain the most education that is possible. … if they are considering entering a health care profession, 'volunteerism' and 'service' are key words that they need to keep in mind."[478] Those keywords would, in his mind, bolster the character he ultimately sought: selfless community servants who recognized, as he did, their neighbors' needs and their own capacity to alleviate those needs. Ramirez always believed "that the way out of the poverty in Starr County," a profile pointed out, "lies along the trail of education. And it is a trail that must return home."[479] Perhaps he thought that home was the only place for physicians to justify the talents they were privileged to realize in their lives.

Ramirez lost his parents in 1985 and 1989. Ramirez's father Efren died on August 11, 1985. He was 83. The headline of his obituary called him a Starr County "pioneer" and patriarch of a family whose nine generations proudly contributed to more than two centuries of Valley history.[480] Ramirez's mother, Carmen H. Ramirez, died on April 2, 1989. She was 88.[481] Ramirez never mentioned their deaths in his memoirs or in his archived correspondence, but the losses must have been fundamentally devastating. Ramirez probably never forgot that his parents always "encouraged me and never lost faith that I would succeed."[482] Perhaps his grief was eased with the self-assurance that he had lived up to their expectations, cared for his community, and mentored the Valley's next generation.

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[477] Ramirez, *Oral history*.
[478] Ramirez, *Pioneer Physician Interview*.
[479] Williams, "One Who Did Not Escape," 7.
[480] Roberts, "Starr Pioneer Ramirez Succumbs."
[481] Roberts, "Obituary: Maria Del Carmen Hinojosa Ramirez," *Rio Grande Herald*, April 20, 1989, accessed October 15, 2014, http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth195181/.
[482] Ramirez, *Pioneer Physician Interview*.

One summer night in 1990, Nolan Perez, a pre-med student at the University of Texas at Austin, dutifully served his customers at Crabby Harry's, a seafood restaurant in Port Isabel. It was a busy night, and he kept the food and drinks coming to his tables. At one point, he noticed a couple studying him. "I kept refilling their plates with fish and cole slaw and fries," he remembered, "and refilling their drinks," but they were not eating much. They seemed to be much more interested in him, he said. They were Sarah and Mario Ramirez, "who were very curious people," Perez recalled, and they "asked a lot of questions about me." Ramirez, who was on his way with Sarah to their South Padre Island condo, remembered that he thought Perez "was so polite and so nice." Sarah Ramirez asked Perez about his background. When they learned the UT student aspired to become a physician, "they both began talking at the same time, stuttering with excitement, to tell me Mario was a family physician in Roma," a UT graduate, and a UT regent. "That was the beginning of a great friendship," Perez remembered. A few weeks later, Perez visited Ramirez in Roma, "shadowed him in his office [and] toured the hospital." When he returned to school, the Ramirez would check on him, take him out to dinner, and advise him. Perez went on to medical school, served in the Navy, and became a gastroenterologist. He never failed to stay in touch with his role model. Ramirez "always wanted to know how I was doing," he recalled. Perez is a typical example of how Ramirez, often working with his wife, found and nurtured young and talented people. He welcomed them into his life, exposed them to practical experience, and encouraged them to succeed. "You somehow realize that there is great potential there," Ramirez explained, "and they just need a little help. …"[483]

[483] Ramirez, *On Serving as a Regent* transcript, 24-25; Nolan Perez, email interview with author, October 27, 2014. When asked to describe Ramirez as a person, Perez noted that Ramirez was "very humble and shy." Mario and Sarah Ramirez, he recalled, loved spending any available weekend at their South Padre Island condo. "He loved his wife so much," Perez said. "They were inseparable. They did everything and went everywhere together." While on the Island, he said, Ramirez attended services at Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Church. Perez also remembered that Ramirez occasionally enjoyed scotch, usually one or two glasses during dinner.

As he moved into a new decade, Ramirez still worked 12-hour days, seeing dozens of patients and charging them $20 for an office visit but only if they could afford to pay it.[484] But he was far from obscure. One news profile called him the "father protector of the poor" and "the godfather of Starr County medicine."[485] The new decade also posed new personal challenges. Ramirez had to face the realities of health and age. "I realized," he recalled, "that my future from a health standpoint was uncertain and in jeopardy." In 1992, Ramirez learned that he had prostate cancer, and in May surgeons removed his prostate.[486] The ordeal, he recalled, "makes you look at your life and what you have done, and ask if you're satisfied with what you've done."[487] He probably decided that it was time for a change. He wrote that he faced significant debts. His children were grown and were prospering. Ramirez and his wife decided to sell their Roma home, their "ranch on the banks of the Rio Grande," and other properties to pay their debts, and then move to a simplified life in McAllen. Leaving Roma behind was not easy for Ramirez. "To move from Roma," he admitted, "was the hardest decision that I have ever had to make." By then, however, there was another doctor practicing in Roma, and two more in Rio Grande City, "so I was able to leave with a clear conscience -- that the town would be taken care of."[488] Again, faith in community, conscience, and commitment dominated this fundamental decision.

If Ramirez, nearly 70, fully retired at this point in his life, it is likely that no one – aside from his devoted patients – would have challenged that decision. Ramirez led by example for forty years, inspired generations of Valley students, and earned his colleagues' universal respect and admiration. Commendations and awards filled his bookshelves and gleamed on his walls.

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[484] Fatherlee, "Valley Profiles … Mario Ramirez"; Associated Press, "Army to Provide Health Screening: Exams of Starr County Residents May Help Redefine Military's Role," *Dallas Morning News*, March 29, 1993, A11.
[485] Harmon, "The Amazing Dr. Mario."
[486] Ramirez, *My Years as Vice President*, 2.
[487] Harmon, "The Amazing Dr. Mario."
[488] Ramirez, *My Years as Vice President*, 2-3; Ramirez, *Pioneer Physician Interview*.

