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~J. GONZALEZ

## Couple wed for 50 years succumbs to COVID; lived American dream

BY FRANCISCO GUAJARDO  
SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

**BEARING WITNESS**

Guadalupe “Lupita” Alanís and her husband José Luis celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on Aug. 23, while interned as COVID-19 patients at McAllen Medical Center. They could not be together, because of virus-related protocols, but José Luis asked his children to play the song “Mi Linda Esposa” to his wife to celebrate their 50-year commitment to each other.

The children did so, and the next day, their father José Luis died. One week later, Lupita died. Both at McAllen Medical Center, and both as a result of COVID-19.

Through a Zoom interview conducted by the Museum of South Texas History, five Alanís children shared stories of how they bore witness to their parents’ lives. Katya and brother Antonio called in from McAllen, Patricia from Monterrey, Carlos from Lufkin and Jonathan from Pueblo, Colorado. They told stories of harrowing adventures, but also revealed the deep love and affection their parents had for family — and for a country that gave them a new shot at life.

Born in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, on Sept. 14, 1948, José Luis first ventured into the United States as a young man, in search of work, and seeking an opportunity to bring his family. He found a job at Pilgrim’s Pride, a chicken producing company in Nacogdoches, Texas. He earned enough money to buy a truck, a 1982 white F-150. That truck would transport his wife and children from the edges of the Rio Grande to Nacogdoches.

On a fateful day in July 1992, Lupita, who was born May 21, 1951, in Monterrey, crossed the Rio Grande with her young children in tow, but with a significant assist from

18-year-old son Carlos, who came on the dangerous journey to help his mother and younger siblings.

“I came because my mother needed my help to get across the river and to walk through dangerous terrain, at least until my father’s white truck would pick us up,” Carlos recalls. “It’s also a good thing a friendly state trooper treated us with respect and dignity. Si no, we would’ve been sent back.”

“My plan was to head back to Mexico after my family got to Nacogdoches. But I then got a job, and when I saw the amount on my first check,



Courtesy photo  
Guadalupe “Lupita” Alanís and her husband Jose Luis died in August due to COVID-19.

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# Cooper candid



Screengrab

Anderson Cooper gestures during the UTRGV Distinguished Speaker Series event Saturday evening via Zoom.

## CNN anchor intimate in discussion with UTRGV students

BY MATT WILSON  
STAFF WRITER

The Anderson Cooper on display for attendees of the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley’s second distinguished speaker discussions of the year Saturday night wasn’t the serious-faced, hard-bitten news anchor that’s become the most recognizable face at CNN over the past 15 years.

The Anderson Cooper UTRGV students and staff welcomed virtually into their homes Saturday evening was candid, quirky and frequently self-effacingly modest, joking and quipping while sharing heartfelt anecdotes from a lifetime’s worth of experience as a journalist. “For all you to spend your Saturday evening with me, it’s an honor. I don’t know if when I was in college I would have listened to some old guy rambling on a Saturday night — although frankly I wasn’t doing anything on a Saturday night anyway. I was probably just napping,” he said during the chat.

Cooper spent almost an hour and a half speaking with communications professor Aje-Ori Agbese and re-



Screengrab

CNN news anchor Anderson Cooper is seen speaking with UTRGV Communications Professor Aje-Ori Agbese during the university’s Distinguished Speaker Series Saturday evening.

sponding to questions from the UTRGV community.

Much of the discussion revolved around current events, particularly politics and the pandemic. In other parts Cooper talked about his personal life: his brother’s suicide; coming out as a gay man; reporting from war zones.

Wars, crises and disasters were Cooper’s first foray into journalism.

“I couldn’t get entry level jobs at the time, so I decided if no one was going to give me a chance I would have to take a chance, and if no

one was going to give me an opportunity then I’d have to try to create my own opportunity,” he said. “I had some money saved up and I had a friend make a fake press pass for me and I borrowed a camera and I started going to wars by myself, because I thought if I went to places that were really dangerous that other people weren’t going to I could probably find some incredible stories and it would also be personally something I really was interested in, in how people survived.”

Cooper talked about

working his way up to where he now is in the media industry and detailed what’s contributed to his success.

“I think the most important thing — probably in life, but certainly if you’re a journalist — is to listen. And I cannot tell you how important in an interview listening is,” he said.

The veteran journalist also gave advice specifically for people looking to get into the field.

“At the core of journalism is storytelling. And at the core of it, it’s trying to understand someone else’s perspective, and that’s, I think, more important than ever before. We are so divided,” he said.

As enlightening and eloquent as Cooper’s insight was, none of it was particularly revelatory. You could learn most of the facts he shared about himself by searching his name online.

