

# *The Arellano-Higares Story: 1919-2000*

*By Christopher Arellano, son of Daniel Refugio Arellano*

[Edited by Lynn Holmes]

## *Coming to America*

It was 1919 in the United States, the Allies had just defeated Germany in world War I. Woodrow Wilson was president. Shoeless Jose Jackson and other members of the Chicago White Sox were about to conspire to throw the World Series, F. Scott Fitzgerald had published his first novel. The country was on the threshold of its Roaring 20s, its Jazz Age.

At the same time, in a dusty little town in Chihuahua, Mexico 12-year old Tomas Reyes Arellano struck a fateful deal with Manuel Higares, a circus performer. The deal called for Higares, then about 26, to escort Tomas' mother, Alejandra Reyes and five siblings across the U.S.-Mexico border at El Paso, Texas. The deal would form a lifelong bond between the enterprising youth and Higares, and in the process shape the lives of scores of their descendants.

Today, those descendants, the members of the Arellano-Higares-Rondero family, are centered in the San Francisco Bay Area but some have scattered all across the U.S.

In 1919, there were good reasons for wanting to move to the U.S. Alejandra's common-law husband, Daniel Arellano, had disappeared to participate in the Mexican Civil War. Mary Higares Avila, Tomas' sister and at 85, his eldest surviving sibling, said her father bought weapons in El Paso, Texas for Revolutionary leader Pancho Villa. However, other relatives say that Daniel Arellano was a businessman, who sold goods, such as cattle, to the government forces as well as the rebels.

With her family living in poverty and no welfare system to speak of in Chihuahua, Alejandra and her children faced a bleak future in Mexico. [Mary] Avila said her mother and her children lived in a cave, something that is still considered a trademark of her native Tarahumara tribe. Alejandra was 27 in 1919, a year older than Higares. She often went door-to-door, offering to do a family's laundry in exchange for a plate of food, according to Cora Higares Aguilar, [Alejandra's] youngest daughter. Other days, however, the family did not eat. Now, as her eldest sons, Tomas and Enrique were 12 and 10 respectively, they were reaching an age when Revolutionary Leader Pancho Villa, or another warring faction, might draft them into his Army as drummer boys or munitions carriers.

Tomas, an enterprising youth, was willing to help with her plan to cross the U.S. border.

He brushed up on the requirements for crossing the border. The immigration law of the day, apparently, allowed "families" (a man, a woman, and children) to cross the border without papers. It was an era when the American-Mexican border might best be thought of as a mutual frontier rather than today's border with its barbed wire, search dogs and guardhouses.

Young Tomas seized upon the idea that his mother and siblings needed a man to pose as their father to meet the legal definition of a "family." He thought Higares was perfect for posing as his surrogate father. Tomas had either met Higares while shining the shoes or doing on of his odd jobs, according to sources in the family. However, Alejandra was certainly no stranger to Higares before her son present him with the idea. Manuel had seen Alejandra sweeping the porch of a home and smitten, [Cora] Aguilar said.

"He said he wanted to marry her," [Cora] Aguilar said.

Higares, after being approached by Tomas asked the boy where his father was, according to Avila. Avila said that Tomas told Higares that his father was dead. Eventually Higares agreed to go along with the plan. Avila said that Tomas then had to convince a dubious Alejandra about the plan's viability. [Mary] Avila said that her brother told their mother that life would be better for their family in the United States. He said his younger sister, Nellie and Helen, were too thing and might die if they did not leave Mexico for "El Norte."

"Thomas begged and begged and begged," [Mary] Avila said. Eventually, Alejandra went along with the idea.

As a traveling professional, [Manuel] Higares planned to travel the United States anyway with the circus. Alejandra and her children even changed their last name to Higares to complete the ruse of posing as Higares' family. It worked. The family arrived in El Paso, Helen Anaya recalls her late sister, Nellie, saying that they crossed the border in a horse and buggy.