Roma Mayor Alonzo H. Alvarez declared August 18, 1993, to be "Dr. Mario E. Ramirez Day."[489] In April 1995, UT Austin honored Ramirez with a second Presidential Citation. "Your personal standards," university president Robert M. Berdahl wrote the previous September, "eminently qualify you for this award."[490] In 1995, BorderFest, a cultural arts organization that holds a festival in Hidalgo, Texas, every March, named Ramirez its Border Texan of the Year".[491] The Texas House and Senate both passed resolutions celebrating his honor.[492] University scholarships and fellowships were also named for him.[493] Tens of thousands of people on both sides of the Rio Grande considered him their physician. He had fulfilled his elders' expectations and raised a proud and successful family. Perhaps for any other accomplished physician and community leader, the late 1990s would have inaugurated an era of ease and dignified retrospection. But Ramirez was not done yet.

More importantly, Ramirez faced a new opportunity. He knew the UTHSCSA President John Howe III. They were both former presidents of the Texas Medical Association. Ramirez was restless in his new job with as Blue Cross-Blue Shield's associate medical director for the South Texas region. In 1995, Howe offered to make Ramirez the UTHSCSA's Vice President for

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[489] Jerry Lozano, "Dr. Ramirez says So-Long to Roma But Not Good-[Bye]," n.p., August 25, 1993.
[490] Robert M. Berdahl to Ramirez, 16 September 1994, "Documents and Personal Letters," Ramirez Collection.
[491] "Border Texans," *49: Best event/program within an event to benefit a cause*, BorderFest Association, 2013, accessed November 13, 2014, http://files.ifea.com/Awards/2013Pinnacles/2013IFEA-HaasandWilkersonPinnacle-C49-B1-A3-Borderfest.pdf, 15, 22; Ramirez, "Border County Remains a Bright, Shining Starr," letter to editor, *San Antonio Express-News*, March 11, 2001, G5. Ramirez donated the award's accompanying financial support to "UT Pan American's Mariachi and Folkloric Dance group because it perpetuates our culture and several participants are from Starr County."
[492] H.B. 280, 74th Texas Cong. (1995), http://www.legis.state.tx.us/billlookup/text.aspx?LegSess=74R&Bill=HR280; S.B. 882, 74th Texas Cong. (1995), http://www.legis.state.tx.us/billlookup/text.aspx?LegSess=74R&Bill=SR882.
[493] Ramirez to W.A. Moncrief, Jr., 1 November 1992, "Mario E. Ramirez, M.D., University of Texas System Regency. Letters of Congratulations. Scrapbook. (1989-1995)," Cabinet 10, Item 7, Ramirez Collection (hereafter cited as Ramirez, "Letters of Congratulations"); "HSC Champions," *Mission*, University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, July 2008, accessed November 14, 2014, http://uthscsa.edu/mission/article.asp?id=514. Moncrief, a fellow member of the UT Board of Regents, endowed a doctoral fellowship at the UT College of Engineering in 1992 and named it for Ramirez. Online here: http://endowments.giving.utexas.edu/page/ramirez-mario-grad-flshp-engr/4635/. He also partnered with the Bosque Foundation in 2008 to fund UTHSCSA's Dr. Mario E. Ramirez Distinguished Professorship in Family and Community Medicine.

South Texas/Border Initiatives, and Ramirez accepted. "The position in San Antonio would allow me to return to medicine," he wrote later, "and to the fields of medical education that I loved." When the appointment was announced, Howe called Ramirez "the singularly most qualified person in South Texas to work with local civic and medical leaders in communities throughout … this region."[494] Ramirez studied the programs in his portfolio. He learned that the UTHSCSA already had some Valley projects in operation and others in planning stages – dental hygiene programs in Harlingen, an occupational therapy degree program at UT Pan American – and he assumed oversight "responsibility for all these programs." He continued that mission at UTHSCSA. Ramirez pushed for better health education in school curriculums, bigger immunization programs, and better health care for migrant workers. He coupled that with studies of how other communities in the United States helped the poor improve their health care, particularly in the education system.[495] He also chaired a series of McAllen conferences to discuss enduring health problems in the Valley and their potential solutions.

But Ramirez knew more could be done. First and foremost, South Texas did not have enough health care professionals, and he was finally in a position to directly address that inadequacy. He looked for more effective ways to recruit "high school students who might be interested in pursuing careers in health care, and who potentially might return to practice their profession in our South Texas Counties."[496] He also looked for potential medical recruits among the Valley's best students. His Honors High School Banquets gathered the region's brightest

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[494] Ramirez, *My Years as Vice President*, 3; "Ramirez Named to Oversee Border Clinical Programs," *San Antonio Express-News*, August 16, 1995; "Ramirez Top Choice," *San Antonio Express-News*, August 19, 1995. The *Express-News* lauded his appointment. "With Ramirez at the helm," its editorial wrote, "the health science center is primed to tack the awesome health-care challenges the state's southern tip faces."

[495] Ramirez, *My Years as Vice President at The UTHSC SA and THE MED-ED PROGRAM*, "UTHSCSA Vice President for South Texas Initiatives and the Med-Ed Program" scrapbook, Cabinet 14, Item 15, Ramirez Collection (hereafter cited as Ramirez, *My Years as Vice President*), 1.

[496] Ramirez, *My Years as Vice President*, 4.

students to listen to university presidents, motivational speakers, and astronauts, and even an opera star ignite their imaginations and stimulate their blossoming intellects. Ramirez created with the events a space in which he could display to intelligent Valley students positive professional examples for them to emulate – relatable examples from others and from his own life. He was living proof of what those students could achieve if only they challenged themselves and did whatever necessary to achieve those ambitions. The celebrations of students' recent academic successes also served as introductions to the hard but viable road ahead into academic and professional careers. "[He] established a real strong link between Valley students and the universities," Roma High School principal Humberto Vasquez recalled. "Above all, [he] provided a role model, not just for our students, but for us as adults."[497]

Certainly, the concept of guiding the Valley's best students into health care careers was not new. As early as 1975, Ramirez expressed satisfaction with the steadily growing number of available nurses and medical technicians in Starr County. "We attribute this," he said in a speech, "to the fact that for many years we held career conferences to try to interest our students to go into health fields. These efforts seem to have paid off."[498] He saw early on how steady mentorship, inspirational examples, and intellectual focus could defy a legacy of too few physicians and young but uninspired Valley minds. Nolan Perez was a perfect example of what could be accomplished. Ramirez added in that speech that almost twenty students were motivated to enter medical school. Some who graduated, he admitted with disappointment, "chose not to return to Starr County," but, he added hopefully, some students on the verge of graduation "expressed a definite intent of returning home." Ramirez knew that that intent was

[497] Harmon, "The Amazing Dr. Mario."
[498] Ramirez, "Health Care Delivery," 2.

key. No amount of training or education would instill it. The sentiment had to be genuine, unwavering, and focused on long-term ambitions instead of short-term material gains.

