

# Irma's Story

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## American By Birth, Hispanic By Choice This Is Irma's Story

**DALLAS, TEXAS** – “Peter B. Gawenda thrilled readers with his first book, *The Children's War: Germany 1939-1949*,” notes Robert Becker, veteran journalist and former international wire news editor, Houston Chronicle. “Now he thrills them again with *Irma's Story: American by Birth, Hispanic by Choice* (Brown Books Publishing Group), turning his narrative gifts and rich trove of memories to tell another story with universal appeal – the power of enduring love.”

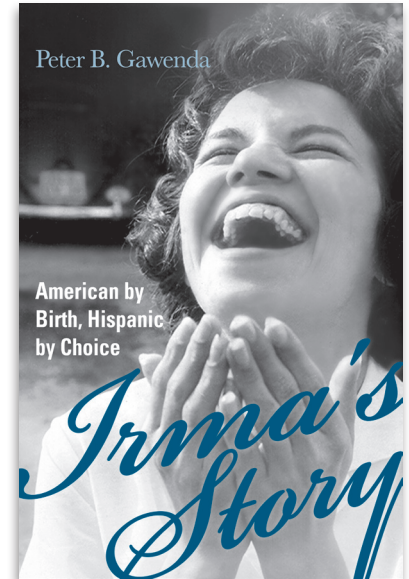
Written with a passion that has spanned five decades, Gawenda celebrates the strength of the once-in-a-lifetime love he shared with his wife, Irma Lozano de Gawenda, offering readers a rare glimpse inside the magic that made it work.

After World War II, Peter, a handsome German pilot, met Irma, a beautiful Texan woman of Hispanic descent. It was love at first sight. Their meeting had been prophesized—for Irma by her grandmother and for Peter by a Gypsy—and together the couple would create an extraordinary life.

*Irma's Story* chronicles Irma's life and the experiences of the “Texan Gawendas” during their tenure in the German military in Europe and the United States. Though Irma, accepted as an American while in Europe, faced discrimination in her home country and contended with the challenges of being a military wife, Peter's love and companionship remained constant.

“Peter Gawenda accurately describes the life journey of two heroes that leaves an imprinted portrayal of Hispanic women as positive role models,” says Maria Elena Corbeil, EdD, assistant professor at the College of Education and Educational Technology at the University of Texas at Brownsville. “*Irma's Story* ensures their legacy will be remembered by all those who knew them.”

Presenting the dynamics of racial issues against the backdrop of military life, Gawenda confirms the joys that the marriage of two people—from two completely different worlds—can bring. The story of Irma Lozano de Gawenda depicts a fearless, fiercely loyal woman willing to do anything for her family. For more information about the book and author, please visit [www.PeterGawendaBooks.com](http://www.PeterGawendaBooks.com).



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CATEGORY: BIOGRAPHY & AUTOBIOGRAPHY/WOMEN  
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# Irma's Story

## About the Author **PETER B. GAWENDA**



**P**eter Bodo Gawenda completed the German Air Force Academy and was commissioned a lieutenant in the German Air Force. After different assignments in the German Army and Air Force and graduation from Command and Staff school, his assignments in Germany included squadron commander, staff planner in high-level German Headquarters, and in NATO.

In the United States, he held liaison positions in US Army Schools. He advanced to the rank of lieutenant colonel and became a member of the German General Staff, spending an administrative assignment in the prestigious Führungsakademie der Bundeswehr (Leadership Academy for German and Foreign Military and Civilians earmarked for high leadership positions) in Hamburg.

Peter spent time in France, Holland, and Denmark and left the German military in 1981, immigrating to Texas with his family. Peter completed his education with a master's in international relations and a doctorate in education. He served as Vice President of Business Affairs and Director of Institutional Research and Planning at the University of Texas at Brownsville. He currently resides in Brownsville, Texas.

In his first book, *The Children's War: Germany 1939 - 1949*, Peter shared the story of his childhood in Nazi Germany and his family's flight to Austria. *Irma's Story* is his second book.



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## Q & A

with Peter B. Gawenda



**What inspired you to write *Irma's Story*?**

Irma was an out of the ordinary young woman. When I met her, I immediately realized that she had abilities and interests that set her apart. Her talent to learn languages and to communicate made her very likable to anyone she met or worked with.

