Hoboken Was Just Like Heaven for Us



RECOLLECTIONS OF AMADA ORTEGA

Castillo del Morro

Castillo de la Punta

Castillo de la Cabaña

San Diego

Camp^to de la Cabaña

Baths

Baths

Baths

Baths

Caleta de S. Lazaro

ry Sta Clara

Canteras de S. Lazaro

CASA BLANCA

Cemetery

ENSENADA DE MERIMELENA

Belot

t Nasario

Depôt

Principe

Quinta de los Molinos

Arsenal

Cayo Cruz

E. de Tallapiedra

Depôt

Depôts

REGLA

Castillo de Atares

E. de Atares

Cayo Blanco

ENSENADA DE GUASABACOA

HORCON

Rio del Luyano

pta Blanca

Poey

CERRO

JESUS DEL MONTE

Aqueduct

Vanishing Hoboken
The Hoboken Oral History Project

NJHC

A Project of The Hoboken Historical Museum
and the Friends of the Hoboken Public Library

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The views expressed in this publication are those of the interviewee and do not necessarily reflect the views of the interviewers, the Hoboken Oral History Project and its coordinators, the Hoboken Historical Museum, the Friends of the Hoboken Public Library, or the New Jersey Historical Commission.

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For more information or to purchase copies of Hoboken Oral History Project chapbooks, contact: Hoboken Historical Museum, PO Box 3296 (1301 Hudson Street), Hoboken, NJ 07030; and Friends of the Hoboken Public Library, 500 Park Avenue, Hoboken, NJ 07030.

Hoboken Oral History Project Coordinators:
Melanie Best, Ruth Charnes, Holly Metz (Chapbooks Editor)

Designer: Ann Marie Manca
Proofreader: Maureen O'Neill Rothman

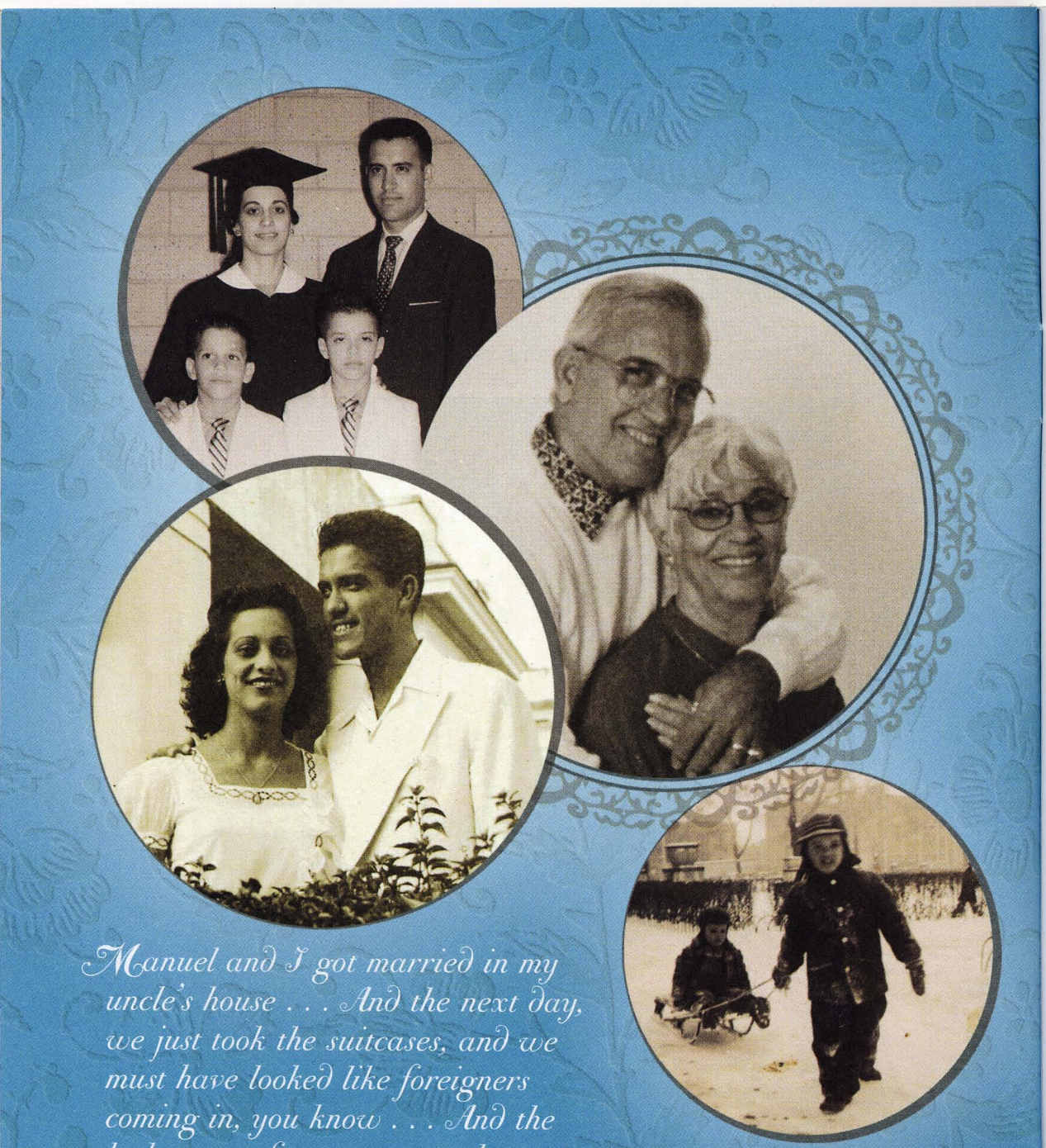
Cover: Manuel and Amada Ortega at Elysian Park overlooking the Hudson River, Hoboken, NJ, ca. 1948. Courtesy of the Ortega family. All photographs are from this source unless otherwise noted. *Front Endpaper:* Antique map of Havana Bay and Regla, Cuba; *Back Endpaper:* Hoboken map, both in the collection of the Hoboken Historical Museum. *Title page:* Contemporary photograph of Amada Ortega, April 2007, by Robert Foster.

Hoboken Was Just Like Heaven for Us

Recollections of Amada Ortega



Amada Ortega in her Hoboken apartment, April 2007.



Manuel and I got married in my uncle's house . . . And the next day, we just took the suitcases, and we must have looked like foreigners coming in, you know . . . And the look on our faces, we were happy. We came to the place where he was living, 944 Bloomfield Street, and we started the honeymoon.

We were very happy in Hoboken because we found love in all the people. And tranquility, too. At that time, Hoboken was just like heaven for us.

— Amada Ortega, August 18, 2006

Clockwise from left: *Amada in cap and gown following her graduation from Seton Hall University, and accompanied by sons Manny and Alde and husband Manuel, 1959. 50th wedding anniversary photo, Manuel and Amada. Sons Manuel and Alde in Hoboken's Columbus Park, 1954. Amada and Manuel in Regla, Cuba, 1943.*

Introduction

Amada & Manuel Ortega

It is not really possible to introduce longtime Hobokenite Amada Ortega without also talking about her late husband, Manuel. The two were teenage sweethearts in Regla, Cuba, and after marrying in New York, they began their life together in Hoboken, beginning what Amada calls their "unending honeymoon." That was in 1948, and for 56 years they earned their livelihoods here, mastered the English language, brought up two sons, and involved themselves deeply in the civic life of their beloved, adopted city.

The two worked hard – Manuel at the Tootsie Roll factory and also at a diner on 14th Street, before moving to a job out-of-town; Amada at the Industrial School and the Hoboken public schools, as an educator – and their relocation within the city every few years, from cold-water flat to row house to condominium, mirrored the concerted rise of many immigrant strivers.