Eddie Lucio, Jr., who survived Beulah in 1967, was a Texas state senator representing District 27 in 2014. He recalled meeting Ramirez in 1990. Lucio was studying the process of establishing a medical school in the Valley, and he consulted several physicians, including Ramirez, on the health care challenges such an institution might address. "He knew we needed more doctors," Lucio remembered. Armed with data and professional support, Lucio's study was the foundation for Senate Bill 606, which, together with House Bill 1557, created the Regional Academic Health Center (RAHC) in Harlingen in 1997. S.B. 606's accompanying "Bill Analysis" echoed Ramirez's long-held view of the state of health care in the Valley: The "shortage of primary care providers is highlighted by the lack of preventative care and indigent health programs in the area." The solution, or at least the beginning of a solution, was the RAHC, which would offer "a program where third and fourth year medical students [from the University of Texas] would receive instruction in the Rio Grande Valley" and form the core of a new medical school to train the Valley's next generation of physicians, dentists, nurses, and other health care professionals. The analysis undergirding H.B. 1557 added that the RAHC might inspire students to enter medical fields. The institution could "shift students from other medical schools in Texas to complete their medical education" in the Valley, thereby injecting their talents into the region and broadening the health care infrastructure throughout Valley communities. The legislative initiative was signed into law on September 1, 1997.[499] Perez

[499] Eddie Lucio, Jr., phone interview with author, October 14, 2014; S.B. 606, 75th Texas Cong. (1997), http://www.legis.state.tx.us/billlookup/History.aspx?LegSess=75R&Bill=SB606; "Bill Analysis," S.B. 606, 75th Cong. (May 1, 1997); H.B. 1557, 75th Texas Cong. (1997), http://www.legis.state.tx.us/billlookup/History.aspx?LegSess=75R&Bill=HB1557; "Bill Analysis," H.B. 1557, House Research Organization, 75th Texas Cong. (May 6, 1997), http://www.hro.house.state.tx.us/pdf/ba75r/hb1557.pdf.

remembered that Ramirez was "instrumental in drumming up support" for the facility. Ramirez also helped find a dean to lead it.[500]

Support for the RAHC dawned on the Valley's health care landscape at the right time, just as Ramirez continued to emphasize that the region possessed the talent and the brainpower needed to build a bigger Valley medical infrastructure. The keys were to consistently nurture that talent and brainpower through the stages of higher education, enhance them in post-graduate Valley institutions, and then persuade those trained professionals to stay in the Valley. Ramirez's first hurdle was institutional resistance to his recruiting ideas. Critics complained, he remembered, that a UTHSCSA vice president did not belong at this level of planning. They also insisted that current recruiting initiatives were sufficient. Ramirez countered with data that showed those programs could be more effective in South Texas.[501] He also pointed out that in forty years of private practice, "more than half of the years" were spent without partners because "it was nearly impossible to find physicians willing to join me." The young doctors who started their careers with him left the region, he remembered, "because they did not like the isolation."[502] The professional limitations also limited his creative problem-solving, the range of care he could provide, the time spent revisiting patients, and his ambitions as a health care provider. Most importantly, when disaster like Beulah struck, there was not a robust network of medical professionals in the area, particularly in the less-affluent areas, to simultaneously respond effectively to multiple emergencies and to sustain the region's painfully long recovery.

Ramirez proposed to target students in Webb, Zapata, Starr, Hidalgo, Cameron, and Willacy counties. "All the rural areas in all those counties," he remembered, "were severely

[500] Perez, interview with author; Dennis Spruill, "Locals Help Select Dean for RAHC," *Brownsville Herald*, April 20, 1999.
[501] Ramirez, *My Years as Vice President*, 4.
[502] Ramirez, *My Years as Vice President*, 5; Ramirez, *Pioneer Physician Interview*.

underserved." His data also showed that more than fifty percent of physicians in those counties "received their medical education outside the United States. It appears as though only 25% of our physicians were Texas born and Texas educated." He did not want his new program to be "an ethnic one." But populations in the counties he targeted were overwhelmingly Latino, and an added inspirational factor was the abysmally low percentage of medical school applicants – six percent. Ramirez was determined to change that. [503]

He convinced his critics, and his new program was authorized in 1996. His new team called the program Med-Ed. It would identify talented high school and college students from Laredo to Brownsville and push them to pursue health science and medical careers. It would also encourage them to stay in the Valley. Francisco Cigarroa, then-UTHSCA president, compared Med-Ed's mentoring process to a pipeline. "The Med Ed program aims to guide interested students through the pipeline for careers in medicine, dentistry, nursing, allied health sciences, and biomedical sciences," he later explained in a speech. Med-Ed would concentrate on "attracting high school students to health care professions, enhancing math, science, and reading skills, and providing interview techniques and preparation for standardized tests."[504] It would create exactly what Ramirez had hoped to create for decades: entire generations of health care professions devoted to their Valley communities.

Ramirez found a suitable program director in Yvonne May-Kautsch, a McAllen history teacher who had worked with Ramirez to produce the Honors High School Banquets in Rio Grande City. She would bring, he wrote later, "years of teaching experience … and a unique understanding of the teen-agers' mind." Ramirez felt that he would bring medical expertise,

[503] Ramirez, *My Years as Vice President*, 5-6.
[504] Francisco Cigarroa, "Creating a Successful Pipeline," "Documents and Personal Letters," Ramirez Collection, 1.

