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~J. GONZALEZ

Family mourning Lupe Hernández comforted by storied life

BY FRANCISCO GUAJARDO
SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

BEARING WITNESS

Lupe Hernández loved a good story. When he came into the world on Dec. 12, 1953, the day that honors the apparition of the Virgen de Guadalupe, he became the subject of a good story. Lupe's sister Dalia, who bore close witness to his life, tells the story of how Lupe got his name.

He was born in a hospital in Corsicana, Texas, with an attending nurse who was good at delivering babies, but bad with Spanish names. Lupe's mother Regina attempted to name him Guadalupe, but to the nurse the polysyllabic name proved challenging to spell, so she submitted the easier-to-spell “Lupe” to the records division of the hospital. Officially, baby Guadalupe then became Lupe.

Throughout his life, Lupe was the subject of good sto-

ries, many generated through his coffee-drinking activities. He loved a cup of coffee and turned coffee drinking into a social act, where he routinely checked in on friends and family. His coffee-drinking buddies dotted the Mid-Valley landscape, and he kept up with them as he hopped from one place to another, in search of coffee and good *plática*.

Lupe attended Pan American University, now the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, after graduating from Mercedes High School. That act alone changed the fate of the family. Dalia tells of the impact.

“When Lupe went to college, all of us then followed,” she said. “We thought, ‘That’s



Courtesy photo

A Dia de los Muertos altar stands for Lupe Hernández.

what we have to do, because that’s what Lupe did.”

Lupe did more than set the example. When Dalia was

a senior at Mercedes High School, she had a research paper due, but didn’t have access to sources.

“Lupe told me, come to Pan Am with me tomorrow,” Dalia recalled. “I’ll take you to the library so you can do your research paper.”

That was an important day for Dalia. As she walked on the college campus and conducted her research at the library, she felt like she belonged.

“Lupe also helped me finish my admissions application and even guided me through my financial aid,” she said. “He helped me believe I could be there.”

After college, Lupe settled into a long and productive career in teaching. He made many friends through the years.

“Through his teaching and his coffee drinking, Lupe got to know so many people. Everybody knew Lupe,” said Dalia.

Lupe had a big impact on people.

“*Misuegro* is the great-

est person I ever met,” said Lupe’s daughter-in-law Cristina, who bore close witness to him during the past decade. Though Cristina shares many positive stories, she also tells the heartbreaking story of Lupe’s fatal encounter with COVID-19.

“Within a matter of days, he got sick and on Aug. 11, he went to see the doctor,” Cristina said. “Sadly, he had to wait in his car, until someone from the doctor’s office came out to call him. My *suegro* died in his car, waiting to see the doctor.”

Lupe’s niece, Stephanie Salinas, loved her *tío* Lupe. A conscientious Dia de los Muertos altar-builder, Stephanie has spent more than a decade building *altares* for family members.

“I want to honor the lives of my family through these *altares*,” Stephanie said.

See **HERNÁNDEZ** | 4A

Conservation legacy



Miguel Roberts | The Brownsville Herald

A view of the many wetlands at Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge Bahia Grande Unit Wednesday.

Laguna Atascosa’s Bahia Grande Unit handed \$5.6M restoration grant

BY RICK KELLEY
STAFF WRITER

HARLINGEN — Federal and state officials have announced a major windfall of \$5.6 million for restoration of wetlands and protection of bird nesting sites at the Bahia Grande Unit of Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge.

The funds, part of the settlement from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010, will help restore normal tidal flows in and around the 6,500-acre Bahia Grande. These tidal surges were cut off by construction projects in the 1930s.

The money also will restore bird rookery islands for waterbirds, including the largest gull-billed tern nesting colony in the United States.

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation announced around \$20 million in new funds for Texas from the Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund. It is the last tranche of monies from the \$1 billion settlement of the Deepwater Horizon spill. To date,



A view of part of Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge Bahia Grande Unit Wednesday.

more than \$203 million has now gone to environmental projects in Texas.

