

News from Nan

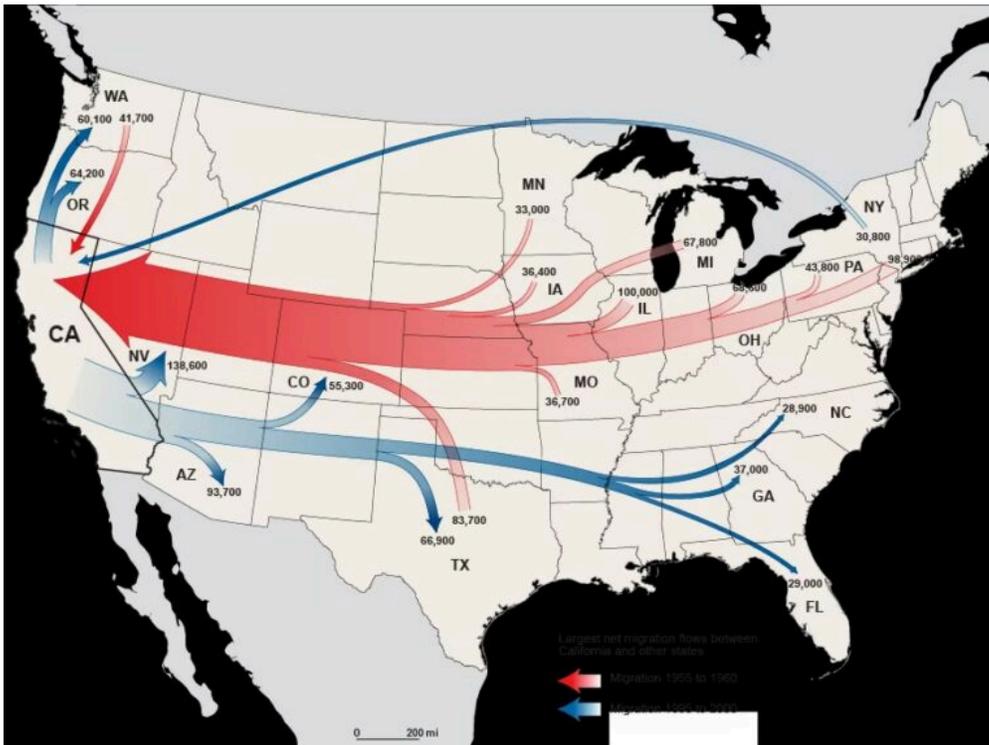
EVENTS, FAMILY, FRIENDS, GENEALOGY, FAMILY HISTORY, HOME, TRIPS, TRAVEL

ANNA'S MIGRATION RETROSPECTIVE, MI TO CA, DECEMBER 1951 (AI-ENHANCED)

APRIL 21, 2025 | ANNA

This is one of a set of two domestic migration retrospectives, Dick's and Anna's, both of which (coincidentally) took place in 1951. Dick and his family moved from the Buffalo, New York, area to San Diego, California. Anna and her family moved from Port Huron, Michigan (north of Detroit) to Los Angeles, California.

During the 10 or 15 years after World War II, which was also the beginning of the Cold War, many people from the East Coast and Midwest moved to the West Coast, particularly California. After consumer manufacturing back in full swing, and gasoline rations were lifted, people were able to travel again, and the aerospace industries, which thrived during the Cold War, were desperate for skilled workers. Our fathers were that: they had both had years of "high-tech" experience as tool and die maker (Dick's dad) and die sinker (Anna's dad).



U.S. Census Bureau, "Net Migration between California and Other States." The relevant data (red arrow and related statistics) is for the years 1955-1960, just after my family's migration.

Anna's dad, John, started the van Raaphorst family migration in the summer or fall of 1951: he wanted to "try out" the new location and job before anyone else joined him. In December of the same year, after a green-light signal from John, Anna (age 11), her mother, Nan, and her Aunt Betty (Bets), bought a new car and set out for Los Angeles. They arrived on Christmas Eve, and it was a joyful family reunion.