And like many of their neighbors, who began their lives in different parts of the globe, they worked to bring other members of their family here – and they too made strides. In this oral history Amada lovingly describes the efforts made by her elderly father, Tomás, a talented poet, painter, and photographer, to learn English so that he would "not be mute." He must have been proud of his eldest daughter, as she gave a voice to generations of new Americans as a teacher of English as a second language. Fittingly, when she was about to retire after 28 years of teaching in the district, Hoboken colleagues and students organized a school trip to Ellis Island and gave her a plaque recognizing her years of service. Her family added to the celebration by throwing her

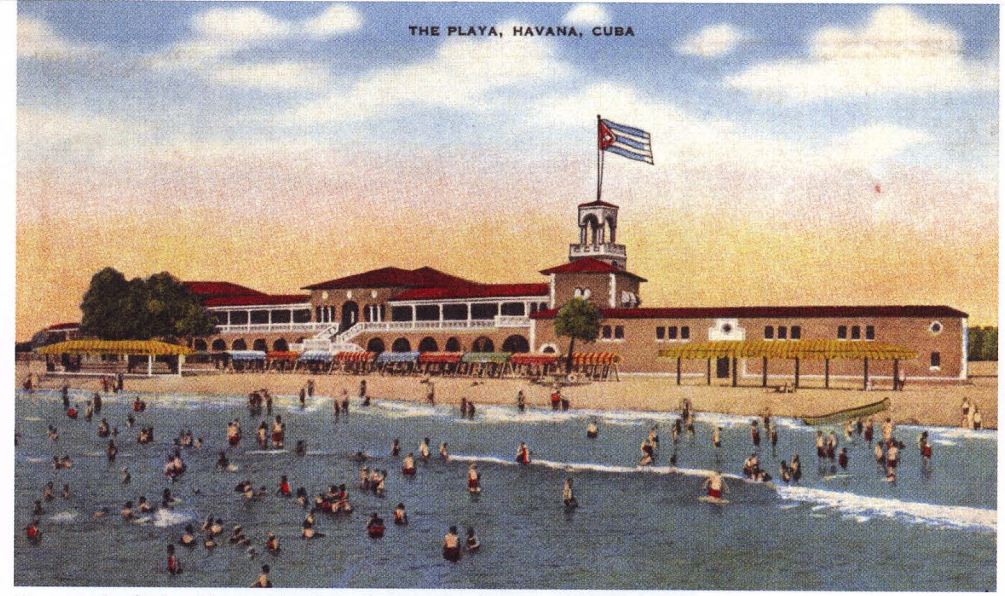
a surprise retirement party at a hotel ballroom, where she was feted by her many friends, colleagues, and former students.

But always, where there was Amada, there was also Manuel. Anyone reviewing the selected listing of Amada's community activities that follows her recollections should know that she was accompanied, whenever work did not take precedence, by the man many called "Daddy;" and when one of the Ortegas was to be honored for community service – as so often happened – the other would be included in the honors as well.

Amada and Manuel whole-heartedly embraced their adopted city but they never forgot the city in which they had first met and fallen in love. They were members of an organization for Cubans born in the town of Regla and Manuel wrote many articles for its monthly magazine, *El Ultramarino.*

And their love and commitment remained as strong as ever; they twice renewed their wedding vows: on Valentine's Day, 1988, in honor of their Fortieth Anniversary, and in May 1998, for their Golden Wedding Anniversary. Members of the Hoboken Oral History Project had wanted to interview both Amada and Manuel for this project, but it was not to be. Amada informed us that Manuel had passed away and "entered Eternal Life on April 27, 2004."

Amada Ortega was interviewed by Holly Metz and Robert Foster on three occasions in her apartment on Hudson Street in Hoboken (October 5, 2005, January 27, 2006, and August 18, 2006.) The transcripts of those interviews, from which this chapbook is derived, have been deposited in the History Collection of the Hoboken Public Library.



Postcard of The Playa (the beach), Havana, Cuba, ca. 1945.

Regla, Cuba

I was born and lived in a very beautiful town in Cuba, very similar to Hoboken in geography and also the situation. A very small town, in front of Havana City, in the province of Havana.

[It's like Hoboken] because it's right in front of Havana City, the same as [Hoboken is to] New York. It has the mountains on the side and the bay on the other side, like you have here [the Palisades and New York Harbor.]

We'd take a boat to cross the bay to go to the city. It was just so similar, you know? And some days in Hoboken, what we did [was similar, too.] We'd take the ferry. That's what we had in Cuba; we had the ferries. We'd take the ferry into New York and throw pennies into the river. *[Laughs]* That was the outing, on a Sunday. In Cuba, there were children who swam, who would dive for the money. Because you make wishes, for good luck.

"Love the Flower Garden"

I'm the oldest [of the children in my family.] Then there's my sister, Caridad Agüero Anceaume. Caridad, that's the name of the patron saint of Cuba. And then my brother. My father named him Narciso Aldemaro. He was the youngest; he was our baby.

I was named after my two grandmothers, Amada Rosalía, which means "Love the Flower Garden." Rosalía is "flower garden," and Amada is "love." I love my name, very much. My name – Amada Rosalía de la Caridad Agüero Anceaume – was very long, because there you carry both names, both your father's and your mother's last names.

[When I got married in America] I didn't know I could keep my last name. They always say you take your husband's name. I know you don't do that in Cuba. I think you lose your identity. So [now] all my papers, on my degrees and things like that, say: Amada Rosalía Agüero-Ortega.



Amada, around age 5, photographed by her father, Tomás del Carmen Agüero-Aréjula.



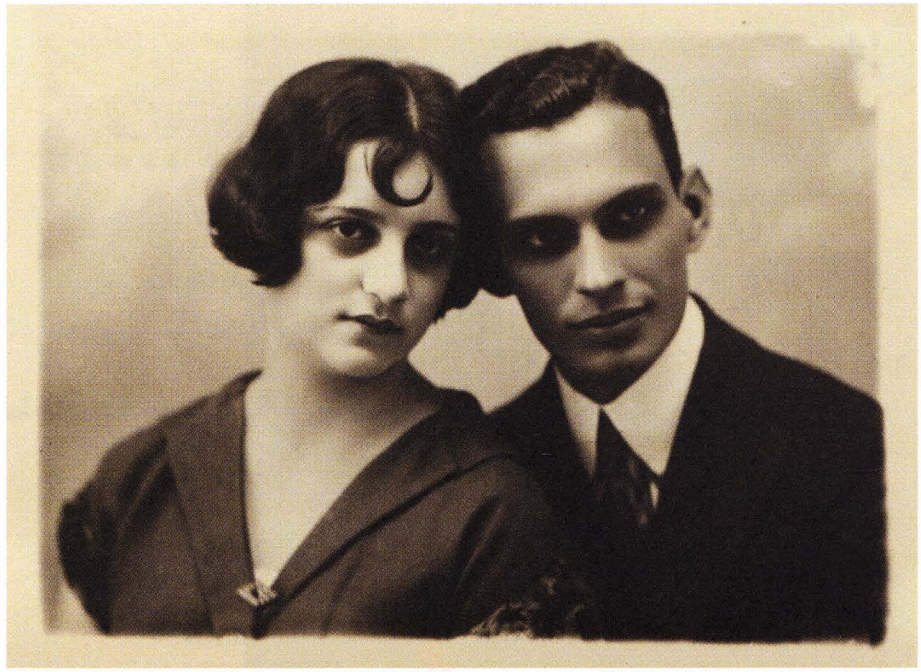
Amada's father, Tomás, late 1920s.

My Father

My father – Tomás del Carmen Agüero-Aréjula – he was an artist, a painter, a professional photographer, and a poet. He was born in Camagüey. His cousin was one that fought for the independence of Cuba, so he was a Cuban-Cuban.

