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~J. GONZALEZ

Father's death is family's fifth loss to COVID-19

BY FRANCISCO GUAJARDO
SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

BEARING WITNESS

Jessica Prieto's father, Perfecto Salas, was her fifth family member to die of COVID-19, when he simply couldn't fight it anymore, and succumbed to the disease at DHR Health in Edinburg just a couple of weeks ago, on Jan. 20.

“Both my father and my mother got the virus from my brother Joey, who died Dec. 29. My brother got the virus from the place where he got dialysis. He had underlying conditions, and the virus just wore him down. He was 48,” said Jessica, who bore close witness to both her brother and father.

“My mom was asymptom-

atic, but I think because she was always active, she wasn't really affected. But my dad had been slowing down, and he just wasn't strong enough to fight it,” she said.

The virus had affected the rest of the family — both physically and emotionally.

“We let our guard down, to be honest with you, when Joey died,” Jessica said. “We spent time with my parents trying to console them. Just trying to be there for them.”

Jessica, her husband and children contracted the virus, too.

“It really hit me hard, but I



Perfecto Salas

couldn't go to the hospital,” Jessica said. “I had to take care of everybody.”

The virus killing Perfecto was a historical injustice. Since he was born on April 18, 1941, Perfecto fought the

good fight, and survived at every turn.

When the city of McAllen pressured families that occupied lands where the future McAllen International Airport and the expressway would be built on the southern edges of today's Bicentennial Blvd, the Salas family was forced to move. They did, just to the west of 23rd Street, sometime in the late 1950s or early 1960s. That's how Jessica recalls her father telling the story.

“The Salas, along with the Herreras, the Rodriguez, the Sotelos and a couple of other families moved to a colonia they called La McAllen,” Jessica said. “In La McAllen, my dad built his house sometime in 1967. I know that because

we have a picture of when Beulah hit, and my dad and the unfinished house were flooded.”

Perfecto was the third child of 12 that grew up as migrants working in Idaho, Wisconsin, Minnesota, the Texas Panhandle, Arizona, several farms across the Rio Grande Valley and other states.

“I'm sure I'm forgetting some states, but he used to tell us stories of how they worked as migrants,” Jessica said.

After his migrant days, Perfecto learned to work with glass and became a skilled glazier that Jessica describes as part artisan and part artist.

“He built so many beautiful things of glass in his house and for other people,” she

said. “He was so good with his hands. His hands told so many stories — of hard work, of commitment, of so much.”