"knowledge of the need that existed," and the personal ambition to realize the aspiration. "All some kids need," she said in 1999, "is someone to find them and give them some direction."[505]

Ramirez archived a series of reports and presentations that offer a glimpse at Med-Ed's evolution from 1996 to 2006. Med-Ed began with a narrow focus on Hidalgo, Starr, and Cameron county students. Its team focused on a central question: Why were students not making it into higher health science education programs? Ramirez claimed to identify eleven problems: Low SAT and ACT scores, weak science education, no time-management skills, weak coping skills, no sense of community service, ignorance about health science professions, unfamiliarity with the acceptance process, little or no advice to move into those fields, poor skills when writing or when interviewed, poor reading and comprehension skills, and too little focus. Targeting these issues with focused mentorship made all the difference. Students sat in SAT preparatory workshops. They learned how to write better essays and resumes. They drilled with mock interviews. They learned about library research, anatomy, physiology, physics, chemistry, biology, CPR, and sign language. By 1999, the growing number of student participants justified opening a second Med-Ed program in Cameron County. In 2000, Juan Gonzalez became the first Med-Ed student to enter advanced medical education. In 2002, a third Med-Ed hub opened in Laredo. A 2003 report asserted that Med-Ed also promoted in its students "volunteerism and community service in an attempt to heighten the students' service sensitivity." They helped out at March of Dimes events, planted new trees, and participated in charity walks and relays. Just as Ramirez expected and pushed young adults in 1967 to selflessly care for their neighbors and

[505] "Med/Ed Finds the Valley's 'Diamonds' -- Potential Health Professionals," *The News*, November 12, 1999, University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, accessed October 1, 2014, http://uthscsa.edu/opa/issues/new32-45.html#meded.

improve their community, he expected Med-Ed's students in 1996 (and beyond) to reach out into their communities as health professionals and give of themselves as much as he had.[506]

By 2006, a Med-Ed report emphasized that the program "was to be an experiment, adhering to protocols that had not been tried before. … We realized that it would require several years before significant outcomes could be realized." The report set out for the program several objectives that took long-term views (re-calibrate operations, review the past decade) and short-term views (stabilize staffing issues, re-organize the Cameron County office).[507] The report's fourth objective called for a review of all Med-Ed programs to ensure its resources were focused on students most likely to succeed. Other objectives called for more and closer cooperation with UTHSCSA, Houston's UTHSC, UTMB, and the Southwestern Medical Center as Med-Ed tracked their students' applications and acceptance to medical and health-related academic programs. A sixth objective called for the monitoring of "new physicians (and their specialties) that settle in our counties" – Hidalgo, Starr, Cameron, Willacy, and Webb. The report pointed out that "although every South Texas Border County is underserved, both the cities of Harlingen and McAllen do not qualify for this designation since both has as many or more physicians per 100,000 population than does San Antonio." Ramirez's voice echoed throughout the directives, most especially this one: "Med-Ed staff should keep in mind that it will be of utmost importance in the near future to track and determine where our professional graduates decide to settle and

[506] "MED-ED High School Recruiting Program," South Texas Border Initiatives, University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, 2003, 42-44; Ramirez, *My Years as Vice President*, 6-8; "Med/Ed Milestone: First Student Accepted at Allied Health," *The News*, July 31, 2000, University of Texas Health Science Center San Antonio, accessed October 10, 2014, http://uthscsa.edu/opa/issues/new33-30/alliedhealth.htm. Gonzalez planned to transfer from University of Texas-Pan American to the physical therapy degree program at UTHSCSA's School of Allied Health Sciences.

[507] "Work Plan 2006," Office of the Vice President or South Texas Programs, University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, 6.

establish their professional practices."[508] Med-Ed had to know if their students eventually became the professionals Ramirez needed them to be.

By 2007, the Med-Ed "pipeline" guided more than 2,200 students into higher education and medical fields. But the program also had a benefit beyond the classroom. It focused their students' objectives, guided their decisions, and kept an eye on their progress towards medical and nursing programs. The program helped students connect with medical professionals, allowed them to watch those professionals in action, observe lab work, and find relevant research and internship opportunities. It was itself an infrastructure that students could turn to and build upon as they composed their medical careers in the Valley. "Med-Ed," Ramirez wrote proudly, "has helped to focus on the fact that South Texas is uniformly medically underserved."[509] Ramirez acknowledged that Med-Ed was not the golden solution, but merely the first right solution to problems future generations of Valley health professionals would have to address for themselves.

As Med-Ed generated and nurtured one class of medical students after another, Ramirez received the kind of adulation and appreciation he likely valued above almost any other: appreciation from his students. In 2006, Shelly Amieva wrote him that it was "great to know that that there are wonderful people like yourself, who see the potential in young people and who believe that we are capable of achieving great things."[510] In 2007, Michelle Brand, who was in high school when she met Ramirez and later attended Rice University and medical school at UTHSCSA, told Ramirez that she considered herself "blessed to have been part of the legacy you are leaving behind. … Many have been touched and enriched by this program and we are

[508] "Work Plan 2006," 2-4.
[509] Ramirez, *My Years as Vice President*, 6-8; Lindsay Kastner, "Healthy Future: UTHSC Program Hopes to Develop Docs, Nurses of Tomorrow in South Texas," *San Antonio Express-News*, March 20, 2008, Ramirez, *My Years as Vice President*.
[510] Shelly Amieva to Ramirez, 23 July 2006, email, "Documents and Personal Letters," Ramirez Collection.

grateful to you."[511] Juan Carlos and Iris Guerra, also UTHSCSA alumnus, told Ramirez that they "learned how important it is to provide quality healthcare for our communities in the Rio Grande Valley." They added that "you and this program played a huge role in helping us pursue our careers in dentistry (J.C.) and medicine (me)."[512] William L. Henrich, Cigarroa's successor as UTHSCSA president, added his own appreciation for Ramirez: "You are a treasure for our state, our country and our school."[513] Med-Ed was Ramirez's last great educational accomplishment.

