

CHAPTER 1 - FAMILY HISTORY OF LOVE, DIVERSITY, AND VIOLENCE

~~In the late 1800s, much of Europe was devastated by tuberculosis. Back then, they called the disease "consumption." It was caused by bacteria attacking the lungs. It was also known as the "Great White Plague" (because of the extreme paleness of those affected).~~

~~Several members of the Verdu family had already died from the disease in Spain.~~

Gene's grandfather's brother, Father Joseph Pico, was born in Barcelona, Spain, in 1884 and became a catholic priest adult. Gene didn't know the exact dates, but around 1910 Pico was sent to Mexico by the church to do missionary work as the church was looking for priests who spoke Spanish.



Father Joseph Pico

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~~The church was looking for priests who spoke Spanish.~~

~~n Mexico,~~ Father Pico lived at ~~a~~the monastery in Mexico when the government stood violently against the Catholic The situation got very violent. The government was even killing priests and nuns. As the story was told to Gene, Father Pico and a fellow priest ~~walked around the church property one day.~~

~~While they~~ were praying within the grounds of the monastery when; a local man came up to them — riding on a horse —; yelling, "You must leave right away. Soldiers are coming to kill priests at the monastery!" The two priests jumped on horses and rode for days to reach Texas ~~to and~~ escape possible execution.

~~He~~ was living in Texas when the church asked him to travel to St. Louis, ~~MO~~, to start a Spanish-speaking parish.

~~In 1922,~~ Bishop Henry Althoff, from Belleville, IL, (across the Mississippi River near St. Louis) requested Father Pico come to nearby Fairmont City, IL, to help start a new parish called Holy Rosary.

With the help of Father Pico, the Verdu family began migrating from Spain to Fairmont City.

Commented [LB1]: As I touched upon in the Table of Contents, this title is quite factual and straightforward. Do you want to keep this tone, or are you open to injecting a bit more emotion into the chapter headings?

Commented [LB2]: This beginning feels very abrupt. After an Introduction that describes Gene and a Foreword that shows Gene in a work environment, starting with a very general look into tuberculosis in the 1800s feels out of place.

Consider beginning this chapter with the birth of Eugene and then backtracking from there, so that the thread, the link, is stronger.

For example:

Eugene Verdu was born in (place) in (date). How his family came to live in Fairmount City, Illinois, is a winding tale that begins with Father Joseph Pico: the brother of Eugene's grandfather.

Then you can tell Father Pico's story. I don't really know what the significance of tuberculosis is to the story. What the point seems to be is how the Verdu family ended up in the US, no? And specifically in Illinois. I recommend just completely leaving that out of the book. The disease didn't affect any of the "main" characters.

It would be good to know a little bit more why the Verdu family wanted to emigrate anyway. I don't quite see what the motivation is for this family. Can you find out about that?

Commented [LB3]: This kind of detail can be left out of the book. It is enough to say "Around 1910, . . ."

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Commented [LB4]: Find a synonym to avoid using "violent" again. Or remove the first reference.

Commented [LB5]: In a new paragraph, repeat the subject's name so it's clear who or what you are talking about. Make these changes throughout the book, as it's important to restate who the subjects are

Commented [LB6]: Chicago style likes to avoid abbreviating state names. You can do a find and replace for all of the abbreviations of this type. Write the name out in its entirety.

Commented [LB7]: Twelve years have now elapsed since Pico went to Mexico. Do you have a sense of how much time he spent in Mexico before being forced out? Do you know approximately how much time was spent in Texas before he was asked to go to Illinois? This information would be good so the reader can better follow the timeline.

Commented [LB8]: This feels abrupt. There is little transition. This is when it would be good to have the motivation for why the family wanted to move there to begin with. Did Father Pico send letters in which he waxed poetic about that town? Were things going on in Spain that would make them want to leave?

Back then, the town only had one generator to power the entire community. The school was allowed to tap into the generator to power classroom lights at night.

They held night classes because most of the kids in town did not have electricity in their homes and couldn't do their homework after dark. So, school days were split into multiple sessions. Classes went until noon and then, took a break, ~~reopened~~ The school reopened around 2:00 p.m. and went on until ~~to~~ 4:30 p.m., and returned In the evening, the school opened one more time. The split days created much more work for the teachers, but it was worth it to Gene.

During a trip to Belize that I took with Gene in 2020, students I was lucky enough to meet told me Gene worked tirelessly back then to educate the kids and teach a strong work ethic. And ~~h~~He was a strict disciplinarian!

Some kids came to school every day by traveling for miles down the Macal River via "dorys" (canoes). Other kids came from a nearby Mayan village, traveling by horseback for miles through the jungle to get to school.