He was a great man. I loved him dearly. He wrote two books – one is a book of poetry. Half of the poems are for my mother, Teresa Anceaume Ramos. He loved my mother so much, it was something! Unbelievable. She was his princess.

The other book is about the influence of colors on your health, *Cromoterapia.*



Amada's parents, Teresa and Tomás, 1920s.

My father's teacher, Dr. Melero, was a well-known artist. He thought my father really had a future, because he was good. He wanted him to go to France to study painting, but then my father met my mother, and he decided to have a family.

[But he stayed involved in the arts.] One time he was the president of the "Bellas Artes" – fine arts – in Cuba. Artists would get together, and there were exhibitions and social activities. They were all prominent people.

[And he painted.] But he would never sell one of his paintings. Are you kidding? No, his heart and soul were in there. No. We were poor.

So how did my father make a living? From time to time he worked for the government, but he was very outspoken. He would not be quiet; he would always speak his mind. So he would lose the job. He worked [instead] in photography, retouching and reconstructing pictures, to make a living.

Lessons From Parents and Teachers

I remember my mother always at home. She loved to read and loved poetry; she was always teaching me poems and songs. I grew up in a happy home. My mother and father gave me a good example. I learned to be honest, decent, respectful, compassionate, friendly, studious – to be a good person. My father told us that we have to study. "We are poor and the only way that you will be prosperous is if you have an education. No matter what happens, no one can take it away from you." They were very strict, but understanding. I am thankful for that.

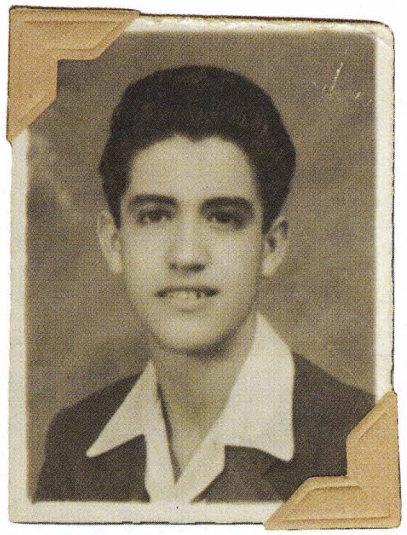
I was three years old when my father took me to school. I cried all the way. Later in my life, I loved going to school. I had perfect attendance!



At Escuela No. 3, Regla, Cuba, Third Grade class with teacher Francia Leal, 2nd row from top, center. Amada is shown seated, bottom row, 2nd from right.

When I started school, I was the smallest – I was like a "pet." I was very little, and I was passing [into the next] grade without even knowing [what I should.] So my father took me out of that school. When I went to the other school, they put me in Third Grade. My teacher was Miss Francia Leal. My life changed! She inspired me to study. I became a good student. I had her for Third and Fourth Grades, then I had Gloria Diaz for Fifth and Sixth Grades. I feel those two teachers instilled in me the desire to be a teacher.

Manuel



Manuel, 1943.

I met Manuel when I was twelve. I liked him, but he didn't even look at me! That is the truth. Because he was, at sixteen years old, already supporting himself.

Manuel wanted to be [independent] because there were many children in his family. He told me that before he went to school – and at this time he was very young – he would deliver milk, [with] a horse and carriage. The guy [driving the horse] would sleep, and the horse knew where to stop. The horse would stop along the route, and Manuel would go and deliver the milk. Then he went to school.

He didn't stay in school too long, though. He worked. He delivered ice, he delivered charcoal for stoves. Hard work.

He [didn't look at me because] was already a man, even though he was only sixteen or so. He was a good dancer, a good roller skater; he swam beautifully. He was a great swimmer. He used to leave school and run to the beach. He did all those things well. And he had all the girls – [girls that were] more developed than me.

But the young people [began to] say, "Oh, Amada? Wow, forget it. You won't get *her*. Forget it." So Manuel took a bet, and he said, "*I* will!" He wanted to prove to everybody else that he could catch me. [After] maybe six or seven months, *he* was the one who was hooked! Because, you know, I was really a coquette. But I liked him from the very beginning.

Teaching in the Countryside of Cuba

I graduated from the "Normal School for Teachers," and was able to teach elementary grades, 1 through 8. The first job I got was in the country. I was not afraid of anything. I had to walk 5 kilometers to a one-room school. I would pick up the children on my way. I had many grades, and I was the only teacher. It was rewarding, because the people were so nice. They respected the teacher, and [saw] that I was very young. I would go on all the big trucks [to get



Amada in Cuba, mid 1940s.

to school.] They'd say, "Teacher, teacher, want a ride?"

It was a small room, and there were not that many students. Maybe ten, fifteen at the most. All the grades.

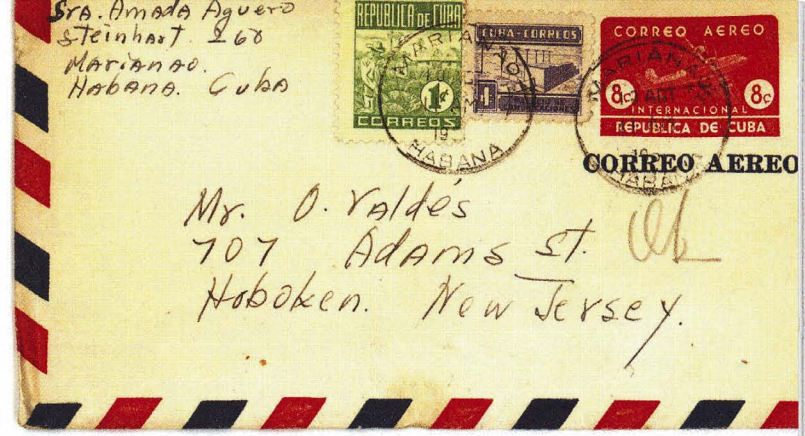
Not too long afterward, I was transferred to the city, and I had first grade and second grade [only.] But it was nice. That was the beginning, and it was a good experience.

I went to the University of Havana School of Pedagogy for my doctorate degree, [but after two years, 1946 to 1948] my education was interrupted, to come to this country.

Why did I leave Cuba in 1948? I'll tell you. It was a surprise. Manuel always wanted to come to this country. He thought in Cuba, there was too much politics. You know, people don't have the opportunities there that they have in this country, to be what you want to be.

So he prepared everything, [but secretly,] because I always changed his mind. I was starting to teach already, I was going to the university, and I didn't want to leave the country. So he left.

We were supposed to meet that day. I went to his office. He was working, then, at La Aduana, import and export. So I got there, to the



office, and his friends were there, and they said to me, "You don't know?"

I said, "What are you talking about?"

"He left for the United States."

So I took a bus, and went to see his father. He'd said goodbye to his father. He was the only person he talked to before. I met with him, and he didn't know what to say. Everybody there thought Manuel was running away from me! His father, his sister. . . .

But Manuel saved money and he sent me a plane ticket. I came [first] to my uncle's house in the Bronx. He's an American citizen – Alexander Anceaume Ramos. He'd been here since he was nineteen years old.

I came November 20, 1948. I came to convince Manuel to come back. Instead, we were married!



Above and left:
From letters exchanged (and saved for over 50 years) between Amada and Manuel when he was in Hoboken and she was still in Cuba.



The first time I came to Hoboken I was with my aunt-in-law, just before I got married. It was December. We don't decorate towns like they do here, and I remember driving on Washington Street, and seeing all the lights. At that time, they put more up than now, and it impressed me so – the town. I fell in love right away.