What you couldn’t get so easily anywhere else was the sense of intimacy between Cooper and the students and staff who spoke with him. Despite happening on a Zoom call, you could tell

See **COOPER** | 4A

## Edinburg hires new spokeswoman

BY NAXIELY LOPEZ-PUENTE  
STAFF WRITER

EDINBURG — The city will have a new spokeswoman beginning this week.

Edinburg city officials announced the hiring of former award-winning journalist Ashley Custer as the new Director of Communications and Media in a news release Friday. Custer, who previously reported for two of the Rio Grande Valley’s news stations, KRGV-TV and KGBT-TV, takes her post Tuesday.



Custer

“I’m humbled to have been given this opportunity to serve the citizens of a city as prosperous as Edinburg,” Custer said in a news release Friday. “I have always believed that knowledge is power. As a journalist, I loved being able to advocate for the Rio Grande Valley community and being able to raise awareness about issues that directly impacted local families and taxpayers.”

Custer took over the post former spokeswoman Cary Zayas left in August when she chose to pursue other professional opportunities in San Antonio.

Custer most recently

See **SPOKESWOMAN** | 4A

## Edinburg woman charged with killing husband wants bond reduced

BY MARK REAGAN  
STAFF WRITER

A 35-year-old woman who maintains her innocence on a charge of murder for the death of her husband is scheduled for a bond reduction hearing Monday afternoon.

Elsa resident Lucinda Diaz has been held on a \$500,000



Diaz

bond since Sept. 17 on accusations she shot and killed 31-year-old Craig Chastain on Sept. 5.

Diaz reported her husband’s death as a suicide but after a preliminary autopsy and what Edinburg police say are inconsistencies in her statements, detectives charged her with murder. Investigators say the preliminary autopsy shows Chastain was shot in the lower back area of his head, which a

See **BOND** | 4A

## Man promised \$400 to smuggle drugs set for sentencing

Defendant had nearly 80 kilos of meth, heroin inside car tires

BY LORENZO ZAZUETA-CASTRO  
STAFF WRITER

The sentencing for a U.S. citizen who told federal agents he was going to be paid \$400 to transfer large quantities of illicit drugs was reset, records show.

A court set a new sentencing date of Jan. 11 for Edgar Ivan Ortiz, of Pharr, earlier this week related to his April arrest at a port of entry after port officers found him in possession of nearly 80 kilos of methamphetamine and heroin, the complaint against Ortiz states.

On April 25, Ortiz attempted to enter the country at the Hidalgo port of entry, claiming to be traveling from Reynosa, Tamaulipas,

See **SMUGGLER** | 4A



J. Scott Applewhite | The Associated Press

In this Nov. 10, 2003 file photo, Cardinal Theodore Edgar McCarrick, Archbishop of Washington, D.C., center, joins fellow clergy in prayer at the end of the opening session of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops meeting in Washington.

## In moment of turmoil, US Catholic bishops meet virtually

BY DAVID CRARY  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Catholic bishops of the United States open a national meeting Monday under dramatic circumstances.

A pandemic has compelled them to meet virtually from their far-flung dioceses. A hard-fought presidential election has caused sharp divisions in their own ranks. And six days before the meeting, the Vatican released a revelatory report detailing how clerics in the U.S. and abroad failed to hold ex-Cardinal Theodore McCarrick to account until many years after suspicions of serial sexual misconduct had become widespread.

"The shadow of the McCarrick report hangs over this meeting," said John Gehring, Catholic program director at a Washington-based clergy network called Faith in Public Life.

McCarrick, who was defrocked by Pope Francis last year, headed up dioceses in Metuchen and Newark, New Jersey, and in Washington, D.C. The report found that three decades of bishops, cardinals and popes dismissed or downplayed reports of McCarrick's misconduct with young men.

For U.S. clergy, one of the most embarrassing revelations was that three New Jersey bishops — all now deceased — provided "inaccurate and incomplete information" about McCarrick to the Vatican as part of an investigation in 2000, just a few months before he became a cardinal and archbishop of Washington.

The bishops will discuss the McCarrick report twice Monday, first in a private session and later in a public livestream, according to the communications office of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

## ALANIS

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I thought, I ain't going back to Mexico," Carlos said.

Lupita and José Luis became devoted to their new country. When Jonathan finished high school, he wanted to join the military, but he wasn't sure if his parents would approve.

"My father said, 'Son, you have our support,'" Jonathan said. "And to this day, the military is part of my life."

When the couple eventually made its way to South Texas, Lupita found a job with La Union del Pueblo Entero, a San Juan-based organization that employed her for eight years. The organization also offered citizenship classes.

"Lupita enrolled in my classes because she wanted to become a United States citizen," said citizenship class teacher Miguel Venegas, who also bore close witness to Lupita's interest in becoming

a citizen.