“Here in Texas, we’ve used GEBF dollars to leverage additional private and nonprofit funds to restore and preserve thousands of acres of coastal habitats and wetlands, while at the same time working with communities and private landowners to voluntarily participate in conservation efforts,” Gov. Greg Abbott said. “Not only have we been able to restore oyster, fish and bird habitats for both commercial and recreational enjoyment,

we’ve bolstered resiliency efforts by enhancing the marshes, bays, dunes and barrier islands along the Gulf Coast to help protect our communities from the next storm.”

The GEBF was formed to distribute funds set aside for environmental projects from the settlement with oil company BP and Transocean, which operated the oil rig that caused the massive oil spill.

“The GEBF represents an historic opportunity that arose from an unprecedented tragedy,” said Jeff Trandahl, executive direc-

tor and chief executive officer of NFWF. “Working closely with our partners in Texas, we have made strategic investments that will help to remedy the harm done by the spill and will forge a lasting legacy of conservation that will sustain fish, wildlife and their natural habitats. These once-in-a-lifetime, landscape-level projects will also boost the resilience and productivity of the Texas coast for generations to come.”

The Bahia Grande Unit of Laguna Atascosa is located along the coastal plain between Port Isabel and Brownsville.

The new funds will enable the refuge to begin Phase II of the restoration of Bahia Grande, specifically to complete the design and construction of breakwaters to protect three bird nesting islands, totaling 17 acres.

These islands have been eroding for years and are critical for ground- and shrub-nesting waterbirds such as gull-billed terns,

See **ATASCOSA** | 4A

Texas History: Spelling out life on an 1800s Texas plantation

BY MICHAEL BARNES
AUSTIN
AMERICAN-STATESMAN

WASHINGTON-ON-THE-BRAZOS — The highlight of my overnight Texas history trip to Washington-on-the-Brazos and nearby Brenham was a “living history farm,” the Barrington Plantation at Washington, which taught me a good deal about how people, including enslaved persons, lived during the middle of the 19th century.

Four staff members, dressed in period costumes but not in period character, answered my questions on farming, cooking, trading, travel and other topics related to a half-dozen or more structures, one of them the renovated home of Anson Jones, last president of the Republic of Texas, the rest of them replicas of outer buildings spread out over the Brazos River bottomlands.

As distinct from reenactors, who assume the personas of historical figures for guests at

a historical site or museum, “third-person interpreters” like these strive for historical accuracy and might employ appropriate costumes and tools but fully acknowledge their parts as modern museum or park guides.

“That’s a trend in our field,” said Nathan Giles, a guide who was working in costume in the Barrington Plantation slave garden. “More third person and less first person. That way we can explain things in a modern context. Also, if someone asks, ‘When did Anson Jones die?’ we don’t have to pretend, ‘What? No! Dr. Jones died?’”

The most famous spot at the Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site has to be the 1969 replica of Texas Independence Hall. A look inside indicates just how raw and uncomfortable life was during the Republic. Several times on visits to this park, I’ve tried to imagine all the bigger-than-life Texas

See **HISTORY** | 4A

Police: Texas officers shoot man who approached with knife

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAN ANGELO, Texas — Police in the West Texas community of San Angelo fatally shot a man early Sunday after he approached officers with a knife during a domestic violence call, a police spokesman said.

Around 12:30 a.m., officers were dispatched to a home in the city 260 miles (418 kilometers) southwest of Dallas after getting a call about a man who was punching a woman inside. They arrived to find the woman and 38-year-old Adam Lee Mendez, police spokesman Josh Schultz said in a news release.

Schultz said “an alterca-

tion ensued” and Mendez displayed a knife, leading officers to utilize what he described only as “less lethal devices.” That failed to stop Mendez and, ignoring the officers’ commands, he began approaching them, so they shot him, Schultz said.

Mendez was taken to a hospital, where he died, Schultz said. The officers were not injured and have been placed on paid leave pending the outcome of an investigation into the shooting by the Texas Rangers, Schultz said.

