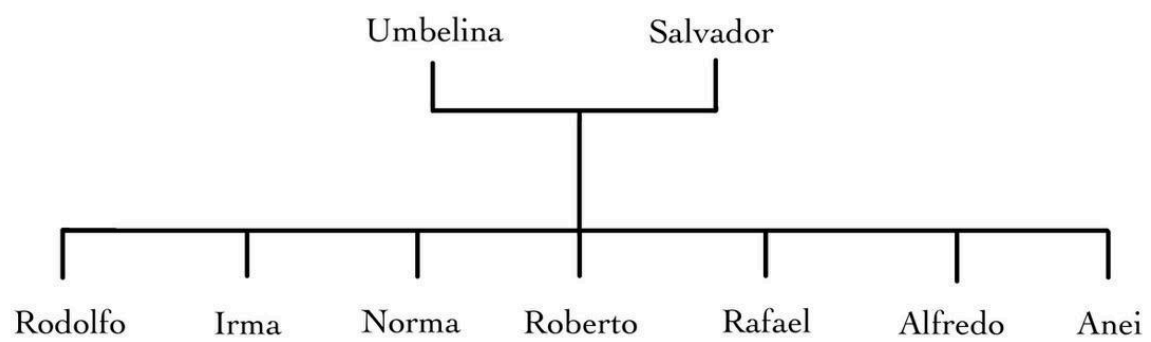


From La Sierra to the Skylines:
The Journey of La Familia Sanchez-Rogel

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La Familia Sanchez-Rogel



My whole life, it was always my family. To this day, it is always my family. Since I was born, even now, I have lived with my mom, Tio Rafa, and my Abuelita and Abuelito. I've always been fascinated by my family's stories. Every time my abuelita was cooking, or we were all eating, I would ask them where they came from, their history, and how we managed to end up in Chicago, Illinois. As I'm getting older, I'm starting to realize that my grandparents, unfortunately, aren't going to be with me forever. It wasn't until this year and numerous health scares from them that I decided to forever keep their stories alive. It's important that future generations of our family understand where we came from and what bravery and courage it took to get to where we are today. For those exact reasons, I tell their beloved stories.

A la Primera Vista:

Umbelina "Umbe" Rogel Juarez was a beautiful young woman born in the town of Almoloya, Guerrero, in 1944. She loved to dance, adored spending time with family, and loved getting dressed up. In May of 1957, Umbe and her sister-in-law Teresa were found at the bus stop on the side of *Carretera Federal 51*, shifting their weight from side to side, feeling the cotton dresses rubbing along their legs and leaning forward with their eyes squinted, wondering if *La Flecha* was close. They were headed to the next major town over, Arcelia, Guerrero, where the *Mercado* is located. During this time, the bus, or *La Flecha* as it was known to the locals, would pick them up. They had been patiently waiting with others from the town since 6:30 am, as the first bus of the day didn't come until 7:00 am. Upon the bus's arrival, she and her sister-in-law boarded, and that's when she first laid eyes on him.

Salvador "Chava" Sanchez Villalobos, born in the village of Sabino Alto, Guerrero, in 1943, is a hardworking young man, always helping and wanting the best for his family. He and his mother, Jovita Villalobos, like everyone else in the surrounding towns and villages, were waiting for the bus to start their day at the *Mercado*. Lifting one foot in front of another and grasping onto the aluminum rails, they boarded and walked down the middle of *La Flecha* to take a seat. They were in for a long journey since the bus ride to Arcelia was two hours long. Nodding his head back and forward until they came to a sudden halt. *La Flecha* had just stopped at the town of Almoloya. As he was observing the people entering, there she was. Instantly, he sat up, straightened his grey button-up shirt, brushed off his beige trousers, and fixed his styled hair. *La mujer mas hermosa que he visto en mi vida*, Salvador thought to himself.

For the next two hours, not once did they exchange actual words, not even their names, but they kept glancing at each other. *En nuestras miradas nos dijimos miles de palabras*. When they finally arrived at the *Mercado* in Arcelia, they looked at each other one last time, and they each went on with their day. Throughout the rest of the day, all they could think about was one another.