Manuel and I got married in my uncle's house in the Bronx on December 24, 1948. So we were very happy and we stayed in my uncle's house that night. *[Laughs]* And the next day, we just took the suitcases, and we must have looked like foreigners coming in, you know... And the look on our faces, we were happy. We came to the place where he was living, 944 Bloomfield Street, and we started the honeymoon. [It was a furnished room, and that's where we moved in together when we were married.]

Manuel had come to Hoboken because his sisters were here. There was a group of ten people from Regla living in Hoboken. Why did they come here? I really don't know. [They hadn't been here] a long time, but Manuel's older sister was here. The other sister, too, and everybody else was – you know, in a little town – they were all friends.

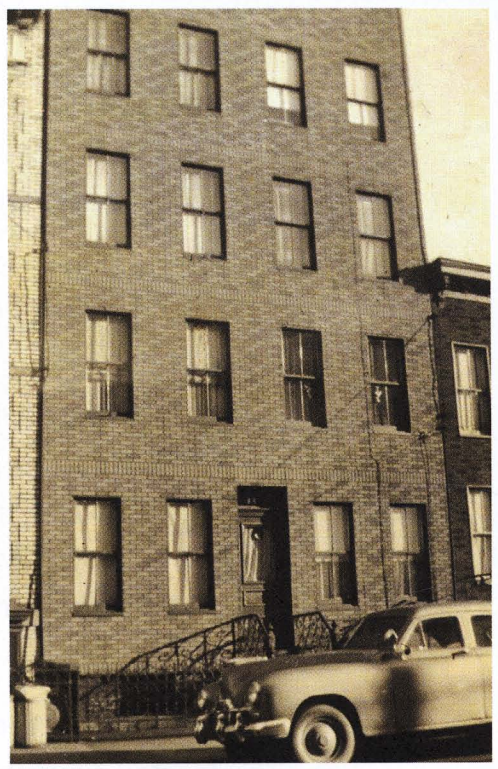
[And they all found work.] One was a beautician, I remember. When Manuel got here, he started working the next day, at Tootsie Roll. Everybody worked there.

Left: *Amada and Manuel's wedding photo, 1948.*

[Manuel had come to the U.S. on a 29-day tourist visa, which he over-stayed.] His full name was Manuel Frank Ortega-Valdes, so he took his second name, Frank Valdes, for work. He didn't want immigration to find him. So when he was at Tootsie Roll, he was Frank Valdes. [And under this name], he wrote articles in the factory newspaper for many years. Everybody knew him and respected him. He worked at Tootsie Roll for many years; he worked the machines.

[Five years into our residency here, he became legal.] As I told you, it's the only case I know where he did not have to go [back] to Cuba to get it. It went to the Congress, to be approved. We became American citizens the same day.





Above: *Tootsie Roll factory, 15th Street and Willow Avenue, Hoboken.*

Right: *The Ortegas' first Hoboken apartment, 944 Bloomfield Street.*

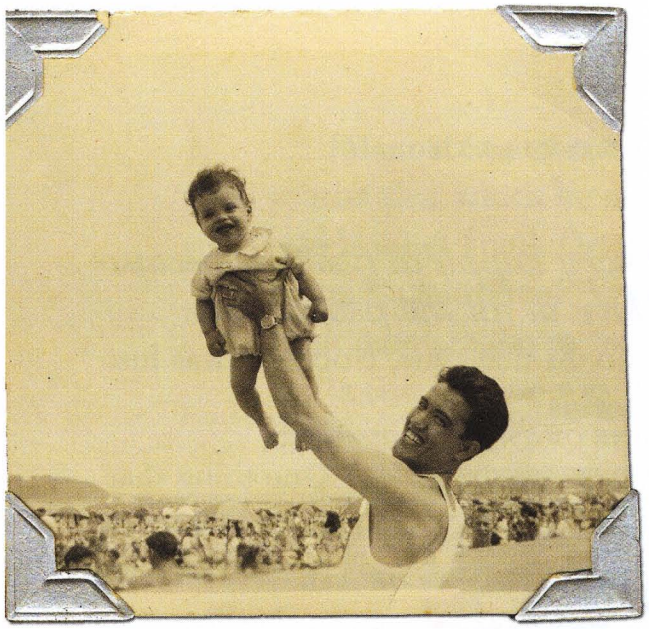
We were very happy in Hoboken because we found love in all the people. And tranquility, too. At that time, Hoboken was just like heaven for us.



Manuel and Amada Ortega in Columbus Park, Hoboken, ca. 1949.

One thing that I say: Hoboken was really safe. Like you go to the Five & Ten, you line up all your carriages, and you leave the child there, sleeping, and you go inside the store. You don't think of anything, really, ever. It was safe all over. [Over the past 57 years I've lived at five addresses: 944 Bloomfield Street, 707 Adams Street, 1036 Willow Avenue, 619 Garden Street, and 205 Hudson Street.]

[Our first place in Hoboken was at] 944 Bloomfield Street, one room, and the owners were from Germany. We didn't speak English. All through the [years in Hoboken], we encountered people from different nationalities, helping us. They were the first ones. They were really so good – Elsie and Karl Wenz.



Manuel holding his eldest son, Manny, 1951.

They fell in love with us, and they worried about me. I was pregnant right away, and I worked and went to school. Elsie gave me a little stove. I cooked a good breakfast, and I cooked dinner, too. They were so good – Karl and Elsie. She used to let me use their refrigerator. They'd call me down when they'd make – I think it's pork with apple, something like that. She would feed me, because she was thinking that I would not eat enough.

And when I had Manny (one of the happier days of our lives – I became a mother and Manuel became a father of a beautiful and healthy boy), that day Elsie was leaving for Germany to see her mother. She hadn't seen her for twenty-five years. But before she went to the airport, she went to the hospital. She was the first person to see Manny, my son, and to see me. They were really so good to me.

We were invited many times by Elsie to go to the lake with her. I would pick berries. I have pictures of us at the lake, with Elsie.

Then we moved to an apartment at 707 Adams Street. When we went to get the apartment, we had to have a "letter of recommendation" from Elsie because [the new landlords] didn't know us. Then we got the apartment.

It had a double sink [for bathing]. We would climb in the double sink, and my uncle put in a hot-water heater. We took a good shower in the kitchen sink! When we got that apartment, it was a three-room apartment, no heat, but we were on the first floor. Afterward, we moved to the third floor, which was better. The first floor was colder. But, in fact, Manny, my son, never got a cold there. We never got sick.

We didn't have any furniture, just my son Manny's crib, a gift from my uncle. The mama of the LaGuardia family, [our new neighbors], took us to a furniture store, and we picked out a bedroom set. She got a good price for the set, plus mattress and pillows. She paid cash and we paid her back little by little. Manuel was making $30 a week and I was not working. Her family asked her, "Mama, what are you doing?! How do you know they are going to pay you back?" She said, "I know they are good people. They need the help."

We moved in December 1949, at the end of the month on our first anniversary. The whole family came to celebrate with a cake and gifts: blankets, towels, sheets, pillowcases. They show us how to work the heater (kerosene). They showed me how to make the gravy for spaghetti. We love them all. They are like family. Especially Carmela and Vinnie Tarantino. [Carmela was Mamma LaGuardia's daughter; she married Vinnie Tarantino.]



