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Behind the Luna Family Reunions

WHEN I GO TO MEXICO, THEY SAY, "OH, THERE'S THE AMERICAN GUY." [IN CHICAGO] I'M NOT CONSIDERED MUCH OF AN AMERICAN.'

The first unofficial Luna Family Reunion was held in Chicago in 1987 during the funeral of Maria Luna Vargas. The family met at a banquet hall for dinner after the burial of Maria. It was a sad occasion for the Lunas, one of their beloved family members had passed away, but it was months and even years since some members of the family had seen each other. Some family members did not want to see each other at sad occasions anymore, and decided to have the 1st ever Luna Family Reunion. Ysmael Luna, Jr. and Becky Vega were the organizers for the first annual Luna family reunion that reunited new and old family members. In 1988, the first official Luna Family Reunion was held in Palos Hills, IL. Since Ysmael had one of the largest yards, they decided this is where the reunion should take place. The second annual reunion in 1989 was also held in Ysmael's home, which was also a big success, over 100 family members attended the event. The second Luna family reunion became the last in more than a decade. According to Ysmael Luna and Becky Vega it was difficult to get family members to volunteer or interested in the family reunions.

A decade later on October of 1999 at the wedding of Brenda and Jose De La Torre some of the younger generations decided they should have a meeting to organize a Luna family reunion for the year 2000. A month later, several family members met in Markham, IL to form a Luna family reunion committee. The first reunion was a big success with over 250 family members attending the event, almost all from the Chicagoland area. For the 2000 reunion only one family member came from Del Rio, Texas. One of the reasons why very few family members came from out of state was that they received a short notice or because they just didn't want to participate.

During the Luna 2000 Reunion we displayed pictures dating back to the 1850's, we had a family tree displayed with over 600 family names displayed that took the entire walls. We had a photographer take a large panoramic picture with all five generations of the Lunas. During the picnic, we had many fun activities for the kids, such as a piñata, potato sack, toss an egg, fishing, paddleboats, tackle football, etc. We also had great American and Mexican food, carne asada, roasted pig, arrachera, carnitas, arroz con gandules, hot dogs, potato salad, hamburgers, ribs, rice, beans, tacos, lasagna, etc.

The best thing about the reunion was meeting new and old family members and having Univision, a Spanish language broadcast station, do a story on the Luna Family Reunion. The reporter did a beautiful story. A few weeks later the Sun-Times, Chicago’s regional newspaper, also did a story on the Luna Family, it was like another family reunion, about 150 family members met at the Planetarium. The photographer from Exito, a Spanish language newspaper, took some beautiful pictures in a cloudy and foggy day, with the Chicago Skyline in the background. A few months later the Chicago Tribune Magazine did a story, were it focused on five generations of the Lunas. A few weeks later our picture in Exito showed the increase in the Hispanic community in Chicago.
By July of 2001 Maria and Adrian Luna had over 701 descendants. About 300 + living in Chicago, 124 + in Texas, 3 in Georgia, 2 in Wisconsin, 5 in Indiana, 4 in Washington, D.C., 4 in Nevada, 200 + in Monterrey, 4 in Coahuila, 4 in Guanajuato, 25 in Mexico City, 3 in Japan and 4 in Germany. They have grown to over 701 + and six generations, so the family decided to organize Annual Luna Family Reunion.

For the 2001 reunion the committee was much better organized and prepared, we had monthly meetings throughout the Chicagoland area. We met in Markham, Oak Forest, Chicago, La Grange Park and Oak Lawn. We decided to organize a three-day event, starting with a banquet on Friday, a picnic on Saturday, and a church mass and tour of our beautiful city on Sunday. By having a three-day event it was giving everyone an opportunity to meet the entire Lunas that attended the reunion. The committee recruited many volunteers to organize different events. Some of the events planned for the Luna 2001 reunion were baby races, piñatas, talent show, sack races, tug-of-war, water balloon, three legged race, family treasure hunt, volleyball, baseball, etc. We hope that future reunions will be something that all family members will treasure for years to come and will encourage the future generations to participate in family reunions.

TRACKING LUNA’S ETHNICITY

Chicago is a city rich in history; people from around the world live in our city. Chicago’s skyscrapers were built by many of the immigrants that settled in this city. First came the French, German, Irish and English. Second were the Bohemians, Norwegians, Swedes. Irish. Third were the Russians, Dutch, Polish, Italians, Jews, Greeks, Lithuanians; and fourth were the Mexicans, East Asians, Middle Easterns, etc. Today one can find people from every corner of the world in this city.

The 1850 census indicates that only 150 Mexicans lived in Chicago. A large number of Mexicans came to Chicago during the Mexican Revolution in 1910 and World War I in 1914. The push factor for many Mexicans to leave their homeland was the Revolution. The pull factor to come into the United States was a need for cheap labor during World War I, which Mexicans provided. Mexicans first settled in South Chicago and Near West Side. By the Year 1930 the Near West Side became one of the regions with the largest Mexican settlement, even South Chicago. Many of the Lunas intermarried with many of the ethnic groups that settled in Chicago.

Cesar Garza is currently working on his Masters on Chicago Studies at Loyola University. He works full-time for the Mayor’s Office of Workforce Development as a Program Evaluation Specialist.