

Local

✓ *Illegal Aliens RP 6/15/90*

After more grilling, INS officially allows man to enter U.S.

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A Watsonville man whose U.S. citizenship was questioned by an Immigration and Naturalization Service official after he debarked from a plane from Mexico at the San Jose International Airport June 5, despite the fact that all his papers were in order, was officially allowed into the country after seven hours of questioning Tuesday.

Paul (Chris) Zaragoza, who was born at Natividad Medical Center in Salinas, and who lives in Watsonville when he isn't studying at the Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolas de Hidalgo in Michoacan, Mexico, was stopped at the airport June 5 and questioned repeatedly about his citizenship, he said. The agent who stopped him also ordered him to remove his shoes, socks, ring and watch and searched through his luggage, opening letters he was carrying to family members from Mexico, he said. The agent eventually let him go, but held onto his papers and told him he had to appear for further questioning at a "deferred inspection" Tuesday.

Zaragoza and his mother, Barbara Barker Gonzalez, a life-long Watsonville resident, said they spent about seven hours at the INS office in San Jose before convincing officials that Zaragoza was, in fact, a citizen.

Zaragoza is angry over his treatment by the agent, who he said was abusive and intimidating. Zaragoza suffers from an asthmatic condition and because of the stress of the last week has been sick. He and his mother are planning to file a complaint against the agent and a lawsuit against the INS. They have already filed a complaint through U.S. Rep. Leon Panetta's office.

In an interview this week, Gonzalez said they were told that Zaragoza was stopped because of his demeanor and because he looked older than his documents said he was. Another thing that made the INS suspicious was that after handing his papers to an officer Zaragoza asked him to wait for a minute before asking questions because his ears were plugged up.

Gonzalez said they were told that Zaragoza's clothing and suitcase were searched for drugs. In fact, the INS officer's search did turn up something illegal in Zaragoza's suitcase — a phony birth certificate with one of Zaragoza's brother's name on it.

Zaragoza is at a loss to explain the birth certificate, saying that it was packed in a plastic bag along with other papers and correspondence by his sister-in-law, and that he had no knowledge of it.

Gonzalez said she believes that Zaragoza's brother had the birth certificate made because he was in love with a woman in Mexico whose parents didn't want her involved with a U.S. citizen.

But Zaragoza and his mother say the document wasn't the point, since it wouldn't even have been found if he hadn't been stopped, questioned and searched, which they say was inappropriate because Zaragoza's papers, which included a U.S. Army registration card, a voter registration card, a birth certificate, a California State I.D. card and a Social Security card, were in order.

The phony document was returned to them by the INS official who questioned them Tuesday. Gonzalez said the official said she didn't want to have anything more to do with it.