Left: *Amada leaning against the wall bordering Stevens Institute of Technology, Hoboken, ca. 1949.*

Lower Right, opposite: *Amada and Manuel (holding little Manny) in front of a factory building in Hoboken, ca. 1951.*

Feeling At Home

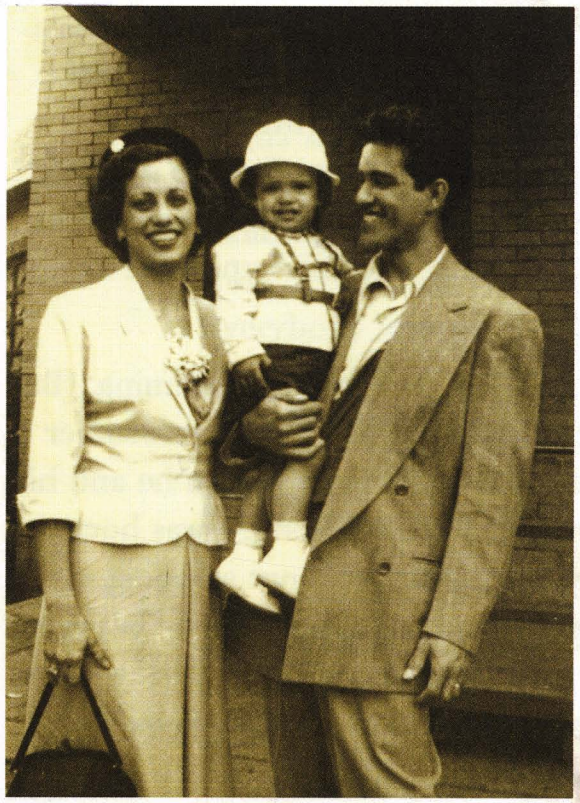
As soon as I came here I went looking for a teacher's job. I visited a few language schools and all of them told me I had to speak English to teach Spanish. Well, I had studied English in Cuba, for seven years. But you know how it is. You read and translate, but you can't speak. They don't teach it that way. Only translations. A lot of vocabulary, and that's it.

I knew from Cuba about Berlitz School of Language and I went there to enroll in a Conversational English Class. When I told them what was happening, they offered me a job. I said, "Fine!" I didn't have to speak English to teach Spanish. I got a job! The school was in Rockefeller Center at the Universal Building.

On my way to the school, I was carrying my diploma from Cuba. I didn't know I had dropped it and an unknown person told me. I was very impressed then. I knew that people in this country care for others and I felt at home.

New Life

Our son, Manuel Tomás, was born September 29, 1949. Two and half years after we were blessed again with our son Alde Alexander, born on my uncle's birthday, March 8, 1952.



The first few years after I had my children, I was just taking care of them. Because my uncle said, "The first five years are important. If you can just stay home with them, do it."

Then when they started to go to school, I went to the PTA meetings. They had a flier on the table saying, "Hoboken

needs teachers." So right away I connected with the Board of Education. At that time they were going to start orientation [for] English as a Second Language (ESL).

I came at the right time. I have a degree from Cuba, and at that time you could get a provisional certificate. So they interviewed me right away. I was appointed a substitute teacher. But then I began teaching English as a second language – and I got involved. Then I knew what I was going to do.

I had to go back to college. They gave me credit only for two years. I had four years of Normal School for teaching, and two years of university, studying for my doctorate. I had to go for a bachelor's.

The principal at Brandt School was Mr. Touhy, and I went to see him because he was a professor at Seton Hall. [That's where I went to get my degree.] I went part-time, nights. I practiced [my English] there. I made a lot of friends. It was there that I met Tomasina Nolan, my mentor and my good friend up to the present time.

I was always running, running, running. [But today] my son will say, "Ma, I don't remember you not being home." [Because when he and his brother came home from school], I was home. For two-and-a-half years, without stopping, I took courses. I graduated from Seton Hall in '59. I'm a person, if I have a goal, I have perseverance, I just... *[She gestures with her arm, to indicate moving forward.]*



From a Hudson Dispatch *article announcing the inauguration of a Spanish language course for Hoboken police officers at the Hoboken Evening School for Industrial Education, January 1956.* From left to right *(seated) Hoboken Police Lt. Walter Drew, (standing) Detective Sgt. Joseph Periera, teacher Mrs. Amada Ortega, (standing) Patrolman Vincent McGrath, and (seated) Patrolman Matthew Brennan.*

The Industrial School

I was already teaching at the Industrial School [located in the Hoboken Public Library building on Park Avenue] when I graduated from Seton Hall. I'd started there in 1956. Everybody wanted to learn Spanish. I have a picture, I saw it recently, with the chief of police. Everybody took Spanish – policemen, firemen, teachers, everybody. I worked at the Industrial School for sixteen years.

[Then I was involved in] "TOPS," Typing and Office Preparatory Skills. A program teaching office procedures. A lot of our students got office jobs. No computers – typing and filing. I was teaching English as a second language.

We had a lab, a language lab [on the second floor.] I used to tell my students, "The time will come when you are going to speak English better than I do, because you're going to speak without an accent." Which is true. They came young.

[The other sections of the Industrial School were] on the top floor. They taught art. Mr. Glatt, a Hoboken High School teacher, taught



Industrial School Staff, ca. 1956. Amada is standing in the back row, center.

painting and mechanical drawing. They made flowers. They taught knitting. And they made dresses. There were a lot of sewing machines. That was the number one thing – dresses. At graduation, a big event, the students would model the dresses they'd made and their hats. It was always very well attended.

Everyone wore hats then, and everybody was there to learn how to make them. There was a teacher in the industrial school for many, many years – Josefina De Angeles – she used to make hats and she taught people to make them.

Sewing for Special Occasions: A Tradition

I sewed at home, too. In Cuba, you have to make your own dresses. You have to sew. I learned that at school, in eighth grade. We used to make the patterns, too.

I made five wedding dresses [in Hoboken.] First I made Maureen Knapp's dress – that was my neighbor's daughter. She was living at 11th and Washington. I have to tell you, the day she was getting married, the photographer was already at her house, and her father came to pick the dress up, and I was still sewing! I had it on my dining room table.

I put the sequins all around the bottom. I didn't want to use pearls [because in the Spanish tradition] brides don't use pearls; it's very bad luck. I'm not superstitious, but I used round glass beads. That was the first wedding dress.

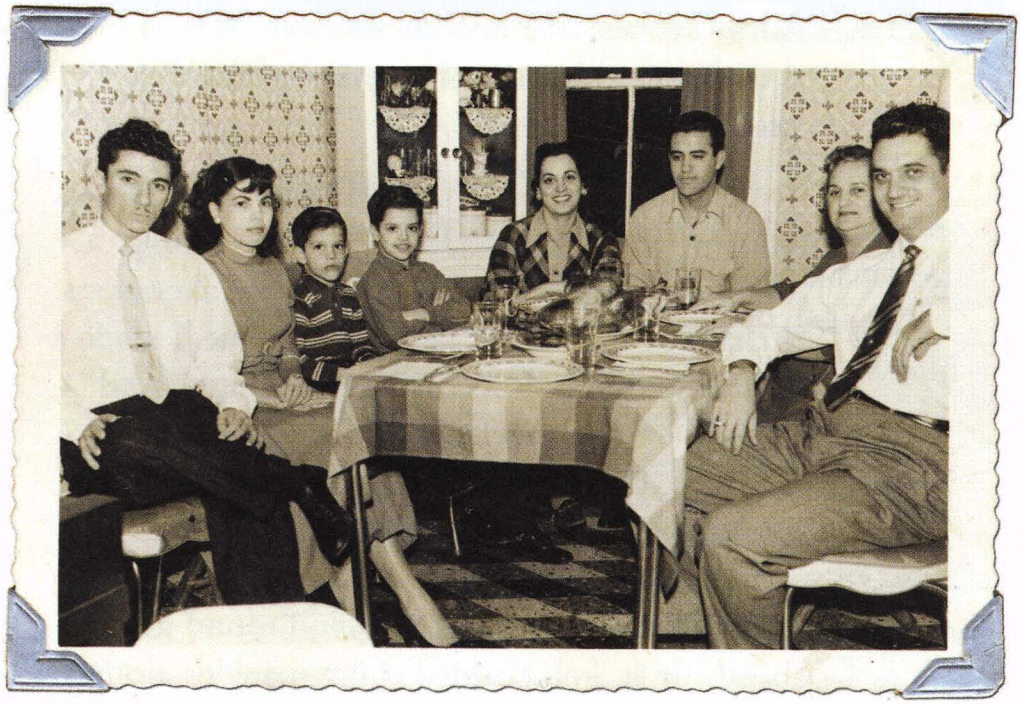
The second wedding dress was for a former student of mine. Later, for another wedding, her sister used the same dress with some alterations. I changed the sleeves and the neckline. I made a fourth wedding dress for Valerie Kruger. And then one of my [former] students, Marlena Aldecon, liked that wedding dress so much she wanted me to make one for her. That dress had beautiful embroidery on the blouse and I used cylindrical glass bugle beads and round glass beads on it. I also added shiny spangles around the neckline and all around the hem. For the

train I sewed glass bugle beads that made the gown shine as she moved. But some people thought I'd forgotten to take the pins out!

