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Shining Star:

Ray Martinez

Kent County, Texas, is about eighty miles, as the crow flies, northwest of Abilene. It was here on his grandfather's ranch that Ray Martinez entered the world on January 20, 1937. He was the third of five children born to Manuel and Julia Martinez. The oldest child was Gilbert, followed by sister Celia, and then came Ramiro (Ray). After Ray, younger sister Mary and brother Charles arrived.

Ray attended his first four years of grammar school in Hobbs, Texas. For some unknown reason, his school was locally referred to as the largest country school in Texas. By the time Ray was ready for the fifth grade, his father had rented a farm near Rotan, Texas. Ray graduated from Rotan High School in 1956. He followed his brother Gilbert to Austin to attend the University of Texas.

Unfortunately, neither Ray nor Gilbert would have the luxury of devoting their full time to academics. The year 1956 was a tough one for Texas farmers and ranchers-it was the year of a great drought. Regrettably, the Martinez boys' father did not escape its ravages, so in addition to carrying a full academic load, Ray and Gilbert also worked forty-plus hours a week at the State Hospital and sent every spare dollar to Rotan to help their family.

The workload was too much, however, and Ray dropped out of school after one semester. He soon joined the Army and served three years as a combat medic at Fort Carson near Colorado Springs, Colorado; Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio; and finally in Germany.

As was common with most men from his era, when Ray got out of the Army, he started looking for a job-any job that would pay him a livable wage. In September of 1960, he was accepted into the Austin Police Department. When he graduated from the their Police Academy on January 20, 1961, Ray became a patrolman. At that time, the Austin PD did not have enough cars to go around, so his duties were those of a walking patrolman.

An eventful year in Ray's life was 1961. Not only did he become a police officer, but he got married. Vernell Schmidzensky, a pretty blond-haired girl from Fredericksburg, Texas, became his wife. Today they have two daughters, twins Janette and Janice.

August 1, 1966, was a memorable day in not only Ray's life, but also in America's. A former Marine marksman, Charles Whitman, barricaded himself in the Tower on the University of Texas' campus and started shooting. By the



time Ray and others put an end to his murderous rampage, Whitman had killed sixteen people-including his wife and mother, whom he had slain before going into the Tower. Another thirty-three were wounded. For his outstanding heroism that day, Ray was awarded the Austin Police Department Medal of Valor, named Peace Officer of the Year by the National Police Officers Association, and honored by the National Rifle Association.

Ray was promoted to sergeant in November 1966 and was assigned to the Criminal Investigations Division. During this period, the Austin Police Department's salaries were falling further and further behind the cost of living. As much as Ray loved being an Austin policeman, the pay was just not sufficient to support his family the way he desired. He decided he had no choice but to leave the police force. With a friend, he bought the Picnic Restaurant on Guadalupe Street beside the UT campus in downtown Austin. It only took about two weeks for Ray to realize he had made a terrible mistake: his heart was still in law enforcement. But rejoining the Austin Police Department was not an option he considered. To do so would have meant that he would reenter the Police Department as a patrolman-with a patrolman pay-and after eight years with the force, he was unwilling to start again at the bottom.

Ray knew that the Texas Department of Public Safety was expanding their Narcotics Division. In 1969, the unit was new and only had about fifteen members. Ray was accepted as a narcotics agent and was assigned to Houston. He worked many cases there, but in 1973, he applied for entrance into the Texas Rangers and was accepted. On September 1, he assumed his duty station in Laredo.

He learned quickly that when you worked in Laredo, you were going to have to contend with the Duke of Duval, George Parr. Parr ran much of South Texas from his headquarters in Duval County. Few politicians in American history have ever controlled an area so completely as he did. The aging George Parr had never known anything but power. His father Archie had run South Texas for decades before his death. With the passing of his father, George had taken over and continued with his iron grip.

With such a long history of power, bringing Parr down wouldn't be easy. He had friends who owed him much-friends ranging all the way from President Lyndon Johnson right on down the ladder. At the time, Ray was part of a task force composed of Texas Rangers and prosecutors from the Texas Attorney General's Office. For the next several years, he worked almost exclusively with this group, and the task force's persistence finally paid off. By the early 1970s, many of Parr's friends were either dead, in jail, or out of power. Eventually, the whole Parr organization was crushed. The connection from the courthouse to the White House was no more. Parr was convicted of tax evasion, and rather than face prison, he committed suicide on April Fools' Day, 1975.

Ray conducted official corruption- and voter-fraud investigations in many South Texas counties, but he still found time to work the criminal investigations that Rangers normally do.

In 1978, Ray transferred to New Braunfels, located just north of San Antonio. Here he continued his outstanding service to the people of Texas until his retirement in 1991.

However, Ray's service to the public wasn't finished. He was elected to the office of justice of the peace, a post he held for several years before he finally



put his official duties down.

Ray hasn't slowed down much. He is still very active in the New Braunfels community where he gives speeches about his first love-the Texas Rangers. In between, he finds time to devote to two other passions in his life: golf and the Former Texas Ranger Association, to which he was elected president in June 2001.

Ray summed up his Ranger service and his LAR (Life After the Rangers) when he said: "I just had a wonderful time in the Ranger service. [While] I was in the Rangers, I was helping people. So I'm just continuing, except this time I don't have a gun and don't have a badge."

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