**There is a quote on the back cover of the book by Irma's grandmother that states "Always remember today's date, *El Diez de Mayo*"—the tenth of May. What is the significance of that particular date? Does it have something to do with her prophecy?**

On May 10, 1947, on her deathbed, Irma's grandmother told her that she would meet someone special on a tenth of May. That is exactly what happened on May 10, 1960, in McAllen, Texas, in the Rio Grande Valley, when I parked my car next to her fancy 1959 Chevy Impala. While I had not been told an exact date, Irma had been given that date.

**You reference the fact that your ultimate meeting had been prophesized—for Irma by her grandmother and for you from a gypsy. Can you explain the circumstances?**

Neither one of us, at our first meeting, immediately knew that the other was the one who had been talked about in the distant past—for Irma by her grandmother and for me by the gypsy. But after a short while, we both knew somehow that we belonged together. I had the suspicion when I saw Irma for the first time, and Irma recognized it after several dates, especially during our meeting on Padre Island.

**Was it love at first sight?**

Yes, it sure was.




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**Irma could be called an ambassador for Hispanic women, as she stretched beyond the traditional role of a young Hispanic woman of her time growing up in McAllen, Texas, in the forties and fifties. What are some examples of her accomplishments?**

Irma picked up the saying: “Fear only fear itself, so prepare yourself that fear never enters your mind!” She made a point of knowing multiple languages and being fully engaged in the cultures she lived within.

During her time in Europe, Irma added several new languages to her flawless American English and her Spanish languages (she previously spoke Mexican and Castilian Spanish). She learned her father’s Basque, my German (which she eventually spoke without an accent), her friends’ French and British English, and later, limited Dutch. When she worked for NATO, she learned to understand and speak Italian and to a certain extent Portuguese.

She was always up-to-date in American and European politics. She was able to participate fully in the military and political circles I belonged to, and also created her own.

**Could you have ever imagined, while growing up in Germany, that you would end up in the state of Texas?**

From my earliest youth—I must have been six or seven years old—I wanted to live in Texas, close to the Rio Grande . . . and I finally made it.

**You are both referenced as heroes in the eyes of many. Can you extrapolate on that?**

In my case, maybe this is because I lived through the second World War and was injured, but never gave up. My focus has always been on helping and supporting others. In Irma’s case, I think this is because she dared to break out of her culture while never losing sight of her background. We were not afraid of taking risks (although we were careful not to endanger others) and we both ventured to live out of the ordinary lives.

**How did Irma impact your life and the lives of others?**

Irma had a superior work ethic and never left anything undone or incomplete. She had the gift of anticipating my thoughts and those of my and her superiors. When we decided on our careers, she researched and helped design all the necessary steps. She did the same for her peers and later for our children. Even today, I will still meet her former colleagues who confirm that she played a key role in their lives. Her most intriguing ability may have been her quick grasp of the different languages and cultures she encountered.



# Irma's Story

**You can sense from the photo of Irma on the cover of the book that she had a zest for life. Was it innate?**

Her enthusiasm and passion for her work and for friendship with the people around her was contagious. She had a natural instinct for always doing the right thing and for recognizing danger. She also had an intrinsic sense of humor. Since she was quickly “at home” in different cultures, she was able to differentiate between the humor of different countries. During her lifetime she prevented many situations that could have become dangerous or uncomfortable. And although we had never really agreed on it, we never went to bed angry at each other.

**Do you feel her presence with you always?**

Yes, I do, and I know I always will.

**What is the most important message you hope to convey to readers?**

Find your strengths as early as possible, never hesitate to use them, trust yourself, and continue learning. Remain ethical, modest, and humble. Irma was never arrogant. She never attempted to be only an American; she embraced her Hispanic heritage as well as her newfound European family. Irma set an example as a proud wife, mother, leader, and organizer, and led a fearless life. But I always tell people that she had to do more and work hard to get where she was throughout her life—and I’m sure she wouldn’t have had it any other way.



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## What People Are Saying

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—Robert Becker

Veteran journalist and former international wire news editor  
*Houston Chronicle*

"*Irma's Story* tells the compelling true story of the impassioned love shared between a south Texas woman of Hispanic descent and a German military officer, brought together by fate after World War II. Readers will be captivated and charmed by this unlikely relationship that thrived and endured. Today it serves as a powerful example of human potential and adaptation."