While she was with Teresa, she thought: *Que sera de el? Cuando la voy a ver de nuevo?* Walking through the *Mercado*, they were immersed in all the colors, smells, and sounds around them. In the stands, they heard people chatting: *Comadres* meeting each other, children crying, and the voices of vendors trying to pursue you to buy their produce *Mira muchacha pasale aqui te lo dejo por buen precio*. Seeing the rich colors of the *Chiles*, *arroz*, *tomate*, y *tortillas* that they would take back home. Taking in the delicious smells of freshly made *Tamales de Elote*, *Chicarron*, and the ground spices. As Umbe was on one side of the *Mercado*, Chava was on the other with his mother, coincidentally buying the same thing and experiencing the same colors, smells, and sounds. After a long day of shopping, Umbe and Teresa boarded the 12 pm

bus. Chava and Jovita --noticing the time—were walking as fast as they could with their *despensa*, trying to reach the bus stop. Just as they did, they saw the bus drive away, leaving them behind. Defeated by the heat and the weight of their purchases, they had no choice but to wait for the 5 pm bus. Not knowing he had just missed Umbe by a minute. As they each rode back home at different times, they found themselves daydreaming about one another, realizing it was love *a la Primera vista*. They were uncertain about whether their paths would cross again and prayed to the universe they would see each other once more. None of them knew, only the universe held that secret.



Umbelina, at the age of 16



Jovita Villalobos age/year Unknown

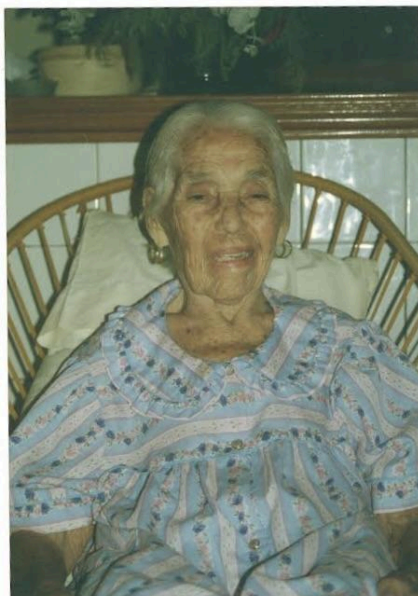
El Baile:

It was October of 1957, and the biggest and only *baile*, *El Baile de Almoloya*, was being held in four days. It was the talk of all the towns. Walking down the streets, you could hear *Vas a ir al baile?* Every young lady and man could be found washing, drying, and ironing their best outfits for the big night. On the night of the *baile*, after a long day of feeding the cattle, milking the cows, and gathering chicken eggs covered in dirt, Chava took it upon himself to take a shower. Opening the kitchen cabinet and reaching for the biggest pot he could find, he turned the silver knob on the faucet and let the pot fill up, then he put the pot on the stove and let it get warm so he could shower. After his shower he walked to the kitchen and started to cut a lime in half. He applied the lime as his deodorant, put on his freshly ironed white striped shirt and black trousers, and combed his hair. Chava and his brother Luis, who is 3 years older than him, walked from their house at the top of the mountain to the *Carretera Federal 51*.

Having walked for 2 hours and seen others along the way, trying not to sweat, they finally reached the entrance to the town of Almoloya. As they walked from the entrance to the *zocalo* where the *baile* was being held, they heard the laughter of people from their homes, smelled aromas from the recently enjoyed dinners, and exchanged greetings with people along the way until the delightful notes of music reached their ears. As Luis was enjoying the music, conversing with people, and even sharing a couple of dances, Chava was standing observing other people until there she was. A young girl wearing a periwinkle dress, her beautiful long black hair in a braid, and makeup so subtle no one could tell besides him. He was astonished, couldn't believe his eyes *era possible? Es ella?* He couldn't believe it; it was her, the young girl from the bus. He watched her for a while, watched her laugh light up the town, her skirt flow with her movements, and the love she had for dancing.

Earlier that night, while Chava was getting ready, Umbe, on the other hand, was begging her parents, Columba Juarez and Francisco Rogel, to go to the *baile*. "Papa, Mama Por favor dejen me ir" said Umbe. After hours and hours of begging, Francisco finally let her go under some conditions. "Te dejo ir si va tu hermano Evencio" said Francisco to Umbelina. Evencio, who was Umbes, older brother, always looked after her when going out. Umbelina was so excited for the *baile* she ironed her periwinkle dress, combed and braided her hair, and then put on some makeup. As Umbe and Evencio were headed out, they told their mother and father they were leaving, but before they could, she gave them their *bendicion*. After a while of being at the *baile*, Umbe was looking around. Maybe she would see some familiar faces.