Med-Ed inspired Nolan Perez to develop his own mentorship program, RGV Mentors, in which Valley students were linked to Valley professionals. The program, in partnership with Valley schools, aspires to, as Perez wrote, "help flip that switch" in students and guide them into promising careers. "Just as Dr. Ramirez did for me," Perez recalled, "I still keep in touch with many students that are in college, medical school, or [are] already working in their dream job."[514]

By 2007, Ramirez looked forward to complete retirement. He stepped down from his post on March 31, 2007, and hundreds gathered at the McAllen Country Club on April 3 to celebrate him and Sarah. Their son Jaime called them the "classic dream team." Francisco Cigarroa asserted that much "of the diversity we are now experiencing in the schools of medicine across the state of Texas, and even beyond, is the result of the work of Mario Ramirez." He considered Sarah and Mario Ramirez to be "Texas heroes." Rev. Roy Snipes, pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church in Mission, said that Ramirez "saw truth and goodness and beauty in all of us." Dr. Hector de Leon remembered that when he was seven, he wanted to join the Cub Scouts, but he needed a physical first. His mother took him to Ramirez, who chatted with the boy

[511] Michelle Brand to Ramirez, 3 January 2007, email, "Documents and Personal Letters," Ramirez Collection.
[512] Juan Carlos and Iris Guerra to Ramirez, 4 January 2007, "Documents and Personal Letters," Ramirez Collection.
[513] William L. Henrich to Ramirez, 18 July 2006, "Documents and Personal Letters," Ramirez Collection.
[514] Perez , interview with author. Learn more here: http://rgvisionmagazine.com/2013/08/dr-nolan-perez-advocate-for-higher-education/

and never forgot him. Ramirez guided de Leon through the Med-Ed pipeline, and by 2007 de Leon was a resident pediatrician at an Austin hospital. Ramirez's "vision for medicine and for what a doctor is," de Leon said, "will never be forgotten. …" [515] In a letter to Ramirez, de Leon echoed Perez's sentiments. "Among what I value most," he wrote, "is the power of mentoring someone. I will always look out for the student from a humble beginning who just needs someone to believe in him." He added that in Ramirez, "[w]e could not have asked for a more impressive human being to have as a role model."[516] The Texas House also passed another resolution honoring Ramirez career and congratulating him on his retirement.[517]

Eighty-year-old Ramirez stood at the summit of his life-long campaign to improve health care for Valley communities. For almost fifty years, he led by example by working tirelessly and selflessly as a physician, as a public official advancing medical initiatives, as an educator promoting better health education and more health professionals, and as a devoted mentor personally guiding legions of intelligent Valley students who shared his vision for a better future.

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[515] Ramirez, *Oral history*; "Curriculum Vitae: Mario E. Ramirez, M.D. (updated January 2008)," Cabinet 14, Item 11, Ramirez Collection; "Dr. Mario and Sarah Ramirez honored as Texas heroes," *HSC News*. At the retirement ceremony, the mariachi band played one of his favorite songs, "Jalisco no te rajes." Online here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uPwHqusTc7E. The ceremony also included a 15-minute appreciative video, "A Story of Two Texans: Mario & Sarah Ramirez," online here: http://atsweb.uthscsa.edu/flash/drramirez/drramirez.html.

[516] Hector E. de Leon to Ramirez, "Documents and Personal Letters," Ramirez Collection.

[517] H.R. 1468, 80th Texas Cong. (2007), http://www.legis.state.tx.us/billlookup/text.aspx?LegSess=80R&Bill=HR1468.

CHAPTER 6: AT EASE

In 2000, UTHSCSA President Howe announced his retirement, and Ramirez learned that Francisco Cigarroa was among five finalists to succeed Howe. "I had known the Cigarroa family for more than 60 years, and I had known Francisco since he was a young boy," Ramirez recalled. Ramirez knew Francisco's father, Dr. Joaquin Cigarroa, from pre-med classes at the University of Texas at Austin, and he considered him a close friend. Ramirez remembered when a young Francisco accompanied his uncle Leonidas, "the only surgeon within a 100-mile radius of Laredo," on one of his trips to perform surgery at Ramirez's little Roma clinic.[518] Ramirez believed, and Cigarroa later confirmed, that that experience influenced Francisco's decision to become a physician. Francisco and Ramirez's son Norman attended Yale University together in the late 1970s, and Cigarroa served at the Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas in the early 1980s. He became a pediatric and transplant surgeon. He also eventually became an accomplished classical and flamenco guitarist.[519] Ramirez encouraged Cigarroa to pursue the presidency.[520] In 2000, the UT System Board of Regents chose Cigarroa to succeed Howe. Cigarroa was the UTHSCSA's first Latino president. In 2009, Cigarroa rose to lead the entire UT System as the first Latino chancellor. He planned to step down from the post in January 2015.[521]

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[518] Ramirez, *Prologue*. Ramirez wrote that Leonidas Cigarroa "was one of the best friends that I ever had." Cigarroa suffered a "a massive Cerebro-Vascular episode" and died on June 19, 1973, at age 49.

[519] Francisco Cigarroa, "Creating a Successful Pipeline," "Documents and Personal Letters," Ramirez Collection, 1; Rudy Arispe, "Francisco Cigarroa: Surgeon Followed His Family's Footsteps to Head a Medical College," *Hispanic*, November 2003, 28-29; Ramirez to Donald L. Evans, 15 September 2000, "Documents and Personal Letters," Ramirez Collection, 2. Cigarroa wrote, "It was Dr. Ramirez who allowed me, when I was 15 years old, to witness my first surgery. It was then that I realized the miracle of surgery, and knew what I wanted to do for the rest of my life."

[520] Ramirez, *My Years as Vice President*, 7-8.

[521] Ramirez, *My Years as Vice President*, 7-8; Melissa Ludwig, "Howe Named President Emeritus of UTHSC," *San Antonio Express-News*, November 12, 2009, http://www.mysanantonio.com/default/article/Howe-named-president-emeritus-of-UTHSC-840904.php; Jennifer R. Lloyd, "Cigarroa to Resign as Chancellor, Return to 'Saving Lives,'" *San Antonio Express-News*, February 9, 2014, http://www.mysanantonio.com/news/education/article/Cigarroa-to-resign-as-chancellor-return-to-5219608.php; Lauren R. McGaughy, "UT Regents Name McRaven as System's New Chancellor," *San Antonio Express-News*, August 21, 2014, http://www.mysanantonio.com/default/article/UT-Regents-name-McRaven-as-system-s-new-chancellor-5703462.php. Howe was named UTHSCSA

In his memoirs, Ramirez wrote that the medical field in the early twenty-first century worried him. Medicine was more expensive than ever. Too many rural people still lacked health insurance. "Longevity, infant mortality, and overall health results" in the U.S. were no better and were in some cases worse than in developing nations. Still, Ramirez expressed cautious hope. Technological and research advances enabled physicians to better diagnose and treat many more medical problems. He pointed to a "decrease of infectious and contagious diseases and improved infant health," better health care, more facilities in the area, and success in inspiring a few more physicians to practice in the area.[522] He allowed himself to take some credit for that progress.

