

# *The Soldiers Wife*

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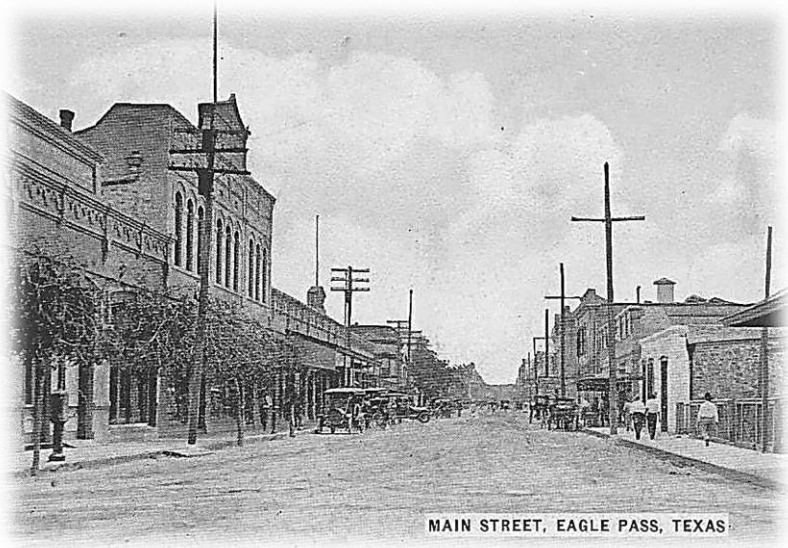
# 1

**I**t was January 25, 1944 when Amparo was admitted to the Fort Sam Army Hospital in San Antonio. The labor pains were a sign of joy to her as she prepared to give birth to her second child.

Jimmy, her seven year old son, was being cared for by Amparo's mother, who was called mama Lupita. He would soon have a baby sibling to watch over and there would be another cousin in the close-knit family.

The daughter of a coal mining inspector, Amparo grew up in the small town of Eagle Pass on the Rio Grande border. She remembered her father saving the lives of several miners when an explosion occurred at a mine he was working at.

As a very young child she was lovingly called Amparito which was shortened to Pito; a nickname that stayed with her throughout childhood and into adulthood.



MAIN STREET, EAGLE PASS, TEXAS

Pito was the fifth of seven surviving children of thirteen. Two sets of twins died when they were very young, before Pito was born. Another sister, the last born of the family, died in infancy. A mysterious circumstance claimed the life of still another sister, younger than Pito, whom she remembered. It was said that a lady who had the 'evil eye' gazed upon the little girl as she played on a swing in the yard. The lady commented on how beautiful the child was but failed to touch her. The superstition was that this admiration without a touch would bring harm to the recipient.

The incident took place when Pito was very young but she still felt a connection with her lost sister.

Pito's oldest sister, and the first born to the family, was Mora who had a charming character. Then there was sincere and quiet sister Sarah who had the most beautiful long hair; and sister Guio who was the carefree, happy-go-lucky girl of the family.

Closest to Pito were Veronica, called Vera for short; and younger siblings Cookie and Leo. Being the only brother, Leo occupied a special place in Pito's heart. He was now a member of the U.S. Navy; having enlisted, like so many other young men, to do his part in The War.

It was Vera and Cookie who escorted Pito to the Army Hospital; and sister Cookie who would name the new born baby. Of course, Pito and her husband had talked about names for the new baby, but he was now far away somewhere in Europe. How she missed him and prayed for his safety. Every day and night.....she would pray:

*Lord, watch over my soldier  
With Your Guardian Angel  
Grant him Your wisdom and strength  
Protect and guide him  
May he soon return to my loving arms  
In Your Holy Name I pray  
Amen*

The soldier was Arthur: the bashful farm boy who was now a broad shouldered, tall, and handsome man who wore his uniform with a sense of duty and honor.

He was Pito's love from the start. The two had met when they were children. Arthur grew up in a family that lived on a farm in the agricultural community of Hopedale, which was on the outskirts of Eagle Pass.

Arthur's father was an 1890 graduate of Texas Agricultural and Mechanical College with degrees in agriculture, mechanical engineering, and accounting. In addition to caring for his own farm, he worked as an inspector of produce for the farm bureau. Arthur was the second eldest of five brothers and two sisters. Another brother, the first child, was lost in a tragic accident; he ingested

a solution of lye that was in his father's shop. This happened before Arthur was born.