One in Texas, Alejandra at first wanted Higares to leave her family alone. In fact, [Mary] Avila said Alejandra tried running away from him, ordered her sons to carry their younger sisters and run away from him

as well. Manuel simply ran after them and caught up to them. Moved by the plight of the family, Manuel stayed with them. Eventually, Manuel and Alejandra fell in love and had children of their own.

[Cora] Aguilar said her mother remained glad that Higuera entered the family's lives.

"My mother told me your father is an angel, marrying a woman with six kids," [Cora] Aguilar said.

### *Mexican Days*

Alejandra, as the common-law wife of Daniel Arellano, then legally married to Manuel Higuera, is the matriarch of both the Arellano's and Higuera's. She was known as Alejandra Reyes when she was born into the Tarahumara Indian tribe. She was born in a very small village, which might be named Parral, in the mountainous Copper Canyon, according to her grandson Jess Anaya. The surname of one of Alejandra's parents is Neri, said [Cora] Aguilar, who added she has never researched the name's origins.

Alejandra lived from January 1892 to May 1962. By all accounts, she had very little to say in her choice of Daniel Arellano as her suitor, Daniel Arellano, while riding on his horse, snatched Alejandra from her tribe, probably when Alejandra she was a young girl.

"My mother was walking along the river," said [Helen] Anaya. "She was getting a bucket of water for her mother."

Most family members believe she was 13 or 14 at the time, but Reynaldo Arellano has stated she thinks she was 16. Alejandra's family disowned her because of her involvement with Daniel Arellano, according to Avila. Alejandra wanted to return to her family, but her family would not let her, Avila added.

[Manuel] Higuera lived from July 18, 1893 and dies in 1967. He is of Spanish descent but was raised in Mexico. Cora Aguilar, in describing her father, said he came from a strict family that owned cattle and might have been wealthy. She said Manuel had a sister named Carmen. She also added that one Manuel's aunt, his father's sister, was a prostitute. The elder Higuera warned his son never to speak with his sister. One day however, his aunt spotted Manuel, then seven, called him over and talked a bit.

The father heard of the conversation and flew into a rage. He used a horsewhip to beat his son so severely that he could not sleep or days and his shirt stuck to his skin.

At the time, the circus happened to be visiting the family's town. Young Manuel asked the circus people for a job and told them he was an orphan. He was given work and never went back home.

There is little that is known about the background of Daniel Arellano. It is unknown when he was born and he died in the 1950's, around 1954(?).

Daniel and Alejandra had six children together. Those children were:

- Tomas (1906-1982). He was born in Santa Eulalia, Chihuahua.
- Enrique (Henry), who was born around 1908 and has since died.
- Santiago ("Jimmy"), who was born around 1910, and disappeared in Los Angeles at 19.
- Maria, who was born in 1912, died of a scorpion bite as an infant.
- Maria Luisa was born in June 1914 or 1915.
- Manuela ("Nellie"), born in either 1918 or 1919, died in 1995.
- Elena ("Helen") born in 1917 or 1918.

After Arellano left, his family had no choice but to carry on without him. After Alejandra and Manuel fell in love, the couple had four children of their own.

Those children are:

- Socorro (Cora) born in either El Paso or Arizona, who died at age 7 in Los Angeles.
- Jose (Joe) born in Mesa Arizona who lived from 1922 to 1995.
- Lupe born in Los Angeles who lived from 1924 to 1993.
- Socorro (Cora) who was born in Bakersfield in 1928.

### *Migrating across the Southwest (1919-1930)*

The details of the family's travels right after crossing the border are unclear. [Mary] Avila said she remembers stopping at an Arizona ranch where Manuel worked by picking cotton. She says she remembers her family receiving free milk and eggs, as part of the arrangement. [Mary] Avila said she was not certain how long the family stayed in Arizona, but pointed out that her brother, Joe, was born in the state.

[Mary] Avila said the family set out across the Southwest in a horse and buggy, “just like the movies, exactly.” She even remembers Tomas cutting the branch off a tree and fashioning a wheel to a broken one. She recalls overhearing conversations that either soldiers or guards had with Manuel, urging him to be careful because there were potential robbers and even attackers in the area.