On February 15, 2006, Rio Grande City officials dedicated the Dr. Mario E. Ramirez Elementary School. Students read a poem to the crowd, outlined Ramirez's background and career, and performed mariachi music.[523] Ramirez mused in recollection that many of his honors "came because people had some kind of admiration because I had returned to my impoverished little town and county to practice [medicine]."[524] Countless young minds would look up at the name on their school and perhaps wonder who Dr. Mario E. Ramirez was and why he mattered to them. It would likely take them many years to realize that Ramirez, now an icon of their borderlands home, never forgot that those young minds mattered to him. Their health mattered to him. Their futures mattered to him. Regardless of how modest Ramirez might have felt about himself, that is why he ultimately mattered. One of Ramirez's friends, Dr. Andrew C. von

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president emeritus in 2009, the same year that Cigarroa rose to become first Latino chancellor of the UT System. In 2014, Cigarroa announced his own retirement and planned to become head of pediatric surgery at the UTHSCSA. Adm. William McRaven, former head of U.S. Special Operations Command, was named to succeed Cigarroa.

[522] Ramirez, *Oral history;* Ramirez, *Pioneer Physician Interview*.

[523] "Dr. Mario E. Ramirez Honored," *Med-Ed Connection*, March 2006, 1.

[524] Ramirez, *Oral history*.

Eschenbach, wrote in 2007 that "the characteristic of extremely great people is that they never believed they were."[525] In 2011, the Texas House passed another resolution honoring Ramirez.[526]

Ramirez's friend Richard Garcia once shared with him an idea to build a museum to honor the lives of important physicians, including "Dr. Joaquin Cigarroa, Dr. Sam Nixon, Dr. John Smith, myself and others" in order to anchor a larger exploration of Texas medical history. Garcia, an assistant vice president for South Texas Programs, died in 2007.[527] That same year, the UT System built a library at the RAHC in Harlingen, and the regents named it for Ramirez. The 8,595-square-foot facility, housing the only medical library south of San Antonio, was formally dedicated on October 30, 2007.[528]

In 1970, Ramirez met John J. Frey III, a medical student from Northwestern University and widower who moved to Laredo to study with Leonidas Cigarroa. The surgeon thought Frey would learn more about medicine if he studied in Roma with Ramirez, who agreed to take him on. Ramirez's clinic staff nicknamed him "Juanito." At the end of their day, Ramirez recalled, he and Frey talked about "just about everything, including politics, religion, college, medical school, and our patients." Frey, wrote Ramirez, saw him as "his teacher and guiding force." Frey, Ramirez admitted, convinced him to preserve his medical archive of correspondence, memories,

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[525] Andrew C. von Eschenbach to Ramirez, 2007, "Documents and Personal Letters," Ramirez Collection. Von Eschenbach diagnosed Ramirez's prostate cancer in 1992.

[526] H.R. 73, 82nd Texas Cong., first called session (2011), http://www.legis.state.tx.us/billlookup/text.aspx?LegSess=821&Bill=HR73.

[527] Ramirez, "Hurricane Beulah" scrapbook, 3. Ramirez speculated that Francisco Cigarroa in part pursued that idea by naming the library for Ramirez.

[528] Library Entrance, Item 6, is a framed excerpt of the minutes from the August 23, 2007, meeting; "RAHC Medical Library to Honor South Texas Physician," *HSC News*, University of Texas Health Science Center San Antonio September 3, 2007, accessed November 7, 2014, http://www.uthscsa.edu/hscnews/singleformat.asp?newID=2503; Will Sansom, "Medical Library Named for Longtime Valley Physician/Educator Ramirez," News Releases, University of Texas Health Science Center San Antonio, November 1, 2007, accessed November 7, 2014, http://uthscsa.edu/hscnews/singleformat2.asp?newID=2567. Travis M. Whitehead, "RAHC: Positioned for Growth in RGV," *Valley Morning Star* (Harlingen, TX), February 10, 2013, accessed August 28, 2014, http://www.valleymorningstar.com/news/local_news/article_60fcc3c0-733a-11e2-b4e9-001a4bcf6878.html.

and documents, which eventually became the heart of the Ramirez Library.[529] They were stored in the Sarah & Mario E. Ramirez MD Reading Room, a small and quiet enclave glittering with Ramirez's awards, certificates, resolutions, and photos.[530] At first Ramirez considered establishing an archive an act of vanity or ego. Frey disagreed. "One way to think of the things you might have," Frey wrote Ramirez in 2007, "is that they are a gift to others of what you have learned, how you learned it, and how all that came to be. It is a story of South Texas, the historic presence that you and your family have played a big part in."[531] The archives Ramirez left in the Library form the foundation of this thesis. They fill these pages with his echoing voice and steady and strong heartbeat. They offer his "story of South Texas."

As physicians and politicians honored Ramirez achievements, historians and architects also honored the beautiful stucco and stone architecture at the center of Ramirez's beloved hometown, which, by 2013, was home to about 9,900 people. [532] In 1972, fifteen blocks of central Roma were named the Roma Historic District. In 1993, the area was named a National Historic Landmark District, making it an elite and significant U.S. cultural treasure.[533] The Roma Restoration Project, which focused its resources on eight buildings from 1993 to 1997, and Los Caminos del Rio Heritage Project, "a bi-national plan to preserve cultural and historical treasures for 200 miles along both sides of the Texas-Mexico border," also brightened the public spotlight on the buildings' historical value.[534] Texas and Mexican officials also attempted for years to restore the 1928 San Pedro-Roma Suspension Bridge, but budgetary priorities, economic crises