The text below tells Anna's domestic migration story from two perspectives: (1) Anna's personal one, and (2) as an example of the larger migration phenomenon that was happening at the time.

Migration narrative (by Anna)

The text below was originally published on News from Nan in 2021, as part of the "Places We've Called Home" set.



7637 Noren St, Downey, California, in 1955

This is a "migration" and "Christmas" story with a happy ending. The first part of the story happened on Christmas Eve, 1951, which is now over 70 years ago. These events and places are still very near and dear to my heart.

The house in the photo above, taken in 1955, was my home from about 1952 through 1958, when I graduated from high school and entered UCLA.

However, the story of my "Downey" years actually begins in 1951, when I migrated with my parents from Michigan to Southern California.



My mom and I (middle) with some of our friends and fellow migrants. The woman and boy on the right drove with us on our second trip to California, in the summer of 1952.

During my years of doing genealogy I've become convinced that most migrations consist of factors that are both pushing and pulling the people involved.

That's how it was with us. Although we had a lovely home on the St. Clair River in Marysville, Michigan, and a large group of beloved friends and family members, there were also a number of tragedies and difficulties during the last couple of our years in Michigan.

These were the major "push" factors:

- There were numerous labor issues involving my dad's union, him and his coworkers, and their employer, the Mueller Brass Company (for more information, see the AI-generated historical context, below).
- My maternal grandfather got cancer and died.
- My parents were joyfully expecting their second child, my little brother, Teddy, but he died at birth.
- My half-brother Bill and his family sold their house, which was located next door to ours, and moved closer to Detroit. My dad didn't approve of the sale, move, and change of employment, and the father-son relationship had turned tense.
- Neither my mother nor my dad had, since their marriage, been fully accepted into their spouse's extended family, and they were feeling pinched and rejected.

And then there were the most important "pull" factors:

- An offer of full employment at top wages in sunny California in the booming post-World War II, Cold War economy
- Encouragement from a group of friends and former co-workers to accept the employment offer
- A strong desire to eliminate, or at least lessen, the tensions "back home" by starting a new life somewhere else

In the summer of 1951, my parents bought a second car and my dad drove, by himself (on old Route 66) to the Los Angeles area. He roomed with Dutch friends in Santa Monica. My mom and I stayed behind while he tried out the new job and location.



My dad's Dutch friend and his house in Santa Monica where my dad stayed during 1951.

Late in 1951, after my parents decided that the move was a “go,” my mom, Aunt Betty (my dad’s older sister), and I started out, also driving, but on a more southerly route. It was already December and getting cold and stormy all along the way. We were determined to make it to Santa Monica, where my dad had rented a small apartment, by Christmas.

We drove up to the apartment, which was located on 14th Street, on Christmas Eve, into the arms of my beloved dad, who was pacing back and forth on the sidewalk outside, worried that we had gotten lost on the last few miles of our journey. Of course, there were no cell phones or “Find My Friends” apps in those days to help us connect!

It turned out to be a magical place for all of us. Aunt Betty loved the warm weather, my parents loved the ocean and walked down by Pacific Palisades almost every day, and I had a new, challenging school experience with lots of support from new friends.

In the spring of 1952, my mom, Aunt Betty, and I drove back to Michigan, and my mom put our house up for sale and started packing. On the way back to California in the summer our travel companions were the wife and son (pictured above) of another of my dad’s coworkers.

When we arrived back in Santa Monica on that second trip, we stayed for a few weeks in the Red Apple Motel. We were there for the 7.3 Kern County earthquake on July 21, 1952. I slept through it, but it made a big impression on the adults.

My parents had promised me a dog, and we adopted Frosty from the Humane Society. I also went to Girl Scout camp in the Malibu hills with some of my 6th-grade friends from Santa Monica.



Then we rented a house on Florence Avenue, In Downey, which is southeast of Los Angeles, while my parents looked for a house to buy.