I sewed all of my own gowns, too, for the St. Mary's Charity Ball and our anniversary celebrations. Sometimes I think – you study, you work, you go to college, and you're going to sew?! I don't know. Don't ask me how I did it. I don't know.

Friends From All Backgrounds

When we moved to 1036 Willow Avenue, we had both kids already. My Irish friend helped me. [My friends were of all backgrounds.] So I had my German friend



The family gathers at 707 Adams Street, 1957.

[Elsie], then Italian [the LaGuardias, the Tarantinos], and now I've come to the Irish, Rita Knapp. Dennis, her son, was born the same day as my son, Manny. I became friends with his mother and his family, who lived in the same house.

We got an apartment. By then, we had six rooms. Our kids each had a bedroom, we had a complete bathroom. We had a dining room. I lived there when the kids were going Wallace. Then, I moved to Garden Street, near the same block of Brandt School, and my kids went there.

My Students

When I started, I was in David E. Rue School. Miss Malone was the principal. My classroom was behind the stage, [the actor's changing rooms.] That's where my classes were held. There were a lot of children [enrolled] then, and there was no other room, but I liked it there. I got a blackboard and a desk, children's desks, and pencil and paper.

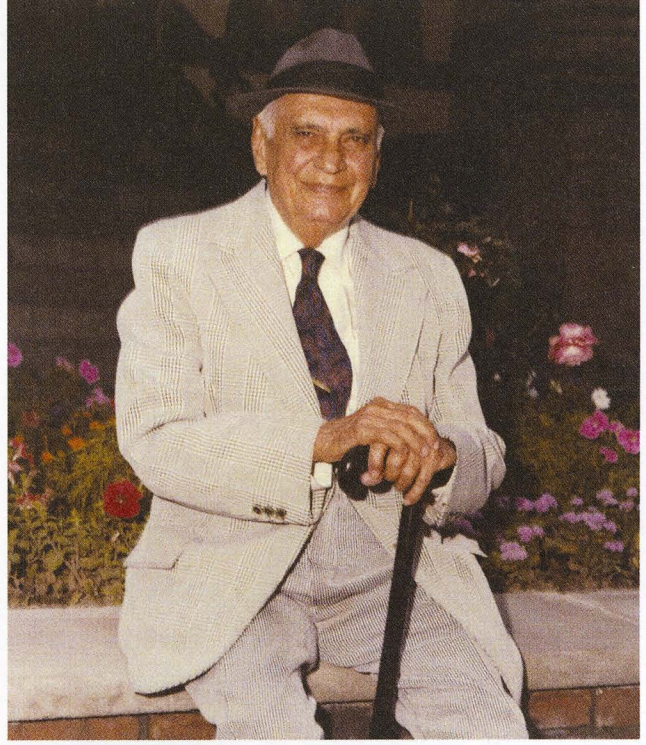
That school was elementary, up to the eighth grade. I was an ESL teacher and my students were from Italy, India, Puerto Rico, Santo Domingo … I was there maybe three years.

Then Mr. Touhy sent for me, because the junior high was going to do Spanish, and he knew I was a Spanish teacher. So I went to Brandt School, where I had more than 200 students.

I've kept in touch with a lot of my students [over the years.] From my Spanish class at Brandt School, Patricia Sorrentino and Lina McKnight; from the TOPS class at the Industrial School, there's Lorie Bruno, who is now a manager of a travel agency. From the Adult Spanish class at the Industrial School there's Lolita Felton, who is my inspiration – a very enthusiastic and talented person. She's 88 years old.

From my ESL classes in Brandt, Joan Ortic, who came from Croatia, became an ESL teacher, and Marlena Aldecon, from Cuba, graduated from Stevens. And there's Eunice, who speaks three languages now – English, Spanish, and French. She lives in Australia. Alba Morales from Puerto Rico became a personal banker; Juliet Fernandez from Cuba is an accomplished musician. I've kept in touch with Nitin Patel from India and Maggie Dojer-Docktor from Cuba; Tiffany, from China, graduated from Stevens; Elena Roa-Cardentoy from Cuba became a lab technician at Christ Hospital.

My students were my children. One time I was on the bus and three of my students came in. I was with a friend and I said, "Oh, my children!" "I thought you had two boys," she said. (These were girls.) I told her they were my students.



Amada's father in front of Hoboken's City Hall, ca. 1970.

My Father Comes to Hoboken

Before he came to Hoboken, in 1969, I got my father this case with all the paints in it and everything, and all the brushes, and I got an easel. I thought he had to have that. "He's going to come to this country, and be lost from his art. He hasn't painted for a while."

[And he did paint while here. The mural in my backyard at Garden Street was made by my father.] It was a wood fence, and he said, "Oh, you know, we have to make it pretty." So I helped him.

But then the [people who lived] behind me, built a shed, a wood shed, back there, and my fence was ruined. So we made a new fence of cinder block, and painted it again. The second time it was a picture of Havana Bay with Morro Castle and the Malecón, which is the waterfront walk, like here.

[When he came to Hoboken, my father was] sixty-nine already. And you know what? He went to school, to learn English. He went to the Y.M.C.A., in 1970. A program from the Board of Ed to teach people English. Sue Newman was the teacher. He had classes there. He was so serious. "I'm not going to be mute. I hear people speak English, I have to learn English."

[Pointing to photograph.] This is my father, here. People in Hoboken knew him, because he would always walk on the avenue. He had what I would like to have – that air of *aristocracia.* Aristocrat. He always was a gentleman. He always treated people with respect.



Manuel and Amada in their first apartment, 944 Bloomfield Street, ca. 1949.

Hard Work and Happiness

Deep in my heart . . . [I want to tell] people how great this country is, and if you want to do something, you have the freedom to do it. But I realize more and more, that [I could also accomplish what I did] because I had a very happy life, secure. I didn't have to worry about Manuel going out and meeting anybody; I knew that he was my man. I tell you, every picture – you have the card from the 50th Anniversary, right? – it also shows it. When you have that, all the other [material] things are not important. God blessed me with an extraordinary man. He made me feel I was "Mrs. America." Fifty-six years of marriage!

Manuel worked hard, too. He worked nights, at Tootsie Roll, 3 to 12. And he had a part-time job, in a diner [near Tootsie Roll.] So he left home maybe about 10 o'clock in the morning, working there first, and then went to Tootsie Roll.