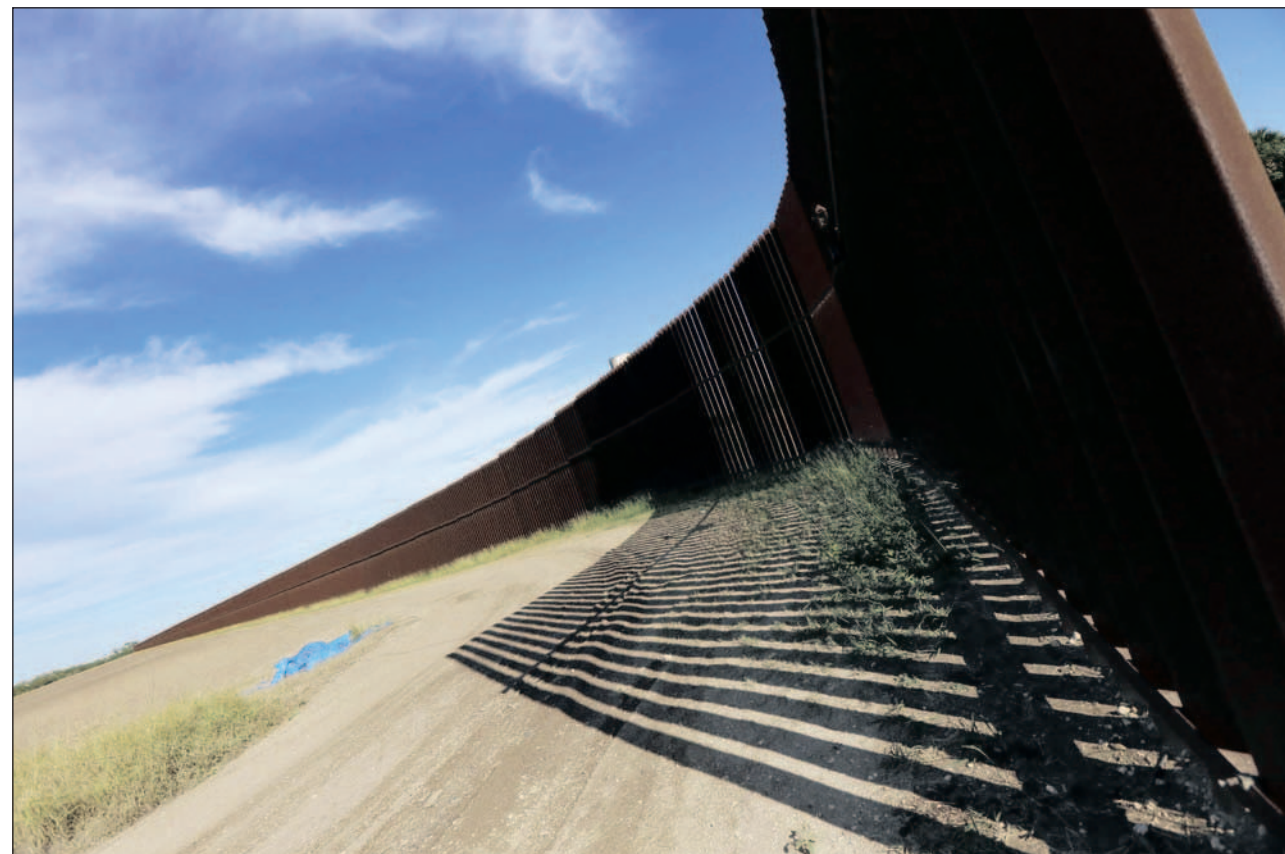
Aside from hard work, Perfecto was known to share a joke or two.

“And he was so funny. Oh my God, my dad's laughter was contagious. He could make everybody laugh,” she said.

Jessica recalls her father telling his brother, “Chico, *ojala que me muera yo primero porque no voy a poder cargar tu caja* (Chico, I hope I die first, because I won't be able to carry your coffin).”

“He was hilarious, and he was a hard worker, and he worked well into his 70s,”

See **SALAS** | 4A



Denise Cathey | The Brownsville Herald

A section of the U.S.-Mexico border wall circles the outer edge of a farmer's field on Dec. 8, 2020, outside the Sabal Palm Sanctuary.

Injured migrants say Border Patrol sent them back to Mexico after they fell off Trump's wall

BY ALFREDO CORCHADO
THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS

PALOMAS, Mexico — To escape the lingering, devastating effects of two hurricanes and the reach of organized crime, Pedro Gomez fled Guatemala in January and headed north, looking for hope.

Thousands of miles south, Jhon Jairo Ushca Alcoser, too, left his country, Ecuador, fleeing political unrest and the economic fallout of a global pandemic that's ravaged his nation.

For both men, it seemed as if nothing would stand in the way of their cherished dream — certainly not deserts, rivers, unscrupulous smugglers, or the infamous wall they had heard so much about. But then that same wall nearly crippled them. And they say the migra — the U.S. Border Patrol — then “dumped us in Mexico like garbage, a piece of trash,” said Pedro Gomez, 37. They say agents who discovered them injured sent them back across the border rather than providing them medical care on American soil.

“When I fell off the wall, my dream crashed too,” said Ushca Alcoser, 25, who this week shared his story from a bunk bed a few feet away

from Gomez, inside a migrant shelter in this desolate border town across from Columbus, New Mexico. Ushca Alcoser said his complaints to agents of his pain “fell on deaf ears.”

The men's perilous journey underscores the rising desperation among immigrants in trying to cross into the United States, immigrant rights advocates say, and raises questions about the protocols used by the Border Patrol to treat injured migrants and the overall effectiveness of the border wall.

