
Mexican family spotlight: the Cruz family

Donato Nieto Cruz was born in 1926 in the Mexican state of Veracruz. He emigrated to the United States at the age of 22, arriving in Back of the Yards in 1948. Cruz worked at WCRW, a local Mexican radio station, as an interviewing host for numerous Latin musical artists. Later, he chose to work as a butcher for Peer Foods from the late 1950s to the early 1970s.

In 1932, Mary Dolores Hernandez was born in Chicago to immigrant parents from the Mexican state of Zacatecas. She grew up in the Back of the Yards neighborhood on 45th Street and Laflin Street. Mary would visit the local community center, the McDowell Settlement House, to watch movies and socialize with other neighbors.



Mary Hernandez with her daughter Charlotte and her son, Donato.

Mary's father worked for Armour & Co. and then later as a janitor for Immaculate Heart of Mary Church. Her mother helped house Mexican immigrants arriving to work in the stockyards, one of whom was Donato. He and Mary eventually married and had 14 children, all of whom graduated from Seward Elementary, as did Mary.

Donato's daughter, Lupe Tsironis (née Cruz), remembers going to Peer Foods with her mother to bring him lunch. Donato worked for most of his life at Peer Foods, while also pickling pork rinds and selling them to local taverns. Eventually, he bought multiple properties in Back of the Yards and rented to Mexican immigrants. Donato later returned to Mexico, where he died in 1978.

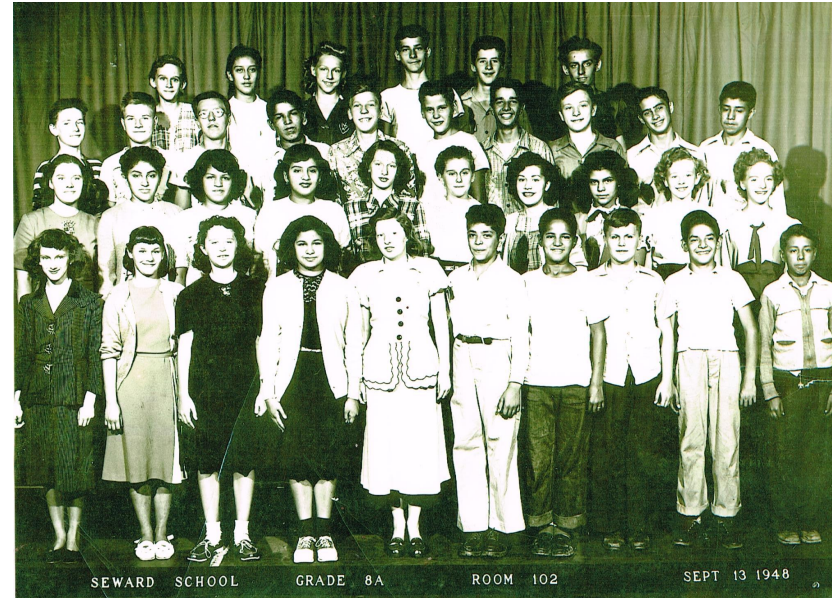
Mary worked at the Schulze & Burch Biscuit Company at 35th St. and Racine Ave. until retirement. She died in 2020, having spent her entire life in Back of the Yards.

Lupe continues the tradition of working in the food industry and owns the Ix-Chel gelatos and paletas shop in Jefferson Park.

People of the Stock Yards: Mexican Family Stories



Donato Cruz and Mary Hernandez.



A Seward eighth grade class in 1948. Mary Hernandez is in the second row, and her brother, Jaime Hernandez, is in the third row.

Images courtesy of Lupe Tsironis.