[529] Ramirez, *Prologue.*
[530] Corey Ryan, "Libraries Going High Tech," *Valley Morning Star* (Harlingen, TX), September 13, 2010, accessed August 28, 2013, http://www.valleymorningstar.com/news/article_d67d1e66-2248-5c4a-8c70-8f22e8255c32.html.
[531] John J. Frey III to Ramirez, email, 6 February 2007, "Documents and Personal Letters," Ramirez Collection.
[532] "Roma (city), Texas," *State and County QuickFacts*. United States Census Bureau, accessed August 1, 2014, http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/48/4863020.html.
[533] Karen J. Weitze, "National Historic Landmark Nomination: Roma Historic District," Austin, TX: Dames & Moore, Inc., April 29, 1993, accessed on October 26, 2014, http://www.cityofroma.net/files/ROMA%20HD.pdf.
[534] Laura E. Keeton, "Restoring Roma's 19th Century Past," *Houston Chronicle*, April 10, 1994; Zapata, "A Historical Archaeology of Roma, Texas."

on both sides of the border, and changes in regional governance consistently derailed the multi-million dollar bi-national process. Despite the struggles, citizens north and south of the border regularly celebrated the bridge and its real and symbolic connections every March 25.[535]

The crusade to improve Valley education, expand its enriching reach throughout the region, and find, educate, and deploy more physicians into Valley communities continued into the second decade of the twenty-first century, and Ramirez watched the key pieces fall into place. Lucio's S.B. 98 in 2009 set the stage when it authorized the UT System to convert the RAHC into a medical school as soon as the System established a supporting academic infrastructure.[536] In 2013, the UT System, enabled by S.B. 24, unveiled plans to add a new institution to the UT family: the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV).[537] Resources and staff from UT Brownsville, UT Pan American, and the RAHC were combined into a single academic and administrative entity, with refurbished campuses in Brownsville, Edinburg, Harlingen, and McAllen. Various Valley locations housed components of a new four-year medical school based at the RAHC. The Permanent University Fund, which funds public Texas universities, financed the UTRGV. In 2013, the Board of Regents approved the name. In 2014, the first class was recruited, their enrollment planned for Fall 2015. Its ambitions were direct and bold: to be "the largest and most successful Hispanic-serving institution in the nation."[538]

By September 2014, the renovated Starr County Memorial Hospital had grown from a staff of eight-five to almost 285. A larger laboratory, an ambulance service with three

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[535] Gail Burkhardt, "Roma, Miguel Alemán Officials Hopeful About Historical Suspension Bridge," *Monitor* (McAllen, TX), March 25, 2011; Burkhardt, "Mexican Officials Give Go Ahead for More Bridge Plans But Must Still Give Final Approval for Project," *Monitor* (McAllen, TX), April 21, 2011.
[536] S.B. 98, 81st Texas Cong. (2009), http://www.legis.state.tx.us/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=81R&Bill=SB98.
[537] S.B. 24, 83rd Texas Cong. (2013), http://www.legis.state.tx.us/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=83R&Bill=SB24.
[538] "Project South Texas," University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, accessed September 1, 2014, http://www.utsystem.edu/news/topics/project-south-texas/about.

substations, including one in Roma, and a small but devoted army of doctors and nurses continued to realize Ramirez's ambitions to care for his community.[539]

On January 29, 2012, Sarah Aycock Ramirez died. The matriarch had presided over a family of five children, nineteen grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren. Ramirez never failed to publicly shower his wife with praise and gratitude for raising their children and enduring his intense and strenuous life. She was his most important medical partner from the very beginning, and she enabled him to build both a fulfilling life and a successful career in Roma. Mario Ramirez believed he could make a difference in his world. She ensured that he realized that belief. Sarah Ramirez was buried at Roselawn Cemetery in McAllen.[540]

By December 2014, the last month of this report's historical scope, 88-year-old Ramirez lived quietly at his McAllen home.

[539] Rick Diaz, "Starr County Hospital Flourishes," KRGV.com, September 4, 2014, accessed November 7, 2014, http://www.krgv.com/news/starr-county-hospital-flourishes.
[540] "Sarah A. Ramirez," *Monitor* (McAllen, TX), January 31, 2014, accessed November 7, 2014, http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/themonitor/obituary.aspx?n=sarah-a-ramirez&pid=155709420.

CONCLUSION

Mario Ramirez believed that a single person could make a beneficial difference in the Valley society that produced him. many lives. He was an ambitious, driven, and intelligent man who realized that belief. The memory of his dying brother probably never left him. Perhaps the heartbreaking sadness turned into a fiery determination to never let another child needlessly die because of the Valley's scarce and unevenly distributed medical resources. Perhaps he, with his wife Sarah at his side, decided that he would confront the suffering, anguish, and intellectual hunger he saw every day. Perhaps he decided that even if he could not end the era of medical neglect Valley residents endured, his efforts would contribute to the beginning of the end of that era. Perhaps he decided that he and Sarah would make a difference, even if no one else joined them, even if no one else understood what they faced, and even if no one else cared.

Ramirez tried to convince talented medical colleagues that their communities needed them in the Valley more than those colleagues needed the sophisticated material world beyond it. He demonstrated to his colleagues and to the generations of students he tried to mold that an individual who committed himself to a community, listened to his conscience, and fought for and encouraged and nurtured education throughout his life – that person would make a long-lasting difference in thousands of lives. "He was the ultimate role model," Lucio asserted. "People can truly have an impact with what they do in life."[541] Ramirez's life experiences also highlighted the fact that the Valley was and is filled with extraordinary men and women ready to realize extraordinary lives. A boy who just wanted to be a Cub Scout, a waiter who needed just one person to believe he could be something greater, thousands of frightened people facing historic disaster -- all they needed was someone to believe in them and someone to care about them.

[541] Lucio, phone interview with author, October 14, 2014.

Ramirez's story sharpens the historical understanding of the Valley's borderlands tapestry, casts fresh light onto Hurricane Beulah's devastating drama, and adds a vibrant individual to the Valley's and the state's pantheon of genuine heroes. A better understanding of his life and accomplishments offers a better understanding of the Valley and of his beautiful hometown.[542] Ramirez was a perfect example of Valley's actors who took it upon themselves to build for themselves a better community, despite the region's poverty, unemployment, intensifying drug use, violence, and natural disasters. Medicine, politics, and education were his arenas across which he waged his pursuits of happiness. Thousands of inspired men and women still follow in his footsteps, and the medical care and education they provide comprise his legacy. The Valley's educational and medical institutions are the intellectual descendants of his ambitions and dreams of a better community for all Valley families.