Es? Es él? Their eyes once again locked, and just like before, it felt as if nothing mattered and the whole universe came to a stop. She turned bright red when she realized he was coming towards her and there suddenly they were in front of each other. "Quieres bailar conmigo" Chava said to her reaching his hand out. "Si, me gustaria bailar contigo" she replied as she took his hand. As they walked towards the center of the dance floor, they shared a lovely dance to *El Zopilote Mojado* by Mariachi Vargas De Tecalitlán. After their dance, they exchanged names, and she had to go back to her brother since another one of her parents' rules was that she wasn't allowed to dance more than 3 songs the entire night and not consecutively either. So, as she waited and waited until the next song, they just kept looking at one another. As a couple of songs went by, he went up to her again, and finally, he asked, "*Quieres hacer mi novia*".



Columba Rogel, age/year unknown.

Acapulco:

Chava and Umbe, now back in their homes, have been dating for a couple of days now, and it was a very lovely couple of days. On the night of the *baile*, they got each other's addresses to send each other letters as Umbe and her family were moving to Acapulco in a week. Acapulco is a lovely place with beautiful beaches, incredible food, and, unlike Almoloya, the sound of many cars passing along the streets. This was all new territory to Umbe and her family, as they had always lived in Almoloya. That's where her mother and siblings grew up. Her heart ached that she was leaving her home, but she was excited for this new chapter in her life. Umbe's new house was in Colonia, Santa Cruz. To get there, she had to be let off the bus at the entrance of the Colonia and walk the inclined streets until reaching the house, which was a half-hour walk. Umbe stopped going to school at the age of nine years old; in the town of Almoloya school only reached third grade. When she and her family got there, they had to find ways to earn income.

Columba got a *local* in *el mercado* where they would sell food, each dish being different every day. Umbe and her mother would wake up at 5:30 in the morning every day, get dressed, and pick out the pots and pans they needed for that day. As they walk to the *Mercado* with their utensils, they hear the sounds of metal hitting metal. *Chunk. Clunk. Clunk.* After a long walk, they finally reached the *local*. Entering the *mercado* they were greeted by the people they passed, each at their own *local* selling food. After they set up their station, Columba sends Umbe with a grocery list while Columba preps the plates for the day. Depending on what day it was and what ingredients were more economical, they would make dishes such as *Carne de Puerco*, *Chicharron en salsa*, *Mole*, and *Huevo en Chile*. When Umbe was done shopping for the ingredients she would then help her mother prepare them. Chopping the *tomate*, *chile serrano* and *jalapeño*, and *cilantro* for the *salsa verde* they would make every day. Her mother would start cooking the other ingredients, and as she started, it seemed like everyone else did as well. It was as if everyone cooking was a precisely synchronized orchestra. The sound of everyone's knives thwacking on wooden cutting boards, the sizzling of the oil's chorus with ingredients

cooling, and the echoing of the grinding and blending ingredients in the *molcajete*. Each step is like muscle memory after making these dishes countless times. Once everything was done cooking, they left the burners on low so the food wouldn't go cold. Serving mothers, fathers, children, and workers every day, their day wouldn't end until six in the afternoon. Once done there, they would stay behind and wash the dishes, clean the garbage, and count their day's earnings; after, as they did in the morning, they do in the afternoon. Carry their pots and pans all the way back home now. This time, instead of being clean and full of energy, they would be tired and dirty. Getting home, their time off was spent doing other chores around the house, cleaning and doing laundry. Once it was night, they got ready to go to bed they would shower, get dressed, and get their things ready for the next day.

The cycle would continue every day unless they could afford to take the day off, which was a rare occasion. Occasionally, Umbe would receive what she had been hoping for during her many days of hard work: a letter from her boyfriend, Chava. While opening and reading each letter, they would talk about how much they love each other, how much they miss each other, and how they long the day until they reunite. Reading these letters, it was as if they put a piece of their heart with it. They were filled with a tremendous amount of love the touch of the paper was as close as they could get to each other. This would continue for the next four years, only seeing each other once a year in the same place their relationship started, *El Baile de Almoloya*.