Schultz did not immediately respond to emailed questions on Sunday, including about the health of the woman and names of the officers involved.

Texas tackles wild hogs with high-stakes hunts

BY MOLLY HENNESSY-FISKE
LOS ANGELES TIMES

WOODSON, Texas — This holiday season many Texans will feast on turkey and roast beef and, being Texans, barbecue. Some will dine on pork, but not just any kind of pork. Call it “wild boar.”

How this meat reaches the table is a story that is quintessentially Texan, involving rugged individuals, a love of the outdoors and, yes, guns. To tell that story, let's go back to earlier this year, before the coronavirus, to a wheat field in north-central Texas at dusk.

Peering through an infrared night-vision scope atop his customized AR 15-style rifle, Fred Jones spied his prey trotting into the field by the dozens.

“We may not get the big one,” Jones said, “but we're going to kill some pigs.”

In Texas you don't need



Brian van der Brug | Los Angeles Times

Wise County Hog Contest organizer Trey Hawkins measures a hog's cutter, killed by Loving Hogs team member Adrian Ligon measuring 4 7/8 inches in Wise County, Texas, on Feb. 28.

a permit to kill wild hogs on public or private land. Hunters can legally stalk them with all sorts of weapons: drones, digital pig calls, baying dogs (a practice known as “hog dogging”), helicopters and even hot-air balloons. Most hunt at night with AR 10- or AR 15-style rifles that make it easier to

quickly shoot hogs in packs, or sounders.

It's open season year-round on feral pigs, whose population in Texas has grown to nearly 3 million. Hunters are not required to retrieve carcasses, although there's an incentive to do so: “wild boar” sells for up to 60 cents a pound.

The hogs are considered an invasive species, much larger than their south Texas cousin the peccary, or javelina. And they're armed with four tusks that can be several inches long and razor sharp.

Last fall, hogs killed a 59-year-old home health aide east of Houston. Earlier this year, wildlife removal experts killed a hog northeast of Houston that weighed nearly a quarter ton — 488 pounds.

Feral pigs damage more than \$52 million in Texas agriculture annually, according to federal and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension experts, and up to \$2.5 billion nationwide. They harm watersheds and archaeological sites, rutting and burrowing into “pigloos” to cool off (pigs don't sweat).

Omnivorous, they eat just about anything, including endangered species, and can transmit nearly three dozen diseases. And they

breed fast. Sows can give birth at about a year old and deliver multiple litters annually of up to a dozen piglets.

“Every business you have outdoors here is affected by pigs. We are trying to stay on top of the problem,” said Jones, 43, an oilfield worker in rural Wise County about 40 miles northwest of Fort Worth. “It's an epidemic.”

Before the hogs trotted into the field, Jones had sprayed himself with “Dead Downwind,” designed to make him invisible to pigs, who he explained see with their noses.

When Jones was growing up, wild hogs were rare. The first one he remembers seeing was killed by his uncle when he was 13.

“Years later, they're like fire ants,” he said.

Until the mid 1950s, wild pigs could be killed in California with no restrictions. While the state has added hunting license require-

ments and a wild pig tag fee, it may learn a lesson from Texas on how difficult it is to control their spread.

Wild hogs spread across the U.S. during the last 30 years from 17 to 39 states, their ranks growing to 9 million so fast, some experts call it a “feral swine bomb.” Since the 1960s, California's wild pig population has mushroomed from about 100 to more than 300,000. In Texas, at least two-thirds of the population — more than 1.7 million pigs — must be killed each year to keep their numbers from growing.

Hog traps with cameras controlled by smartphone can cost more than \$6,000. Texas state agricultural officials tried to fast-track a warfarin-based poison, but faced too many concerns about killing other animals. Scientists are trying to come up with a way to sterilize them with chemicals.

HISTORY

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personalities crammed into a lightly clad wooden hall on an icy March day to decide the fate of the land and people around them.