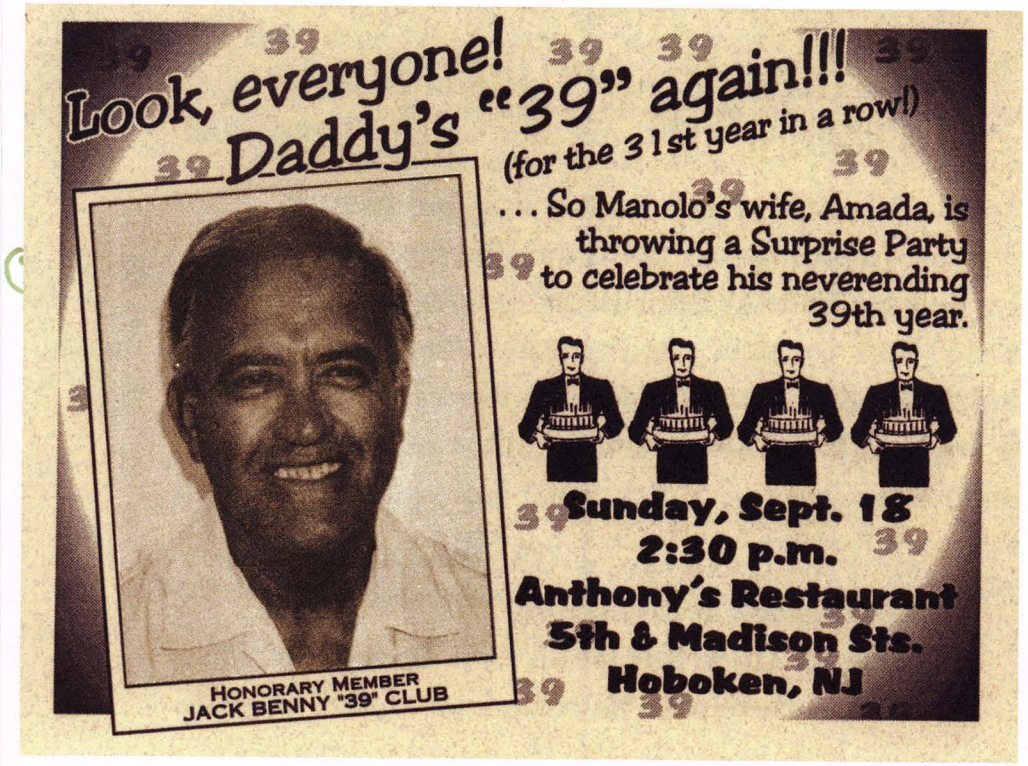
[After he left Tootsie Roll, he] went to General Motors. He didn't stay long. He and his friend – my friend Rita Knapp's husband – they both couldn't take it, because they put them in the line. He got black and blue. He works hard and Manuel is strong. But that job, no.

Then a friend told him, "I can take you to work at Sun Chemical." They make the ink for newspapers, in Rutherford. That's where he worked. There he had his own department. He worked there until he retired, more than 25 years.

Manuel... You name it – he had all the good qualities. And he was happy. He was happy because we were together.

[And I was, too. When I was involved in school or union activities, I wanted him to go with me.] I said: I'm not going to have a separate life; no way. You have to know my friends, the same way I've got to know yours, and we're going to do things together. He agreed, but at first, Manuel worked nights and he [couldn't always] join in. But when he retired in 1999, he joined everything. He joined everything and did everything with me.

There were times when he was the only man [at social events.] Later on, my friends waited more for Manuel than they waited for me! They loved him, and called him "Daddy."





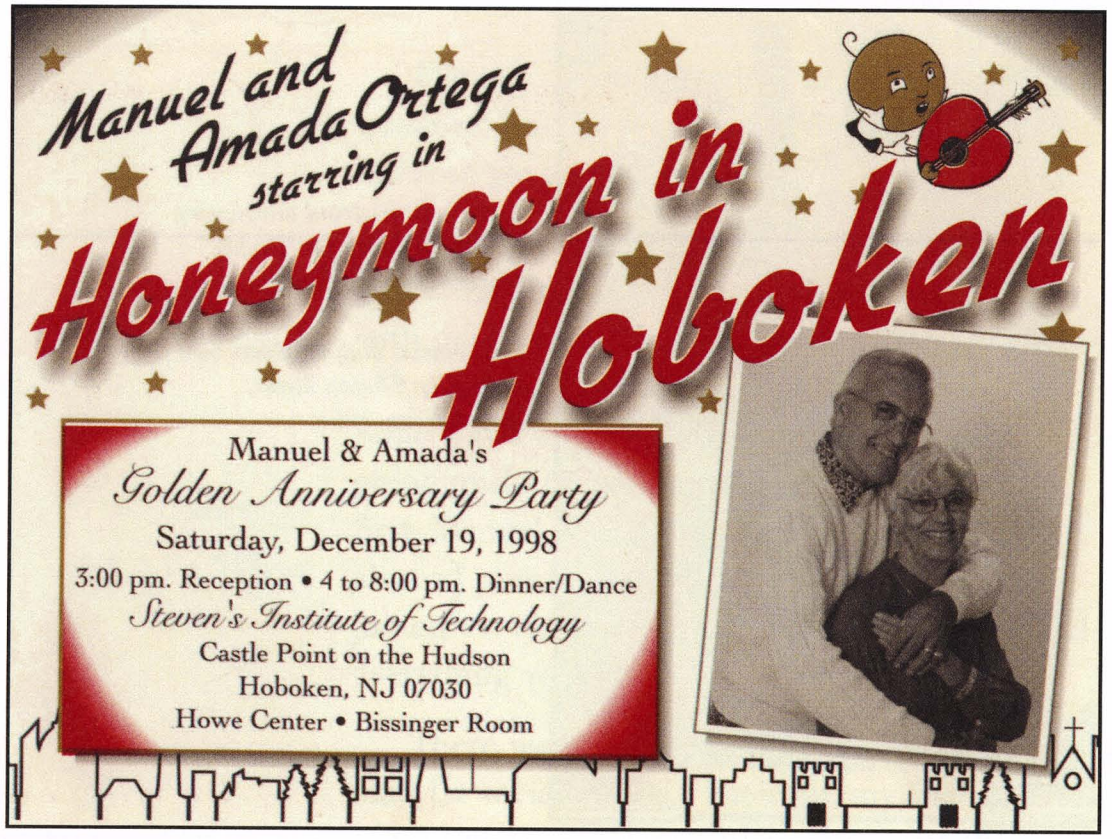
Lower left: *Postcard announcing a birthday party for "Daddy," Manuel (Manolo) Ortega.*

Left: *Amada and her eldest son, Manny, on Clinton Street, Hoboken, ca. 1951.*

Oh, Hoboken, Hoboken. [When we first came here,] it was an industrial city, and there was so much love. We would get together on Sundays, see the family, and the city would be peaceful – there would be people going to church. They were all good people – hard-working, who worked locally.

[And of course we became involved in community life.] Can you imagine getting to a city and not getting involved in it? Everybody told me when I retired I was going to Florida. I said, "No way. Hoboken is my town! No way."

I have a great family. Two sons, Manny and Alde, two wonderful daughters-in-law, Pilar and



Postcard announcing Manuel and Amada Ortega's Golden Anniversary Party, 1998.

Haidee, and three grandchildren, Alex, Gabriella, and Rebecca. They're my pride and joy. (I haven't sewed for a long time now, but my granddaughter, Rebecca, when she celebrated her fifteenth birthday, she had a big party – as Latinos do – and the custom is to have a doll dressed like the girl. I made that dress.)

If I had to live my life again, I would do it the same way – living in Hoboken, this beautiful city, where you can find love, peace, security, friends, and respect.