Sabino Alto:

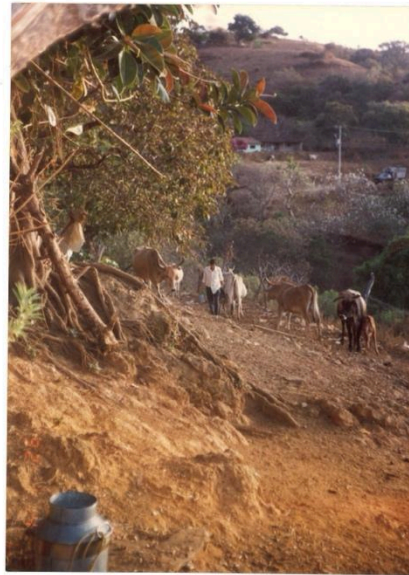
While Umbe was in Acapulco, Chava stayed in his village El Sabino Alto; while there, he experienced life differently than Umbe. Instead of beautiful beaches, incredible food, and the sounds of busy streets, there was dirt, the same 4 ingredient foods every day, and the sound of farm animals. Chava was used to this already, like Umbe; Chava stopped going to school at the age of nine. In small towns and villages such as Almoloya and El Sabino Alto children's education only goes up to third grade the only way to continue is to pay for school in major cities such as Teloloapan, Areclia, Cuernavaca, and Iguala; all, a couple of hours away in the bus. It was merely impossible for them. Since he was a child, he was taught the way of the land a skill that was passed down from generation to generation.

His day would consist of waking up at 5:00 in the morning, getting dressed, and starting his farm duties. There would be days when he would milk all the cows, as this was an essential source of income for his family. As he would milk the cows, he would sit down on an upside-down bucket and have a smaller metal bucket to catch all the milk. Chava would do this for hours on a daily basis as they had a total of forty cows. They would sell it in various ways. Some days, they would sell just the milk; others, his mother would make *queso fresco* and *crema* to sell. He didn't learn how to make the cheese and sour cream since he had to move on and continue his other duties but just like the way of the land, his grandmother passed on this skill to his mother and then his sisters. As his mother and sisters would deal with the products he and his brothers would feed and herd all the animals: the cows, chickens, pigs, and goats.

During July he and his brothers would go down to the *huerta* where they would plant one of their most essential crops; corn. In the winter months, the corn would be ready to harvest they would spend days on end collecting every last bit. Each morning, like clockwork, marked the beginning of their familiar routine Chava and his brothers harvesting with expertise and filling their sacks with their food as valuable as gold; all while trying to beat the scorching sun. Upon their arrival at their home, they carefully stored all the harvest knowing that if they didn't do so

correctly, it would be devoured by the chickens. The maize they harvested in the winter months is what sustained them throughout the seasons until the next harvest. At the *mercado* and other homes around El Sabino Jovita would sell some of the *maiz*, but the majority was for their own consumption. From breakfast to dinner *maiz* was found in their meals from the *Atole de Maiz* they drank in the morning to the *Tortillas* they ate throughout the day; they ate the best they could with what they had. Learning to value food and the various ways to make diverse meals with the same ingredients.

When Chava wasn't doing his daily duties, he was found composing letters to his beloved Umbe. With every word, he expressed his undying affection and love for her and envisioned a future with her. Eagerly anticipating their next yearly reunion at *El Baile de Almoloya* over the next four years.



Salvador herding cows in El Sabino Alto year/age Unknown

Irma 1981:

It was April of 1981, I walked into the kitchen, getting a whiff of freshly brewed coffee and eggs cooking. Walking into the kitchen, I saw my mom preparing our first meal of the day for our family. Walking up to her nervously, *Buenos dias, mamá*, I said. *Buenos dias hija*. Sitting down, shaking my leg up and down until I finally got the courage to tell her mom what was on her mind. “Mamá” “Te tengo que decir algo”. “Que paso hija,” replied my mom. “Me voy a ir a los Estados Unidos con mi papá, quiero trabajar allá y tener una vida mejor” When she heard those words it was as if her heart sank. Confused, scared, and worried for her daughter, she said, “Como que te vas a ir? Apenas tienes 18 años eres una niña, que tal si te pasa algo? No, no, no, como crees?” I, upset that my dreams may not come true I replied “Mamá ya soy mayor de edad, quiero irme para tener buen trabajo y ayudarles, mi papa ya esta allá me voy a ir con el” After going back and forward my mom finally agreed to let me embark on my journey to the United States.