“I was always listening,” she said. “I made sure I was awake when they were talking.”

The family’s migration, however, was a slow one. Jose, the second child born to Manuel and Alejandra, was born in Arizona in 1922, or about three years after the family first crossed the border. But in 1924, the family had made its way to East Los Angeles, where the couple’s third child, Lupe, was born that year. The family also suffered more heartbreak, when the original Cora Higuera, dies in Los Angeles at age 7.

The death of the original Cora sent Alejandra into a deep depression, [Cora] Aguilar said. “The doctors told my father to take her out of Los Angeles because she was spending all her time at the cemetery,” [Cora] Aguilar said. She said her family moved to Wasco, a little town outside of Bakersfield as a result. After originally being told, she would not have another child. [Cora] Aguilar said her mother was ecstatic when she learned she was carrying her. Alejandra vowed that she would call the baby Cora if she had another daughter.

[Cora] Aguilar said she was, in fact, the daughter that her mother had hoped for. However, her birth certificate inexplicably lists her name as “Jesus.” She suspects that a friend who helped bring her mother and father to the Bakersfield hospital might have had something to do with that because her parent were also mystified by the name that appeared on the certificate. Neither Manuel, Alejandra nor the family friend spoke English well.

It was in Southern California that the family lost touch with Santiago, who had opened an automobile repair shop in Los Angeles. He was only 19. Neither Santiago, nor any of his possible descendants, had been heard from since.

But even as Santiago left his family, eldest brother Tomas became the first child to marry. At 22, Tomas married Jovita Romero, a young widow he had met in a Bakersfield grocery store while delivering pan dulce. Jovita, 23 months older than Tomas, used to hide under the counter when she caught sight of Tomas entering the store. Tomas, a foot taller than Jovita, referred to her as “La Chaparra” or Little Woman.

At the time, Jovita married Tomas, she had three children from a previous marriage: Juan (Johnny), Pedro (Peter) and Paula. Juan and Pedro lived with their father’s sister-in-law, Chayo, in the Mexicali area. Paula, however, lived with Jovita and Tomas, and joined Manuel and Alejandra Higuera and their expanding family. Jovita had originally left Paula with the Rondero as well, according to Tomasa Arellano, but later came to get her because she was suffering from malnutrition.

In April 1929, only a year after the birth of his youngest sister, Tomas became a father for the first time when Jovita gave birth to the couple’s first child. The child was originally named Alicia Higuera. After a subsequent name change, she became Tomasa Arellano.

At any rate, after two years in the Bakersfield-Los Angeles area, the family was ready to move on. Again, the family worked as migrant farm workers, moving north along the towns of Highway ((. The family lived in Fresno, Visalia and Delano as Manuel accepted farm-laboring jobs for stints as short as a month, said [Helen] Anaya.

“He was like a gypsy and we had to follow,” said [Helen] Anaya without a trace of bitterness. Like Mary, Helen believes that Manuel Higuera was her “true” father.

“During the migration they worked in the fields and anywhere else they could,” Jess Anaya wrote on June 28. “I understand that Manuel, Mary and Nellie put a little act together, singing and dancing to help make money. Manuel, Tomas and Henry were the main breadwinners, but Alejandra, Mary and Nellie would help in the fields. Helen did not like the fields so was given the job of preparing meals and keeping the house.”

At the same time, the education of the children might have suffered because of the constant moves. [Helen] Anaya said she only received a fourth-grade education and even that was constantly disrupted by being on constant moves.

Eventually, Tomas and Jovita moved to West Oakland around 1930 and Alejandra and Manuel followed, according to [Helen] Anaya.

“I don’t know why (Tomas moved to Oakland),” said [Helen] Anaya. “ He didn’t know anyone.”

“I think maybe because it was a big town,” said [Mary] Avila, when asked why her brother stopped in Oakland.

Even so, the families established roots in the Bay Area. But with the advent of the crippling Great Depression, the family's days as migrant farm workers were still not over.

