

✓ Illegal Aliens RP 6/9/90

# Watsonville man upset over treatment by INS officer

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Paul (Chris) Zaragoza is probably not the only person living in Watsonville who fears being taken into custody by the Immigration and Naturalization Service and facing deportation to Mexico.

What makes him an exception, he says, is that he was born at Natividad Medical Center in Salinas and raised in Watsonville. He also says he has the papers to prove his U.S. citizenship — at least he did, he says, until an INS agent allegedly took them from him at San Jose International Airport last Tuesday night.

A call to Santa Cruz County's elections officer confirmed that Zaragoza is a registered voter with a Watsonville address. His voter registration card says he was born in California.

Zaragoza, 20, who lives in Watsonville with his mother when he's on break from his pre-law studies at the university he attends in Michoacan, Mexico, was returning from Mexico for

the summer Tuesday. He said his troubles began when an INS officer routinely going through Zaragoza's papers began questioning him. A second officer was called over, he said.

Zaragoza said the second officer questioned him, asking him repeatedly where he was born, what his parents' names were, and what his phone number was. When Zaragoza objected to being asked the same questions over and over, he said the officer told him that he was the superior officer and if he didn't like how he was being treated he would have to be taken elsewhere to be questioned.

"I got kind of scared," Zaragoza said in an interview yesterday.

Zaragoza said he was then asked to remove his socks, shoes, watch and ring, which the officer inspected.

"They even asked me if my shoes were Mexican," he said.

Zaragoza said he was also asked if he had served in Mexico's army or voted in Mexico.

He said his suitcases were gone through and letters he was carrying to his sister opened and read.

Then, Zaragoza said, the officer took his birth certificate, California identification card, voter registration card and U.S. Army registration card and told him he would have to come back to San Jose Tuesday to answer more questions at a second inspection.

Zaragoza said he was never told what the problem was.

Philip Waters, deputy district director at the INS office in San Francisco, said he wasn't familiar with the incident Zaragoza described.

But, he said, the officer "must have thought there was something wrong" with Zaragoza's papers. He said that under those conditions, it is common practice to keep the papers.

As far as the officer's behavior toward Zaragoza, Waters said it was probably a situation where "the officer was just not being polite."

Zaragoza could have been de-

tained in jail instead of let go until the hearing next week, Waters said.

Next week's inspection is not a deportation hearing, Waters said.

But Jack Holmgren, a Salinas lawyer whose firm, Park, Vandevere and Holmgren, specializes in immigration law, said if the INS is not satisfied after the second inspection that a person has a legal right to be in the United States, the next step is voluntary departure or a hearing on whether the person will be allowed into the country. Zaragoza has not yet been officially admitted to the United States.

Zaragoza and his mother, Barbara Barker Gonzalez, who said she is a lifelong Watsonville resident, are ready to fight.

A year ago, Zaragoza said he was questioned by an INS officer at the San Francisco airport on his return to the United State for the summer. The officer checked some things out on a computer and let Zaragoza go. Zaragoza said the incident upset him but

that he and his mother decided to let it pass. But this time, Gonzalez said, even if everything goes well on Tuesday, they aren't going to let the incident pass.

Yesterday, Zaragoza and his mother went to U.S. Rep. Leon Panetta's office in Hollister to formally ask that the incident be looked into. They said they were given advice on how to handle the meetign with the INS Tuesday. Gonzalez said Panetta's office had already contacted the INS and was told that the officer thought there was something wrong with the papers. She said one of the aides in Panetta's office said they had received similar complaints from naturalized citizens, but never from someone who was born in the United States.

In an interview yesterday, Sylvia Panetta, Leon Panetta's wife and aide, said that she couldn't comment on the details of the case but that the INS had promised a report on the incident "immediately."



Chris Zaragoza

"We're working with them," she said.

Gonzalez and Zaragoza said they're planning to sue the INS even if Tuesday's deferred inspection goes well for them. They have an appointment at Holmgren's law office next week.