After being asked about the men's cases and how the Border Patrol handles injured migrants, the agency released a statement attributed to El Paso Sector Border Patrol Chief Gloria Chavez that read, in part: “We routinely encounter injured people on the border, most of which are individuals that have entered the country illegally. When it is apparent that someone is hurt we will administer first aid and request assistance as needed.”

The statement said that the response “may include a Border Patrol agent trained and certified as an EMT; or possibly an ambulance service depending on the severity and complexity of the injury” and, if necessary, an

agent accompanying and monitoring “the progress at the medical facility until they are cleared and released for processing.”

It's not clear why these injured migrants were deported to Mexico, even after both said they told agents they couldn't walk.

“I couldn't even get up, so I crawled inside the migra vehicle,” said Gomez, after falling off the wall in late January. At one point, he says he was told he was going to be taken to a U.S. hospital, but instead was dropped off at the border crossing nearly 90 miles from where he fell off the wall near El Paso. His ankles are broken and he cannot walk.

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Ushca Alcoser said he told Border Patrol agents he couldn't move and was “screaming in excruciating pain” after he fell backwards off of a 30-foot section of the wall newly installed during the Trump administration as Border Patrol agents stood in front of him in early February.

But “they said ‘stand up, stand up.’ I don't know where I found the strength.” He says he was sent back to Mexico, dragging his feet as another migrant held him up. X-rays later revealed broken tendons and a fractured back and pelvis, Sosa said.

The Border Patrol said “records indicate that neither individual you mention presented illness or injury during their brief encounters with our agents.” The statement added that agents “perform their jobs with the

See **BORDER PATROL** | 4A



John Clanton | Tulsa World

Snow covered city streets including at 61st and Sheridan in Tulsa as a winter storm moves in to northeast Oklahoma on Sunday.

Wintry weather blanketing US to make rare dip to Gulf Coast

BY JAMIE STENGLE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DALLAS — Wintry weather was forecast for much of the U.S. on Sunday, with freezing temperatures expected to dip as snow falls as far south as Texas' Gulf Coast.

“Typically, we just don't have quite this much cold air in place that far south,” said Marc Chenard, a meteorologist with the National Weather

Service's Weather Prediction Center.

The storm has prompted officials in Houston, where temperatures were in the 70s (20s Celsius) earlier this week, to advise residents to prepare for power outages and hazardous roads that could be similar to those experienced in the wake of a Category 5 hurricane. Temperatures

See **WEATHER** | 4A

Father, son, convicted in same cocaine case

BY LORENZO ZAZUETA-CASTRO
STAFF WRITER

A Mission man was sentenced early last week for his role in a scheme to transport cocaine to Houston, records show.

Jorge Luis Perez-Cortez was sentenced to a more than six-year prison sentence related to a May 2020 arrest in Edinburg, according to the complaint against the man.

Perez-Cortez, 65, who did not have legal status to remain in the country, was found with more than 2 kilos of cocaine on May 22, 2020, in his possession.

On that day, Perez-Cortez and his son picked up 2 kilograms of cocaine and traveled to a McDonald's in Elsa. There the two men met with a third person, and left together to a residence in Edcouch.

Eventually, the men returned to the parking lot from where they had departed.

During this meet, federal agents approached the two men.

“Agents maintained con-

stant visual surveillance of all three individuals and made contact with the third (person) in the Ford Escape, recovering two packages wrapped in black tape, containing 2.23 kilograms of (cocaine),” the document stated.

Perez-Cortez admitted he was the one responsible for coordinating the drug transaction, while his son was just his means of transportation and intended for the cocaine to be delivered to Houston.

According to court documents, federal agents had been watching Perez-Cortez as part of an investigation into drug trafficking. The investigation revealed several incriminating messages on Perez-Cortez's cellphone linking him to a drug trafficking ring.

During the sentencing hearing, the court admonished Perez-Cortez for returning to the country soon after his most recent deportation, and for involving his son, Jorge de Jesus Perez, in cocaine trafficking.

See **COCAINE CASE** | 4A

