

Fernando Fortunato Villegas

1948 – 2026

By Gloria A. Ramirez

"A friend loves at all times and a brother is born for adversity" Proverbs 17:17 (Rita Villegas tribute)

Fernando Villegas was born in San Antonio to Fortunato and Dora Muñiz Villegas. As Rita Villegas, Fernando's sister-in-law, remarked in one of several eulogies that were part of his *despedida*, his name would come to define his life. Inheriting his middle name from his father, Fortunato, foretold his being lucky (*afortunado*) in life and love.

Migrant work took the family of 12 to Fisher, Minnesota where Fernando spent his formative years. He never forgot Fisher and often talked about it. His farm worker roots and his being a Mexican American were the hallmarks of his identity. He supported the *United Farmworkers* movement throughout his life as well as union membership.

Fernando graduated from Fisher High and went to Morehead State College and UT in Austin where I was lucky enough to be part of a group of Chicano friends there who benefitted from his friendship for half a century. Being a veteran returning to college made Fernando more worldly than most of us and he delighted in joking with us and taking us camping (even in the dead of winter) or tubing on the Guadalupe or Edge Falls. Besides his love of nature Fernando was always involved in projects that enhanced every place that he lived in—with the addition of decks, gardens, workshops or upgrades.

During the Vietnam war, Fernando served his country in the US Army in Panama. Oddly enough at UT, he met one of his best friends, Carlos Moreno who had family connections to Panama. At the memorial, Carlos mused about his friendship with Fernando who was so different from Carlos, now a distinguished physician in Houston consulting with Fernando about his health issues. Carlos spoke of his adventures and misadventures with Fernando during those college years in a heartfelt tribute. Ironically, Fernando and his



wife Elizabeth spent their honeymoon in Panama and stayed longer than planned when hurricane after hurricane trapped them there. Still, Fernando was lucky and they returned home safe.

Fernando started his 30-year career with Southwestern Bell now AT&T in Austin and he ultimately returned to Austin to live with his wife, Elizabeth. He ended his career with AT&T in San Antonio where he made many lifelong friends and indulged his love of conjunto music taking lessons on *acordeón* with Maestro Sandy Sánchez along with friends Carol Rodríguez, Rudy López and others at the *Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center*. They began to visualize and eventually brought the *Conjunto Heritage Taller* to fruition ensuring the continuation of conjunto music for future generations.

Fernando's parents predeceased him as well as a brother, Andres. Fernando was a faithful son and loving brother throughout his life—doting on his mother when she lived in San Antonio and traveling to visit his 11 brothers and sisters in various cities throughout the U.S. He never failed to be present in their lives and in the lives of his friends. In the waning weeks and days of his life, his home bustled with activity as all his brothers and sisters as well as friends came by to visit. He was aware and grateful to receive them all—along with Elizabeth who welcomed everyone. A man who was truly beloved by all—Fernando did right by everyone he ever met or was part of—especially his wife, Elizabeth whom he always made time for—to take her dancing.

Fernando is survived by his wife, Elizabeth and his step children. The oldest of 12 siblings, Fernando is also survived by five sisters and five brothers and their families as well as many, many friends. The *Esperanza Peace & Justice Center* board and Buena gente extends our heartfelt condolences to the family and friends of Fernando. His memorial ended with the song, *Yo Soy Mexico Americano* by Rumel Fuentes: ♪ *Por mi madre yo soy Mexicano • Por destino soy Americano • Yo soy de la raza de oro • Yo soy Mexico Americano!* ♪ ¡Fernando Villegas, siempre presente!