"Even though we were based here, we would still go out and pick," said [Cora] Aguilar, adding she still thinks of her family's farm laboring when she sees cotton fields near Los Angeles. "...that was backbreaking work and it was hot. But it was the only work available for people without skills.

[Cora] Aguilar said she remembers picking tomatoes even after she married in 1943.

Daniel Refugio Arellano, born in 1938, the second youngest child of Tomas and Jovita, also remembers working in a migrant labor camp one summer with his brother Raul and sisters Mary and Alejandra. They lived in a tent and their grandmother, Alejandra, cooked on a kerosene stove.

### *Life in West Oakland*

The Higaes' lived at 626 Jefferson Street, across the street from a part and kitty-corner from St. Mary's Catholic Church. They struggled in Oakland as Manuel strung together a series of odd jobs to help make ends meet, said [Cora] Aguilar. Manuel knocked on the doors of affluent Piedmont homeowners, asking if he could clean their yards. He charged a penny to clean a brick, which were then reused in construction projects. He also asked a 10th Street florist if he had any flowers he planned to throw away. He was given unwanted roses and carnations that apparently could not be sold. Higaes peeled off the outer portion of the flowers, then made them into corsages, which he sold in local taverns. It was typical of his knack for using creative ways to put food on his family's table.

[Manuel] Higaes never had more than a first-grade education, but had natural intelligence, said [Cora] Aguilar. She recalled on Tompkins School teacher saying he would have had "gone far" if given an opportunity for a formal education. He is also remembered for having an unusually good disposition, with [Helen] Anaya saying she remembers her stepfather whistling if he were angry.

Manuel did not land a full-time job until after the U.S. joined World War II, when he went to work at the Oakland shipyards, which was then to meet the government's demand for marine and naval vessels.

But as the years went by, the children who comprised the first wave of Arellano-Higaes immigrants began to marry off and start families of their own.

Nearby, in the Arellano household, Tomas and Jovita continued to have more children. Tomasa, was then the eldest child. Reynaldo was born in 1931. Josefina was born in 1932. Alejandra was born in 1934. Mary was born in 1936. Daniel was born in 1938. Raul was born in 1939. They also had one child Reynaldo, who was born in 1930 but died in infancy. Also, a child named Josefina, who was born in 1932 and died from diphtheria at age 3.

In 1934, Jovita Arellano also retrieved her two children from the Mexicali area of Baja California, Mexico. Later, after a long Southern Pacific train ride, Peter Rondero recalls arriving in West Oakland on a rainy evening.

"It looked like daytime as there were so many street lights," Rondero wrote recently. "This was new to me. I remember walking up some stairs as the family lived above a store on 6th Street. "At the time, the family lived a block away from Tompkins School where the family children attended school.

It was there that Johnny and Peter were reunited with sister, Paula, and their new younger brother and sisters: Tomasa, Reynaldo, Josefina and Alejandra.

"I remember little Josefina. She look a lot like Mary Lou," Rondero writes of the young Arellano girl who died of diphtheria at age 3 in 1935.

Josefina was also remembered recently by Tomasa Arellano Torres. "She was a beautiful little girl, dark like me, and she had pretty black curly hair," [Tomasa] Torres wrote about her late sister who five years younger than her. "I used to call her my 'Dolly'".

Despite the changes, and having his own children, Tomas remained the dutiful son and brother. [Tomasa] Torres remembers him serenading his mother with a guitar at times and bringing over big bags of groceries to the Higaes family. He even helped pay for the weddings of some of his sisters.

"My brother Tomas was like a father to us," [Mary] Avila said, adding she was thrilled when her brother gave her away at her wedding in St. Mary's.

Visits by the Arellano children to the Higaes home were frequent, as Reynaldo especially drew close to Manuel and Alejandra. He is remembered by [Cora] Aguilar for bringing flowers to his grandmother Alejandra, after she said she preferred receiving flowers while she is alive, rather than after she died. Reynaldo, after hearing this, appeared to make it a point to present his grandmother with flowers for his visit.