"She was a committed student," Miguel said. "She passed her test in 2018. She was very proud of that. We all were."

"My parents were luchones," Carlos said. "They worked hard and fought hard so their children and grandchildren could have good lives."

During the pandemic of 2020, COVID-19 took two good people who loved each and their family deeply, and who became devoted to their new homeland.

*Que en paz descansan Lupita y José Luis Alanis. Rest in peace.*

*Francisco Guajardo, chief executive officer for the Museum of South Texas History at 200 N. Closser Blvd. in Edinburg, authored this story as part of an ongoing series entitled Bearing Witness. The museum's effort aims to document some of the Rio Grande Valley lives lost to COVID-19. For more information about the museum, visit MOSTHistory.org.*

# Texans tire of quarantine

BY MOLLY HENNESSY-FISKE  
LOS ANGELES TIMES

HOUSTON — The map of Texas lays bare the unrelenting march of the pandemic.

A new coronavirus surge is driven by outbreaks in cities, towns and wind-swept outposts, stretching from Dallas to west Texas. Health officials along the border in El Paso extended a stay-home order, more than doubled their mobile morgues to 10 and expanded a temporary hospital at the convention center. Fresh outbreaks were piling up in Amarillo and Lubbock, too.

Big cities were also hit hard, but because the infections were spread across larger populations — the Houston metro area alone is home to about 7 million people — they didn't trigger lockdowns or public outcry. By the end of a disquieting and startling week one thing was clear: Texas, like much of the nation, is overwhelmed by a virus that is more stubborn than the will of many quarantine-fatigued Americans who want to wish it away.

"The country is in freefall. It's in disaster mode," said Dr. Peter Hotez, dean of Baylor College of Medicine's National School of Tropical Medicine. "It's really scary in terms of the surges on the ICUs, the hospital staff getting exhausted and, you know, mortality is just going to shoot up. These are lives that don't have to be lost."

COVID-19 cases are increasing in 46 states. Public health officials announced more than 177,000 new infections in the U.S. on Friday, a record high for the third straight day. Coronavirus hospitalizations also reached a record 67,096 this week, double from five weeks ago. New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham reinstated the country's most restrictive pandemic measures, saying the state



Molly Hennessy-Fiske | Los Angeles Times

A line of patrons stretches down the block outside Houston's Turkey Leg Hut, where diners technically ate outside at tables crammed together under tents on Friday.

was at a "breaking point," while Oregon Gov. Kate Brown announced a two-week statewide "freeze" to limit gatherings ahead of Thanksgiving.

U.S. deaths have increased to an average of more than 1,000 a day. More than 244,000 have died of the virus since the pandemic began. An additional 40,000 could die in the next month, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. By year's end, Hotez expects at least 400,000 COVID-19 deaths.

Texas became the first state to surpass 1 million COVID-19 cases this week (followed by California), matching peak levels reached this summer and alarming public health experts ahead of the winter holidays, when infections are expected to soar.

Despite exhausted doctors and steady funeral processions, many Texans refused to wear masks or avoid crowded public places. In the border city of McAllen, Bianca Lilley, 36, took her mom and 3-year-old daughter out to eat at the La Plaza Mall this week. They plan to gather with their extended family on Thanksgiving, she said, but only after one member of each of their nuclear families tests negative for the virus.

"We obviously don't want

to get sick," she said as she watched her daughter play outside the mall. "But also, we don't want to live in fear." Public health officials said that testing one family member won't necessarily protect the rest of the family, because they could have a false negative or other family members could still be infected but asymptomatic.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott and other state leaders have resisted pandemic shutdowns and restrictions, even in places such as El Paso. Texas' attorney general joined local businesses suing to overturn the El Paso stay-home order.

Unlike California's governor, Abbott hasn't issued a coronavirus-related travel advisory ahead of the holidays or warned residents who travel out of state to quarantine when they return, even though Texas colleges have more infected students than any other state. On Friday, Dallas County's chief executive sent a letter to the governor requesting added pandemic restrictions.

Hotez has become frustrated with people socializing at cafes without masks in his Houston neighborhood. He had been looking forward to a visit by his daughter and her husband from Los Angeles during the holidays. He canceled it when cases in El

Paso soared.

"People are choosing to make such horrible decisions because of this medical freedom ideology that came out of Texas and is now being pushed on us by the White House coronavirus task force," Hotez said. He is at work on a COVID-19 vaccine that's in clinical trials but will still take months to develop.

As temperatures drop in north Texas, Hotez expects infections to multiply as they have in the Upper Midwest as people spend more time indoors, especially in Dallas-Fort Worth.