Amada Ortega: Career and Community Highlights

Career

- **Diploma**, Normal School for Teachers, Havana, Cuba
- **Two years toward Doctorate in Pedagogy**, Havana University, Havana, Cuba
- **B.A. in Education**, Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey
- **M.A. in Multilingual Teaching,** Fairleigh Dickinson University, Madison, New Jersey

- **Teacher** in Hoboken Public Schools from 1956 until 1984 (retirement)
- **Teacher (Spanish, ESL)** in Hoboken Industrial School, 1956-1974
- **Taught in-service Spanish** to colleagues

- **Hoboken Teachers Association** positions and awards include Vice President, Legislative Committee Chairwoman, Social Committee member, Building Representative, Scholarship Committee Chairwoman, Credit Union representative, and recipient of Bernard Ziegler Teacher of the Year Award (1980)

- **Hudson County Educational Association** positions include Vice President and member of the nomination and by-laws committees

- **New Jersey Education Association** member for several years of Delegates Assembly and Pension Committee

- Charter member, **Teachers of English for Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)**, honored at 1991 convention

Community

- **Hudson Health Agency**, member of Board of Directors
- **Welfare Board**, Chairwoman
- **Family Planning**, member of Board of Directors
- **Hoboken Public Library**, member of Board of Directors

- **St. Mary Hospital**: Charter member of Women's Auxiliaries; Community Health Service Interim Governing Board; Charity Ball Committee; Chairwoman Journal Committee; Committee member, Dedication Committee North Tower; honored for service to the hospital, with Manuel Ortega, 1997

- **National Association of Cuban American Women**, member
- **Circulo de Cultura Panamericano**, member

- **Committeewoman**, 6th Ward, Hoboken
- With Manuel Ortega, **twice received keys to the City**: From Mayor Patrick Pasculli in 1993 and from Mayor Anthony Russo in 1998
- *Jersey Journal* **"Woman of Achievement,"** 1981
- **Mile Square Civic Association**, Latin American Heritage Gala, recognized for contributions to the City of Hoboken, 2005

The Hoboken Oral History Project

"Vanishing Hoboken," an oral history project, was initiated in 2000 by members of the Friends of the Hoboken Public Library and the Hoboken Historical Museum in response to dramatic physical, social, and economic changes in the city of Hoboken over the preceding twenty years, and to the consequent "vanishing" of certain aspects of public life.

For much of the last century, Hoboken was a working-class town, home to many waves of immigrant families, and to families who journeyed from the southern regions of the U.S. and from Puerto Rico — all looking for work. Hoboken, close to ports of entry in New Jersey and New York, offered a working waterfront and many factories, as well as inexpensive housing. Each new wave of arrivals — from Germany, Ireland, Italy, Yugoslavia, Cuba, and Puerto Rico — found work on the waterfront, at the Bethlehem Steel Shipyards, Lipton Tea, Tootsie Roll, Maxwell House, or in numerous, smaller garment factories. Then the docks closed in the 1960s; and factory jobs dwindled as Hoboken's industrial base relocated over the 1970s and '80s. Maxwell House, once the largest coffee roasting plant in the world, was the last to leave, in 1992. In the go-go economy of the 1980s, Hoboken's row houses, just across the river from Manhattan, were targeted by developers to young professionals seeking an easy commute to New York City. Historically home to ever-changing waves of struggling families — who often left when they became prosperous — Hoboken began in the mid-1980s to experience a kind of reverse migration, where affluent condominium-buyers replaced poor and working class tenants, many of whom had been forced out by fire, through condo-conversion buy-outs, or through rising rents. More recently, building construction has further altered the face of Hoboken, as modern towers are rising up alongside the late-19th century row houses that once spatially defined our densely populated, mile-square city and provided its human scale.

The Hoboken Oral History Project was inaugurated with the goal of capturing, through the recollections of longtime residents, "Vanishing Hoboken" — especially its disappearing identity as a working-class city and its tradition of multi-ethnic living. The Project focuses on collecting the oral histories of residents who can evoke Hoboken's vanished industries through their recollections of employment in the city's many factories and on the waterfront, and those who can capture for present and future generations the ways in which Hoboken's rich ethnic and cultural diversity was once evident in the everyday life of the city. In 2001, with the support of the New Jersey Historical Commission, a division of the Department of State, the Hoboken Oral History Project transcribed and edited several oral histories to produce a series of "Vanishing Hoboken" chapbooks. Since 2002, thirteen chapbooks have been published in the series, with the support of the Historical Commission and the New Jersey Council for the Humanities, a state partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Vanishing Hoboken Chapbooks

The editor of this series chose to call these small booklets "chapbooks," a now rarely heard term for a once-common object. And so, a brief explanation is now required: A chapbook, states the most recent edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, is a

> ...small, inexpensive, stitched tract formerly sold by itinerant dealers, or chapmen, in Western Europe and in North America. Most chapbooks were 5 x 4 inches in size and were made up of four pages (or multiples of four), illustrated with woodcuts. They contained tales of popular heroes, legends and folklore, jests, reports of notorious crimes, ballads, almanacs, nursery rhymes, school lessons, farces, biblical tales, dream lore, and other popular matter. The texts were mostly rough and anonymous, but they formed the major parts of secular reading and now serve as a guide to the manners and morals of their times.

Chapbooks began to appear in France at the end of the 15th century. Colonial America imported them from England but also produced them locally. These small booklets of mostly secular material continued to be popular until inexpensive magazines began to appear during the early 19th century.

Although some of the chapbooks in the Vanishing Hoboken series are considerably longer than their earlier counterparts, *others* are nearly as brief. They are larger in size, to allow us to use a reader-friendly type size. But all resemble the chapbooks of yesteryear, as they contain the legends, dreams, crime reports, jokes, and folklore of our contemporaries. One day, perhaps, they might even serve as guides to the "manners and morals" of our city, during the 20th and early 21st centuries.

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Bellmans Creek

Carlton Hill

Overpeck Creek

Overpeck Park

Ridgefield Park

Bogota

Palisades Park

Leonia

Fort Lee

Edgewater

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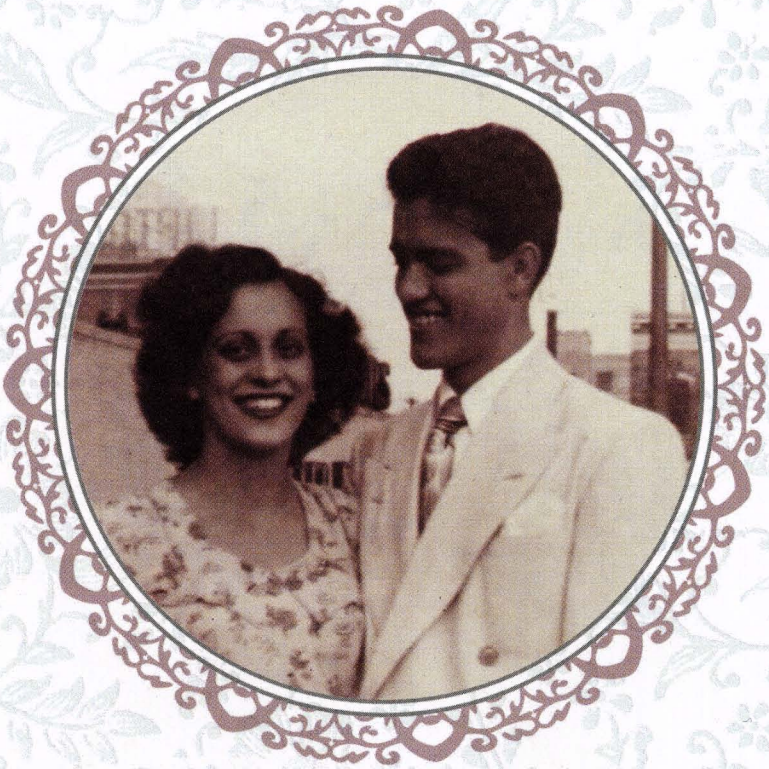
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