When someone asked Ramirez to explain his formula for happiness, Ramirez replied, "Hard work plus humility equals success." When a reporter asked Ramirez how he wanted to be remembered, Ramirez responded with a simple phrase: "He cared."[543]

[542] Arreola, *Tejano South Texas*, 200-201. In the twentieth century, historians and archaeologists re-discovered Roma's beautiful architecture, and when Texas created a "Lower Rio Grande heritage corridor," among its historic jewels were the First Chapel of Roma, the Manuel Guerra Store, Roma City Hall, the Roma-San Pedro International Bridge, and the Manuel Ramirez Hospital.

[543] Harmon, "The Amazing Dr. Mario"; Perez, interview with author. When asked why he thought Ramirez seemed so humble, Perez wrote, "My guess is that at some level he may have lacked self-confidence. … But he really lives life to serve others, to help others. [I]t is never about him, [and he] never did things for credit or for the awards. …"

APPENDIX A
The Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale[544]

Category 1
Sustained winds: 74-95 mph
Potential wind damage: Damage to roofs, gutters, shingles; large tree branches snapped; downed power lines

Category 2
Sustained winds: 96-110 mph
Potential wind damage: Severe damage to roofs, siding; trees ripped out of shallow ground; power outages for days or weeks

Category 3
Sustained winds: 111-129 mph
Potential wind damage: Even the best homes severely damaged; downed trees block streets; power and water supplies cut off for many days

Category 4
Sustained winds: 130-156 mph
Potential wind damage: Roofs ripped off, walls collapsed; most trees and power lines down; region rendered unsuitable for residence indefinitely

Category 5
Sustained winds: 157 mph or higher
Potential wind damage: Most structures shattered; natural landscape and inhabited regions completely devastated

[544] "Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale," National Hurricane Center, National Weather Service, http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/aboutsshws.php. The website includes a strangely fascinating and horrifying animation of what each category will likely do to palm trees and a hapless home. In 2012 the NWS slightly modified the Category 4 wind range to compensate for mathematical imprecision when converting knots speed into miles-per-hour speed.

APPENDIX B
The packaged disaster hospital

One of the more fascinating aspects of the Beulah relief efforts was the packaged disaster hospital. Here is how the USPHS described the unit shortly after the hurricane:

> "A packaged disaster hospital (PDH)" is a unit of enough medical equipment and supplies, cots, bedding, and pharmaceuticals to establish a complete 200-bed hospital. These units, assembled and packed for storage by the Public Health Service, are placed in strategically selected communities throughout the country for use in time of major disasters. There are 108 PDH's in Texas, 20 of which are located in the southeast counties afflicted by the floods. All or portions of 12 PDH's were used in the disaster."[545]

A short 1967 news film documenting the relief efforts noted that about 2,500 PDHs were stored "at strategic points across the country for use in either natural or nuclear disaster."[546]

[545] "Wrap up report on PHS Activities During Hurricane Beulah," "Hurricane Beulah" scrapbook, 2.
[546] "It Happened in Texas," *Texas Archive of the Moving Picture*.

APPENDIX C
"I couldn't say yes fast enough"

Mario Ramirez remembered that several years after the Beulah drama, "a gentleman ... gave me several rolls of 35 mm black and white negatives of pictures taken during the entire period … He was a teacher from the Rio Grande City High School who had been assigned, perhaps unofficially, to record what happened."[547] That gentleman was George F. Tuley, who worked for the Teacher Corps, a Great Society program established to train new teachers for low-income regions. He also loved photography. Tuley and his family lived at Fort Ringgold.[548]

As medical teams and military forces gathered at the old fort, from where the U.S. directed the evacuation of many Mexicans citizens from "flooded villages across the river," someone knocked on Tuley's door and asked him if he would be "interested in documenting the operations from the hospital." Tuley was thrilled, "I couldn't say 'yes' fast enough." He had full access to every aspect of the relief efforts. He flew into Mexico on U.S. helicopters "that landed on tiny patches of dry ground with water all around" and watched rescues and evacuations.

By the end of 1967, Tuley recalled, "I had a dream portfolio for someone who had a degree in history and had never taken a lesson in photography." Tuley later became a professional photojournalist – a career that began as Ramirez labored to save the lives Tuley's camera immortalized.

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[547] Ramirez, "Hurricane Beulah," scrapbook, 6-7.

[548] Tuley, Facebook conversation with author, October 18, 2013. I was a newspaper editor and news page designer at the *Corpus Christi Caller-Times* from 1999 to 2006, and I worked regularly with Tuley, who was by then a senior photojournalist. As a news page designer I placed his photos on my pages. As a copy editor I edited his captions. As a senior editor I selected his best work for the front pages. A decade after I last worked with him, I was pleasantly surprised during my research for this thesis to see him credited in UTHSCSA's collection of Beulah photos, which are online here: http://tinyurl.com/kcolxmy.

APPENDIX D
Approval from the Institutional Review Board

Approval		
Document No.:	**Date:**	**Page:**
HRP-522	**25 Feb 2014**	**Page 1 of 1**

Fernando Ortiz Jr.
COLFA, Dept. of History
210-248-4936
Remembrance1974@gmail.com

Dear Fernando Ortiz Jr.:

On September 4, 2014 the IRB approved the following from September 4, 2014 to September 3, 2015 inclusive.

Type of review:	**Initial**
Title:	**The Port in the Storm**
Principal investigator:	**Fernando Ortiz Jr.**
IRB number:	**14-249**
Documents reviewed:	**Initial Application; Research Personnel; Protocol; Interview Questions; Information Sheet;**

No later than one month prior to expiration, you are to submit a continuing review to request continuing approval or closure. If the IRB does not grant continuing review, approval of this protocol ends after September 3, 2015.

Copies of any approved consent documents, consent scripts, or assent documents are attached. These are your official documents. Please use these for modifications, when required.

In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements in "INVESTIGATOR GUIDANCE: Investigator Obligations (HRP-800)."

Sincerely,

IRB Office

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