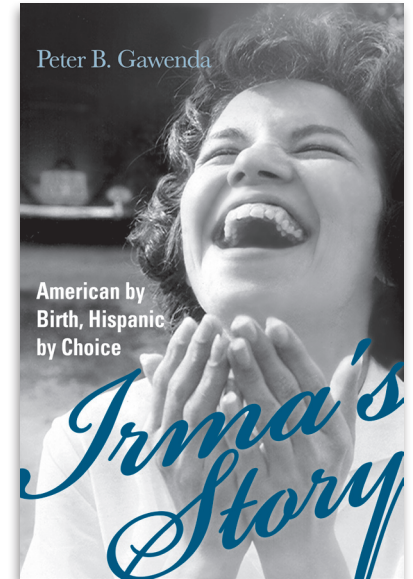
—Yvonne Freeman, PhD

Professor, Department of Language, Literacy, and Intercultural Studies at  
the University of Texas at Brownsville

"Peter Gawenda invites readers on a journey across several countries, decades, and adventures to describe the unique and rare love shared between two people. He provides a rare glimpse inside the life journeys of two heroes, leaving an imprinted portrayal of Hispanic women as positive role models. *Irma's Story* ensures their legacy will be remembered by all those who knew them, and now, by all those who read this magnificent book."

—Maria Elena Corbeil, EdD

Assistant professor, College of Education, Educational Technology at the  
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Excerpted from Chapter 2

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## *The White Knight*

On May 10, 1947, Irma saw her grandmother, Doña Aciana Reina Garcia, alive for the last time. She was lying in her large bed, her head buried among puffed-up pillows and her body covered with beautifully embroidered lace blankets. She had been ill for a few weeks, and seven-year-old Irma had gone to see her with her own mother, Josefa Vela de Lozano, almost every day.

That day they had been called by the grandmother, Irma's Mama Gran Vela, who seemed to feel her end coming. Irma and Mama Gran Vela both loved red roses, and Irma picked a few in their garden. She and her mother entered the bedroom quietly, and Irma laid the roses on Mama Gran Vela's cover. She lifted them up, smelled them, and then gave them to her maid to put into a vase with water. As she had done so often, the grandmother reached for Irma's hand, making sure she had not hurt herself with the thorns and then started speaking to her in beautiful, melodious Spanish.

Irma, the youngest girl of the Lozano family, had been her Mama Gran Vela's favorite granddaughter since birth. Irma spent many hours with her. Sitting on her grandmother's lap, Irma listened to her songs and her stories about the family, their family's history, and the many relatives.

Sometimes Irma did not understand, but she tried to remember. This time, though, the grandmother made Irma sit at the side of the bed and started whispering to her about her future. Mama Gran Vela seemed to look into the distance, appearing to be in a trance. She said that Irma would be the only one of her grandchildren to see the world, that she and her children would speak languages other than their own, and that she would leave the home of her parents. Irma would eventually return home.

Irma listened and began to cry. She insisted that she would never leave her parents or her home. But Mama Gran Vela told Irma's mother to let Irma go when her white knight came to pick her up as his bride, and she told Irma in English, "Always remember today's date, *El diez de Mayo*"—the tenth of May.



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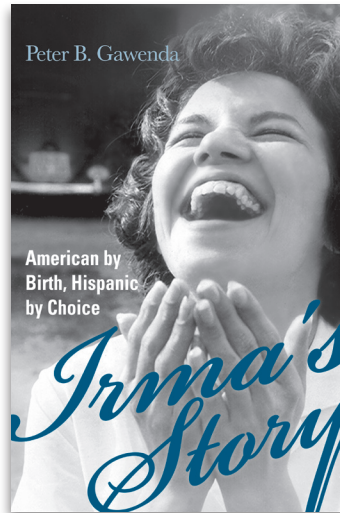
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## Synopsis

"Always remember today's date," her grandmother said to Irma. "*El diez de Mayo*"—the tenth of May. After World War II, Peter, a German pilot, met Irma, a beautiful Texan woman of Hispanic descent. It was love at first sight. Their meeting had been prophesized—for Irma by her grandmother and for Peter by a gypsy—and together the couple would create an extraordinary life. *Irma's Story* chronicles Irma's life and the experiences of the "Texan Gawendas" during their tenure in the German military in Europe and the United States. In his second book, Peter B. Gawenda, author of *The Children's War*, offers readers an insider's view of the joys that the marriage of two people—from completely different worlds—can bring. Presenting the dynamics of racial issues against the backdrop of military life, the captivating story of Irma Lozano de Gawenda depicts a fearless, fiercely loyal woman willing to do anything for her family.



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