"We're starting to see hospitalizations go up," he said, including in Houston, where coronavirus hospitalizations nearly doubled this week compared with last month. "The more aggressively we can social-distance for the next two or three months, the more lives we'll save."

Small gatherings in north Texas have increased community spread of COVID-19, said Dr. Erin Carlson, an associate clinical professor in the College of Nursing and Health Innovation at the University of Texas at Arlington.

"People have quarantine fatigue. They're tired of it. They want to go over to their friend's house and have poker night just like they used to," she said. "Pretty much any contact tracer you talk to, they're seeing small gatherings and that's driving the rates up. They're tired and they want to see their families, so they're going ahead to the birthday parties."

Catherine Troisi, an infectious disease epidemiologist at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, said she is concerned about diminishing hospital resources because of the virus' "exponential spread." If families gather for Thanksgiving without quarantining for two weeks beforehand, she said, there's a chance the pandemic will worsen.

## SPOKESWOMAN

From Page 3A

served as Rio Grande City's Public Relations/Public Information Officer and also previously worked as a reporter for

KSAT-TV in San Antonio.

"As an Edinburg city employee, I am dedicated to keeping its residents and the media well-informed of initiatives, community events, economic progress and much more,"

Custer said. "I want the residents to feel empowered and connected to their city government."

Custer has a bachelor of arts in communications and a bachelor of political science/public

law from the University of California San Diego, and is currently pursuing a master's degree in finance.

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## BOND

From Page 3A

forensic pathologist determined was inconsistent with a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

During her first request for a bond reduction in front of 464th state District Judge Ysmael D. Fonseca, Diaz's defense attorney Juan A. Tijerina requested her bond be reduced to \$50,000.

However, after Fonseca disclosed that he signed sev-

eral warrants in the case, Tijerina requested the hearing be moved to another judge's court.

The request landed in front of 370th state District Judge Noe Gonzalez.

Diaz briefly appeared before Gonzalez on Nov. 4, but there was some confusion over the case and it was rescheduled.

During that hearing, Diaz again claimed she was innocent.

Edinburg police, however,

allege that Diaz shot Chastain after an argument when the man told her he was going to leave her while she was pregnant. Investigators even found a bag packed with clothes, according to the probable cause affidavit.

For Diaz's part, she admitted that they got into a "stupid argument," but said she heard a loud pop when she went into the bedroom and closed the door, according to the probable cause affidavit.

During that first bond reduction hearing, Tijerina said Diaz has no criminal history and is having health issues with her pregnancy and is mourning the loss of her husband.

The defense attorney said she is receiving treatment for the pregnancy, but says she also is in need of emotional and psychological help.

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## SMUGGLER

From Page 3A

Mexico, headed to McAllen for work, the court record shows.

After he was sent for a secondary inspection, U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers conducted a search of Ortiz's vehicle with the use of an X-ray machine, and discovered anomalies in all four tires.

"A physical search of the

vehicle revealed a total of 23 packages concealed within the tires," the document states.

Between the packages there was a total of 23 kilograms of meth, and 54 kilos of heroin, the complaint states.

During his interview with federal agents, Ortiz admitted that he knew what he was doing was illegal. He added that he was going to be paid \$400 to transport the drugs,

but believed it was cocaine, not meth or heroin.

Ortiz, who has a criminal history dating back to 2014, according to state jail records, pleaded guilty to two state jail felony charges, a theft charge, and a possession of a controlled substance charge.

Ortiz remains in custody pending his sentencing hearing in January.

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## COOPER

From Page 3A

the journalist was connecting with his audience.

You could tell Cooper was following his own advice and listening to the people he was talking to — he would use their name when he spoke to them, graciously shrugging off their compliments and focusing on answering their question. He told one student she could direct message him another question via Instagram if she needed to.

The subject of the conversation was often grim. Cooper's faced difficult times personally and professionally, and most of the questions he fielded were shaded by the current state of world affairs, politically and pandemically.

Nonetheless, the tone of the discussion remained positive. Cooper believes in people, and that buoyed the grim talk with an air of positivity.

He believed in his audience Saturday, too.

"When I was in college, I always thought it was really

cheesy when older people said this, but your generation is so much more, so much better educated about the world. You just have access to so much information, you know it's overwhelming obviously at times, but your life perspective is so much broader, I think, than a lot of the older generations who are around now making the decisions," he said. "And so I'm optimistic about your generation and younger people."

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For your safety and the safety of our most vulnerable neighbors, please wear a face covering in public and practice social distancing.



To help reduce the spread of COVID-19, the CDC recommends wearing a cloth face covering in public settings and around people who don't live in your household, particularly when social distancing measures are difficult to maintain.

*Thank you for doing your part!*