I got incontact with my dad and told him the plan. After also worrying about his daughter her agreed to let her come. A couple of days later, I got in contact with him once more; he told

me the plan to cross and said it would be \$550 u.s.d. and that he had already paid the *coyote* to cross me over. On the night of May 4th, I spend the entire day with my family, especially my beloved mom. We all shared our last meals together until we were to see each other once more. My mom helped me pack her bookbag. I only took one pair of jeans, one pair of black pants, and two fuchsia tops, not one thing more, not one thing less. While packing, I looked at my mom and burst into tears *Mamá como la voy a extrañar, como voy a extrañar a mis hermanos, a mi querido Sabino*. My mom, with tears running down her face, looked me in the eye and said, “Hija yo tambien pero nos vamos a ver pronto.” We spent all night talking and crying until we had no more tears left to cry. On May 5th, waking before the sun was up, I headed out, waking up my mom to say our last goodbyes. My mom like always gave me *La bendicion* and watched me leave our beloved home in hopes of a better life. I walked from our house all the way to the bus stop on the side of *Carretera Federal 51*. When I arrived, I got on the bus and headed toward the town of Teloloapan, Guerrero.

In Teloloapan, I got on another bus. This bus was headed toward La Ciudad de Mexico, CDXM. This bust ride took about 4 hours. I was on the bus with nothing but my bookbag and slept for most of the ride. finally, after reaching CDMX, I took the last bus until I could finally cross to the United States. I went for CDMX to Tijuana, where my *Tio* Pancho was waiting for my arrival. Once I arrived, it was early in the morning on May 7th. This was the big day. The day when I would finally cross to the United States. *Tio* Pancho and the rest of my family, who lived in Tijuana, prepared me for the journey I had coming. We went over the plan once more, and he told me to get some rest because I would need it. A few hours before I left, they made me a big dinner and wished me the best of luck in her travels. It was 10 pm and time to head out. I went to the designated spot where the *coyote* would meet me and 7 others, all of them men. The *coyote* told us they would be crossing by foot, and that a white van would pick us up on the U.S. side.

I didn’t know what was to come. I and the 7 other men spend 3 days in the *Otay Mountains*. We did not eat for three days, and each only with one bottle of water. My mind is running with so many thoughts at once, thinking to myself *Cuando voy a ver a mi familia? Voy a sobrevivir? Quiero a mis papás*. On May 10th, 1981, at the beginning of dawn, I saw a white van approaching us. I was so relieved I wanted to cry we had finally made it to *America*. The *coyote's* American workers took us to Los Angeles International Airport, LAX. Once I arrived, I got my belongings, looked back at the men, and never saw them again.

I headed toward the entrance with my one-way ticket to Chicago, Illinois. I came across so many people traveling to different parts of the world, amazed by everything this new country had to offer. When I finally got to my gate, I patiently waited until it was time to board the plane. *Calling all passengers to a direct flight to Chicago, we are now boarding*. I reached the entrance. “Name, please.” Said the agent. I with a confused look on my face, didn’t know what to say. “Nombre,” said the agent again. “Ah, Irma Sanchez Rogel,” I replied. The agent took my ticket and let me right in. This was my first time on a plane, my first time traveling alone, and my first time not being with my mother on Mother’s Day. When I sat in my seat, I was so nervous my hands sweating so much I dried them on my jeans. When the plane took off, I looked out the window. *Ya llegue al pais de los sueños*. Four hours later, I arrived at O’Hare International Airport. I got off the plane and got the nearest taxi. I gave the taxi driver the address of my *Tio* Erasto Villalobos’ house where my dad was living. Once I arrived, there he was; my dad. I ran out of the car and gave him the biggest hug I ever could, and we both started crying tears of joy. *Bienvenidos a los Estados Unidos Hija*.