Anna with puppy Frosty in the back yard on Florence Ave in Downey CA

At the end of the summer, just before I started the 7th grade at North Junior High School, we bought our house on Noren Street.



Moving van on Florence Ave

The migration took about a year from start to finish. Although we all missed our family and friends in Michigan, the change was generally positive for all of us. And, of course, over the years we had lots of company in our new sunny paradise, including some who came and stayed!



Our Noren St home

Historical context and occupational narrative (Perplexity)

Below is an excerpt from "The History and Legacy of Die Sinkers: From Detroit's Auto Industry to Los Angeles Aerospace," which was researched and generated at my request by Perplexity AI. The information matches my (pre-teen) understanding of my dad's work situation at the time, but has provided me with interesting details that I had never heard before. Thank you, Perplexity!

Introduction

Before delving into the rich history of die sinkers in Detroit and Los Angeles, it's important to understand the significance of this specialized occupation across American manufacturing history. Die sinkers played a crucial role in both the automotive revolution centered in Detroit and the aerospace advancements that flourished in Southern California. These skilled craftspeople created the precision tooling that enabled mass production in these industries, working largely behind the scenes but forming an essential foundation for America's industrial might during the 20th century.

What is a die sinker? Understanding the craft

A die sinker is a specialized metalworker who creates dies—precision-engineered metal forms used in manufacturing processes. Die sinking involves machining cavities into steel blocks that are subsequently used in molding, stamping, or forming operations. This highly skilled trade has evolved significantly over centuries, adapting to new technologies while maintaining its essential role in manufacturing.

Historically, the term “die sinker” dates back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, initially referring to craftsmen who created dies for striking coins, medals, and tokens.

The process of “sinking” referred specifically to creating recessed designs in metal dies, not the process of pressing dies onto materials. Master die sinkers needed multiple skills, including engraving capabilities and knowledge of how to use specialized punches to create intricate designs in hardened tool steel.

Die sinkers in Detroit's automotive industry and the Southern California aerospace industry

Detroit's emergence as the center of America's automotive industry (**Comment from Anna:** which began in the 1910s when my dad's family immigrated from the Netherlands) created unprecedented demand for tool and die makers, including specialized die sinkers. The transformation of automobile production from small-scale craftwork to mass production necessitated precision tooling that only skilled die sinkers could provide.

While Detroit became synonymous with automotive manufacturing, Southern California—particularly the Los Angeles area—emerged as a powerhouse in the aerospace industry. During World War II alone, the Los Angeles area contained around two million aerospace employees and produced approximately 300,000 airplanes. This massive industrial mobilization created significant demand for precision tooling experts, including die sinkers.

Labor disputes between the Mueller Brass company and the die sinker's union

(**Comment from Anna:** During and after World War II my dad worked for the Mueller Brass company in Port Huron, Michigan. Labor disputes between the die sinker's union and the company were a significant “push” factor for our migration to California, as I mentioned above.)

During the late 1940s, Mueller Brass, like many industrial firms in the Midwest, experienced significant labor unrest. The period after World War II was marked by a surge in union activity across the United States, as workers sought to secure better wages, improved working conditions, and greater job security in the booming postwar economy. The die sinkers—highly skilled tradespeople essential to the company's operations—were often at the forefront of these efforts.

The labor disputes at Mueller Brass would have mirrored national trends, with die sinkers and other skilled workers demanding recognition of their unions, improved pay, and safer working environments. These disputes sometimes led to strikes, work stoppages, and tense negotiations.

(Comment from Anna: Some time around 1950, my dad quit his job at Mueller Brass and started to work freelance for manufacturing job-shops in the Detroit area. I remember his being very dissatisfied with his work situation. The atmosphere in Los Angeles, in 1951, must have been a huge relief for him.)

◀ 1951 ◀ 2025 ◀ AEROSPACE INDUSTRY ◀ CALIFORNIA ◀ LOS ANGELES ◀ MICHIGAN ◀ MIGRATION ◀ PERPLEXITY
◀ PORT HURON