On occasion Pito's family would visit with Arthur's family on the farm. Their parents were close acquaintances and the children attended the same school in Eagle Pass. Sometimes after school Arthur and his brothers would visit Pito and her sisters at their home before heading back to the farm.

One of Pito's favorite times of year was Christmas. How she treasured the memories of Christmas spent on the Hopedale farm. The lighting of candles on the fresh cut Christmas tree gave a soft glow throughout the room where the children would gather.

From the cozy kitchen came the sweet aroma of cinnamon pastries that were a tradition to make on holidays. At the wood burning stove was Arthur's mother whom everyone affectionately referred to as Nana. She was a petite lady of Spanish and Kickapoo Indian decent. She didn't speak English and all the children were brought up bilingual as was also the case with Pito and her siblings.

Another room of the farm house, Pito would remember, was often times closed. This was the library where Arthur's father spent much of his time. It was not proper to enter without first knocking and given permission to do so. A form of discipline learned, no doubt, from military training which Arthur's father received in the Corps of Cadets while at Texas A.M.C.. Stored on the shelves of the library were books on subjects such as agriculture, engineering, history, and geography. There was also a farmer's almanac and Spanish/English translation dictionary. A favorite among the books were the series of "Tarzan" adventure novels.

The whitewashed, clapboard siding farm house had a hipped roof of tin. A breezeway separated the children's rooms from the rest of the house. Not too far from the house was the wood frame barn where planting seed, tools and other farming related items were stored. There were also stalls for the horses, mules and a milk cow. The hay and feed for the animals were stored in the loft.

As a young boy, Arthur was given the nickname Cuyo which stayed with him into adulthood. When he became old enough Arthur helped his father extensively in running the farm. Wearing his wide brimmed hat, he spent many a day in the field guiding the horse drawn plow during planting season.



All sorts of vegetables were grown on the farm and there was also a field to plant and harvest hay. Nearby was another field with rows of sugar cane where Pito, Arthur, and the other children would often break off a

sweet delight to chew on. It was energizing and good for the teeth.

The brother closest to Arthur in age, Charles also kept busy in the field and other tasks in running the farm. Younger brothers Joe and Oscar helped with the lighter chores, and the baby of the family, Edward was always anxious to help wherever he could. Older sister Henrietta who was called Tete for short, and younger sister Mary would help Nana with cooking, cleaning, washing clothes and other necessary chores to keep the household comfortable and in order.

In summertime, evenings were spent in the breezeway of the farm house where the boys would hand churn a batch of ice cream or slice into a fresh melon. Times were good in the mid 1920's and the children often talked about their future. Arthur was especially fond of horses and he dreamed to someday raise thoroughbreds on the farm as a way to make a good living. Pito loved to draw and her dream was to be an artist someday; perhaps in a big city where she would become famous.

That someday would never come. Little did they know how their lives would be changed by the end of the decade and the turmoil the world would later be in as a result of the things that were happening far away in other countries.

For now life at their home in Eagle Pass was a happy time for Pito. She adored her father, a skilled carpenter, and cherished the wooden box he had made for her to keep her play things in. Mama Lupita was a kind and loving mother who cared very much for her children. And then there were the many dear friends she had in addition to Arthur and his family.

Arthur liked working the farm. It made him strong, and seeing the crops grow and ready for harvesting was very rewarding. Walking or riding a horse to school was commonplace. Mending leather was a favorite pastime learned out of necessity.

For the boys and their sisters a trip to town on a Saturday afternoon in their father's Dodge sedan was always a nice break from the farm work and the school studies.

Arthur, again wearing his wide brimmed hat, would head to the Aztec Theater to catch a showing of the latest Tom Mix or Ken Maynard western movie. It was probably Mix and Maynard who inspired him to wear that style hat.



When Pito thought of that hat it would always bring a smile to her face as loving memories tend to do. Oftentimes she would even have a joyful laugh as tears ran down her cheeks.



She wrote in her memoirs.....

*I will never forget the day I put my arms around the man I have always loved. It was July 4, 1934 just after my father died and just before his father passed away. I was visiting the Hopedale farm and just before leaving for home that day, I went to the barn where he was standing tall, slender in blue jeans and wearing a big western hat. As I put my arms around his neck and kissed him, his hat fell to the ground; I thought he cared more about his hat than my arms around him. I remember he commented "why did you do that for?" in a bashful tone. Thinking his love wasn't for me; trying to forget him I moved on with my life. Foolish me; I couldn't forget him.*