Alejandra was never far from Tomas' thoughts either. "My father was devoted to his mother," Alejandra Arellano Holmes wrote recently. "She came first, before all other..." At one point, the families shared a flat on Third Street. Tomas and Jovita lived on one floor and Alejandra and Manuel live on another floor.

Even in the late 1930s, Higares was still willing to don makeup and clown garb for performances at family birthday celebrations.

"I can remember as a child, sitting down on the floor of his house, and he putting on a two to three hour show for us," said Reynaldo Arellano at the 1993 Family Picnic. "All of his magic tricks, his handkerchiefs, his flowers and his hairpiece. His trademark was the hair piece which he had connected with a string to his arm."

Alejandra Arellano Holmes recalls Tomas and Jovita both being strong supporters of the US. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Mexican President Lázaro Cárdenas who was known for his progressive politics and support of the defeated left-of-center Spanish Republic in the Spanish Civil War. Cárdenas' pictures were even displayed in the family home. [Alejandra] Holmes said the patriotic fervor was so strong in her family's home that Tomas made the family stand whenever the National Anthem was played on the radio. Tomas himself is also remembered for playing Mexican songs with his guitar. Among those songs Tomas played were "Humilde Emigrante," "Soy Mexicano, Soy de Chihuahua," "Mi Ranchito," and "Corrido de Joaquín Murieta."

Jovita joined a sewing club at Tompkins School where she enjoyed her rare chances to socialize with other woman while sewing, something she loved to do.

Tomas himself became known as "El Maestro" to his friends because of his business expertise according to Tomasa and Reynaldo Arellano.

"He was like a don- Don Tomas," Reynaldo said.

Tomas had various jobs. Peter Rondero remembers him driving in a panel truck, delivering pan dulce from Oakland to San Jose some days. Others remember him working, along side his brother Henry, at "Mi Rancho" Mexican bakery. For a time he worked at a chemical plant as evidenced by a badge with his name and picture discovered among his personal effects by son Daniel. Later, he operated pool halls on 7th Street in Oakland. After that one closed, Tomas opened a second pool hall in Pittsburg [California]. The Pittsburg [California] pool hall called for Tomas and his partner to manage the business on alternating months, with each keeping the profits from the month they managed the pool hall. The pool halls are believed to have hosted gambling card games.

Even so, the Arellano's also struggled. Raul Arellano remembers seeing deliverymen bringing Christmas gifts to his home. He asked who they were and what were they doing. They identified their non-profit agency and said they were delivering Christmas gifts to "poor people." He had no idea the family was poor.

At home, Tomas displayed a strong personality. Sometimes, his children were sent to the pool hall in Oakland to ensure that Tomas came right home after work. Other times, they were sent by Jovita to collect money to support the family.

At home, Tomas' actions dominated the Arellano household. "Yes, Tomas had a strong personality," wrote Alejandra Arellano Holmes last month. "He was (always) right! He wanted industrious, hard working children that showed respect to him and all other elders. With a look, he gave out discipline, or (with) a little pinch of skin. We responded quickly to his wishes."

Alejandra also recalls being subjected to riddles that were designed to test what Tomas deemed as subjects of common sense. "Sad to say, I did not get them and he would say something like 'My American born and educated children don't know anything,'" she wrote. "Of course, he never told us how to solve the riddle either. I sure didn't want to play this game with him as time went on."

The Arellano's lived in several different West Oakland residences during this time. Tomasa Arellano remembers her mother saying that she told landlords there were only two or three children in the family. Once the landlord had agreed to rent to them, and the keys were turned over, all the children moved in.

"She said that was the only way we could get the place," Tomasa said quoting her mother.

The family's finances are the subject of ambiguity. Tomas is recalled as dressing nicely. Yet, some family members also report the power company turning off the family's electricity for not paying its bills.

By the time the U.S. Entered World War II in December 1941, the family had spent more than 20 years in this country. Alejandra's children were grown and mostly married. A peek inside the various household during the war year would have shown these status points.

Manuel and Alejandra Higares: The outbreak of World War II would lead to a full-time job at the Oakland shipyard for Manuel, a welcome relief after struggling to make ends meet during the Great Depression.