Irma age/year Unknown

Rafael 1986:

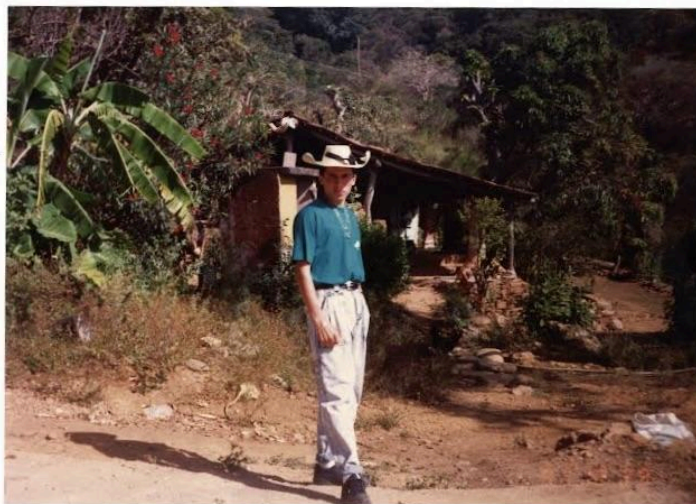
It was March 1986. I woke up to the sound of roosters crowing. I got up and made myself breakfast; *Picaditas* was the choice for today. I served myself a plate of food, and I sat down to eat breakfast before school. Once again, it was those days when my heart ached. At this point, everyone had left for the United States, and I was the only one left. As the days go by, my heart grows fonder, wishing every day I was with my siblings and parents. Most of the days, it's bearable, but today, it's something about today that I can't take it anymore. I don't like school, and I miss my family too much, so I walked to my room, got all the money I had saved up, and went on my way. *Me voy*, I thought to myself.

Walking down to *La Carretera Federal*, I got on *La Flecha*. I arrived at Teloloapan, Guerrero, and with the money I had saved, I purchased a one-way ticket to *La Ciudad de Mexico, CDMX*. It took hours before I arrived at my destination, but when I did, I realized I was one step closer to seeing my family. *¿Perdon, adonde puedo usar un telefono?* My dad's sister, my *Tia* Lucila or Lucy, and her husband *Tio* Jorge lived here, so what better place to stay than with her? I called and asked if I could stay with her for a day since it was night, and the next bus out didn't leave until tomorrow morning. Of course, she agreed and gave me her address so I could get a taxi. When I arrived, she greeted me with the biggest hug but with a stern face, looked at me, and said, "Rafita! Que haces aqui?" So, I explained to her how I missed my parents so much and how much I wanted to go with them she understood and supported me in any way she could. I told her not to tell my parents and let her know that I would call them shortly. She agreed and asked me how I was getting there. I told her I was planning to cross the same way my sister Irma did walking across the mountains with the help of her bother *Tio* Pancho.

The very next morning, *Tia* Lucy, *Tio* Jorge, and I went to *Terminal Central Del Sur Taxqueña*. Arriving, I said my goodbyes to them, and I walked inside the bus terminal yet again. I bought a one-way ticket, but this time to Tijuana, Mexico. Once more, it was a long trip. I fell asleep and looked outside my window, watching the scenery, knowing I would be reunited with my family very shortly. When I arrived at the bus terminal in Tijuana, I walked to my *Tio* Panchos home. It was a short walk, and since I'd been there before, I knew my way around.

When I arrived at this front door, I knocked, and to his surprise, his eyes widened and eyebrows raised, and he leaned in for a hug. He had the same question *Tia* Lucy had: “Rafa! Como estas? Que haces aqui?” Once more, I sat down with him and explained my situation. This time, I had to call my parents. *Bueno? Buenooo?* I paused, took a deep breath, and said *Hola mamá...es Rafa. Estoy aqui con mi Tio Pancho. Me quiero ir a los Estados Unidos.* It took a while for my mom to fully understand what was going on and how I, a seventeen-year-old, managed to travel half the country all by myself. Later, between the lecture that I got and how glad they were to be able to finally see me, they told me I would have to wait for a while until they could gather the money to pay the coyote to cross me over.