One of the significant and everlasting lessons Gene learned while teaching in Belize was the absolute care, dedication, and hard work he witnessed from the families as they did everything they could to provide access to education for their children.

He also couldn't help but admire the great effort the kids made to get an education.

Gene told me he had some real characters at that school.

According to him ~~Gene~~, a few boys would occasionally convince the local operator of the town's generator to sometimes turn the power off during night classes. Of course, the boys would have fun charming or tickling the young ladies when the lights went off.

Occasionally, when Gene had his back turned, students would pick up little stones on the floor and throw them at the chalkboard. Though the kids were ~~(not intending to hit him), but~~ the sounds ~~it~~ scared the heck out of him. He kept the class after school for an hour, but nobody would reveal who it was. It took him years to find out who had done it. Of course, the culprits turned out to be Gene's best friends, Joe Mena, Sergio "Chato" Torres, and Chato's brother Jorge. Gene shrugged it off and said, "Boys will be boys." Lifelong bonds were beginning to form.

CHAPTER 11 – DELIVERING PROGRAMS AND SERVICES FOR OLDER PEOPLE

Commented [LB9]: It would be nice to know the times at night since you have it for the morning and afternoon. Though you didn't mention when classes first started.

Commented [LB10]: How would those students know him? Hadn't he stopped teaching many, many years prior? Or are these former students from back in the 60s?

Commented [LB11]: Is this from back in the 60s or do the current students have to do that too?

Commented [LB12]: This paragraph makes it sound like this was a one-time thing, not a once-in-a-while thing. Perhaps rework the paragraph to make it seem like it happened more often.

For example, did he keep the kids back after school for an hour every time they did this? Wouldn't he have changed tactics if he hadn't gotten the name the first time around?

Commented [LB13]: Oh, so Joe was one of his students.

Commented [LB14]: How old were these boys here? How old was Joe? This becomes an issue when Chato tells his story as the ages and other things seem to get confusing.

Commented [LB15]: I think the chapter ends better without this sentence. You did say earlier that he and Joe remained friends all of their lives, so I'm not sure this is needed. If you want to keep it in, maybe tell the reader about Sergio and Jorge and their relationship with Gene years later.

Commented [LB16]: Again. Think of a more welcoming/narrative/creative title

While working in State Park Place, Gene was still working at SWIC college at night.

His role at the college consisted of teaching the Preparation for Retirement class and applying for grants to fund and develop new senior programs. He became very successful with grant writing.

In 1973, Dr. Nieberg wanted SWIC to start a program that would benefit older people and asked Gene to apply for grant funding. He said Gene was familiar with the need and had the skills to do it. So, Gene wrote and submitted the grant application, and it was accepted. ~~The new program would be funded.~~

After receiving the grant, Dr. Nieberg told Gene that the college was not going to sign off on the program unless Gene accepted to take over as director. ~~said, "We received the grant, but we're not going to sign off on it unless you take the job as Director for our new program for seniors."~~

The offer caught Gene entirely off guard, but the timing was good.

~~"Sometimes, I thought Dr. Nieberg, a true mentor and good boss, was a bit crazy. He said, "I'll pay you \$12,000 to be the director."~~ I told him, "You are crazy. That's too much! Give me \$10,000. If I earn it, you can give me a raise." Maybe it was me that was crazy. That was good money back in 1973."

Following the negotiations, Gene~~He~~ accepted the position. The new program began in Belleville, IL, just a few miles from where Gene and his mom lived.

~~One of his first actions was to contact Sister Mary Simpson and invite her to join him in this new venture. He had never forgotten his admiration and friendship with her.~~

~~Sister Mary turned down the offer, saying, "Gene, I need to stay where I am because I want to serve poor people in the East St. Louis area. You don't have poor people in Belleville."~~

~~Gene said to her, "Sister, we have a lot of poor older people in Belleville. I need your help." She still refused his offer.~~

Commented [LB17]: During the time that Gene was working at State Park Place — helping both the elderly and the youth — he was also still working at SWIC college, teaching his preparation for retirement class in the evenings. If that wasn't enough work, he was applying for grants to help fund and develop new senior programs as well. He became very successful with grant writing.

(The change is not massive from what you've written, but it has a little more heft and incorporates some of what you have in the second paragraph into the first. This is the beginning of a new chapter. The beginning of chapters need to set up a scene and make it clear and easy to understand right away. There was nothing really wrong with your sentence, but as the start to a new chapter, it didn't have a transitional bent to it.)

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Commented [LB18]: I'm not sure what the importance of this is if Sister Mary refused to join. It's kind of a thread that ends up going nowhere.

I recommend deleting it. The quote about his energy still works without the other paragraphs.