The site's modern-era museum, designed in the shape of a two-story star, attempts to tell the whole story of Texas up until statehood. Updated some two decades ago, the exhibits are often three-dimensional and packed with printed information. I particularly liked a simple map of the mighty Brazos with the names and dates of shipwrecked steamers. Never thought about that phenomenon before, but of course there had to be groundings and wrecks steaming to and from the riverport of Washington, about as far inland as these ships could reach on a regular basis.

Fortunate in its early years, Washington also sat on the spot where Robertson's Ferry extended the Bahia Trail on its way from South Texas to Louisiana. Like another riverport, Jefferson in East Texas, however, Washington rested on its laurels while other towns such as Brenham chased railroad connections as early as the 1850s. Jefferson at least kept many of its most striking buildings, while old Washington just blew away once the rails passed them by. (The park is good about helping you visualize what was here.)

The museum, however, is now dated. It shows African Americans working, especially in the critical cotton farming, but tells almost no stories about them as individuals, doubly problematic because approximately half of Washington's population

were enslaved people. Mentions of Native Americans are confined mostly to one niche at the start of the chronological section. Tejanos receive more attention, but I'd like to see a more explicit account of their interactions with the other groups that lived in Texas.

Slightly disappointed by this, I headed down to the Barrington Plantation, more of a farm than a plantation, really, too small to support a slave owner of the “planter class.” Jones was a medical doctor, the only one in the district, but 10 of his family members and five to eight slaves also lived directly off the land in this fertile glen.

After crossing into the farm proper, I first headed to the right. I wanted to see the rough-hewn timber barn, two slave cabins, as well as livestock pens that held living animals, some

of which would be bred, others eaten. Rounding the bend, I saw two young men dressed in waistcoats working in a garden. One wore a period hat. I asked what they were planting for the winter. Greens and root vegetables, it turns out.

Nathan Giles and Chandler Wahrmond pointed me to the slave cabins, which mutely testified to the dark, harsh and restricted lives spent in one room next to a fireplace. I wanted more historical background from the guides and so returned to the garden.

“It's hard work,” Giles said. “But rewarding for me. I've lost 20 pounds. Yesterday I probably lost more because that cornfield behind you, I cut all that down with a scythe.”

Giles and Wahrmond, both white, explained in a matter-of-fact manner more about tough realities of slavery. They explained, for instance, that the slave garden was one of the few places on the plantation



Michael Barnes | Austin American-Statesman

Brenham likes to celebrate nearby Washington-on-the-Brazos as the “Birthplace of Texas,” but more accurately, it's the Birthplace of Texas Independence, or the Birthplace of Independent Texas.

where enslaved people could make choices, in this case, what they planted and when they harvested it.

This kind of account is part of their job as interpreters. I told them that I was pleased they did not act as if it were still the 19th century, a practice that I find a bit creepy.

We chatted about the deficiencies of the Star

of Texas Museum. I told them how the Bullock Texas State History Museum in Austin had amended and modernized the first floor of its permanent exhibit, especially its now more nuanced portrayal of Native Americans. The three of us agreed that all museums, but especially historical ones, should be updated every 20 years or so.

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HERNÁNDEZ

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Last year, she built an altar to honor her grandmother Regina.

“2019 was very emotional for me,” she said. “But it was important for us to respect my grandmother who always helped me build *altares* to honor others.”

“2020 is for my *tío* Lupe. This altar is to honor his life,” Stephanie said.

Que en paz descance Lupe Hernández. Rest in peace.

Francisco Guajardo, chief executive officer for the Museum of South Texas History at 200 N. Clossner 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

ATASCOSA

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herons, egrets, ibis, skimmers and gulls.

The second component of Phase II will restore the hydrology of the Paso Corvinas wetlands, some 670 acres.

Channelization and irrigation over decades have led to high salinities and frequent drying out of these once productive wetlands, and new construction will restore the natural flow of water.

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