It was April 5th, 1986. A month had passed, and I was told by my *Tio hoy es el dia.* It was eleven at night, and I was taken to the side of the road by the mountains. I was the only one crossing tonight. *Bajate.* So, I did what I was told. I got out of the van and listened to the instructions given to me; I had to walk through the mountains and then meet a van until I was picked up and taken to the airport. So, I did it. I wasn’t scared or worried about getting caught. The excitement of seeing my family was overpowering every other emotion I had. I walked six hours through the mountains without a single problem. I had enough water, and I didn’t see any border patrol agents. I arrived in the United States on April 6th, 1986, at 5 am, a day I will never forget. I got picked up by this white Van and was taken to the same refuge my sister was I waited there until it was time for me to go. My dad arranged for me to stay with my cousin Ruth until he had the money for the plane ticket to Chicago. This took about a day. When I was united with Ruth, I called my dad to let him know I was safe and with her. He sent her the money to buy me a plane ticket, and that same day, I was headed to Chicago. It was my first time getting on a plane like Crossin; the excitement took over every other emotion. I finally landed in Chicago; my dad picked me up while my mom stayed home to take care of my siblings. When I was greeted by my dad, we gave each other a hug, and for the first time, I heard *Bienvenidos a los Estados Unidos Hijo.*



Rafael in front of their house in El Sabino; age unknown

La Familia Sanchez-Rogel:

Over the course of gathering information and composing this work, I realized the parallels my family has lived, and I live now. I never understood but always dreamed of understanding the feeling when my *abuelitos* fell in love; it wasn't until I experienced what they felt for myself. When I was 19, I traveled by myself for the first time. It was always my dream to go to New York City, and I finally got the courage to do it by myself. I didn't know what was waiting for me. The first night I got there, I met him, Jay Peña, and as my *abuelitos* described it it felt as if the whole universe came to a stop; at that moment, nothing else mattered. We knew that they were meant for each other. At this moment, just like my *abuelitos* once were, we are also long distance. It has been difficult with long periods of not seeing each other, but the times we do make up for it. While we don't write letters to each other like my *abuelitos* once did, we have technology to thank for our frequent text and Facetimes. I can now confidently say I know what their love felt like, and I hope to continue to understand that for the rest of time.

At the time of writing this, My *Abuelita* is seventy-nine, turning eighty this May, and My *Abuelito* is eighty, turning eighty-one this August; they have been Married for over sixty years. Two of my *Tio*'s, Roberto, Beto, and Rodolfo, Lucas, are truck drivers. My *Tio* Alfredo, Freddy, is a very successful chef with his own restaurant, and my *Tio* Rafael, Rafa, has his own photography business he has been running since he got to the States. As for the women, My *Tia* Irma is now retired and living in Mexico with her husband, and my *Tia* Norma, now a retired teacher who helped many children in her career, never moved out of Mexico and frequently travels between Acapulco and El Sabino. As for their youngest child and my mother; Anei is now a travel Surgical Technologist, and I, Dazalyn, a soon-to-be University of Illinois-Chicago graduate. My *abuelitos* have done everything in their power to give their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren the best opportunities possible. They taught us everything we know and, most importantly, the love of family. My family has undergone many struggles, but they still managed to create a better life for themselves. While writing their stories, I found it interesting how much has changed over the years and what has stayed the same. As of now, my *abuelitos* place of birth is now noticed and can be located on maps; the buses that they once took no longer exist; they now have better communication than they ever did by using cellphones; I can keep going on and on.

My *Tio* Rafa always loved photos. If it was him taking them or modeling for them, it always brought him so much Joy. He would take pictures of everyone and everything. I'm very much like him; he loves to preserve family memories, and so do I. The people closest to me will know I take pictures of everything and will carry a digital camera with me. I love photography so much that I even studied it during my time here at the University of Illinois-Chicago. My family has been constantly separated from someone, not in the house, to a whole different country, but that never stopped my *Tio* Rafa from taking pictures. As I was putting this work together and looking through our family photograph archives, I noticed there were so many pictures of everyone individually, but almost never all 9 of them together. That was until I stumbled upon now one of my favorite pictures. At the time this picture was taken, they all had revisited their beloved home in Sabino Alto, Guerrero.



Family Sanchez-Rogel in Mexico. Top left to right: Alfredo, Rafael, Alberto, Rodolfo bottom left to right: Irma, Salvador, Anei, Umbelina, Norma