▪ Tomas Arellano: Tomas is rejected for military service because of flat feet and his family responsibilities. The family moves to 738 Adeline Street during the war, which sports a 12 x 12 flag outside the home. Jovita on her own opens a restaurant, “La Quinta” at 2361 San Pablo Avenue, between Brush and West Streets.

▪ Maria Luisa (“Mary”) Avila: She married Prajedes Avila in 1934 at St. Mary’s Church, where she is given away by Tomas. They moved first to Oakland, then to Richmond in the 1940’s. They have four children: Prajedes Jr., Linda, Gilbert and George, each of who are alive.

▪ Enrique “Henry” Higaes: He married Seferina, but they later divorced. He then married Juanita, who dies later. He then married Olympia. His only child Henry Jr., was the product of this first marriage. Henry enjoyed a burst of local fame of East Los Angeles, because of his reputation for excellent baking. He and Henry Jr., better know as “Little Henry” have died.

▪ Manuela “Nellie” Ybarra: She marries Mario Ybarra in 1937 at St. Mary’s Catholic Church. Mario was drafted into the Army in 1945 and served in Japan after the end of World War II. They have three children: Robert, Patsy and Rita. Two others, Nellie and Mario have died.

▪ Elena (“Helen”) Anaya: She marries Antonio Anaya in September 1941 at St. Mary’s Catholic Church. They have three children: Carmen, Jess and David. Antonio and David have died.

▪ Lupe served in the Navy during World War II and served in Okinawa. He married and divorced Anita. They had one child, Manuel. He then marries Hattie. They have three children Geraldine, Michael and Dolly. Two other children, Lupe and Anita, have died.

▪ Joe married, divorced and then married Vera. Joe and Vera had nine children: Chris and Michael. Joe served in the Navy in World War II. His destroyer was obliterated in the war, but Joe is one of the ships few survivors as he clung to a life raft for three week after his ship was sunk.

▪ At the outset of World War II, their youngest daughter, Cora, was still living with Manuel and Alejandra. Cora would marry Joe Aguilar in 1943. Joe was drafted in 1945, in the waning months of World War II and served in Korea. They would have six children: Joey, Danny, Jerry, Tom, Tim and Becky, all of whom are living.

But for all of the talk of weddings, it must be noted that sometimes the couples did not get married until after they had children and a common-law marriage.

“My Mom and Dad didn’t get married until Joe got married,” said Cora Aguilar. “That’s just he way it happened them.” On Oct. 25, 1947, there was another milestone wedding in the family. It was on that date that Tomas gave into his wife’s wishes and had a Catholic wedding at St. Joseph’s Catholic Church in Oakland. “He always said he was a man, and the priest was a man, so why should he confess his sins to another man,” said Tomasa Arellano, explaining her father’s resistance to Catholicism and therefore a Catholic wedding.

The wedding was presided over by Father Barbero, a strict priest from Spain, who was often a dinner guest at the Arellano home. In a sign of how intertwined the families were at the time, [Cora] Aguilar said she and her husband, Joe, were also married by Father Barbero. Alejandra, one of the daughters of Tomas and Jovita, recalls her brothers, Daniel and Raul, serving as the altar boys for the wedding.

“I just remember giggling a lot at this event as my two little brothers appearing as serious as they could be, just containing themselves, not to the blow the event, like I was. Holmes wrote recently. Despite Holmes vivid recollection, neither Daniel, Raul, Reynaldo nor Tomasa remember the day with nearly as much detail.

Church records indicate that Mariano and his wife, Maria Trinidad Perez, the latter, a cousin of Jovita’s, were the witnesses at the wedding.

Almost two years later, another family milestone was achieved. Reynaldo Arellano became the first among his brother and sisters to graduate from high school, when he accepted a diploma from Oakland Technical School in 1949. As a reward, Tomas let him drive the family, in the family car, home.

“It was his way of recognizing me as an individual,” Reynaldo said.

Later, Tomas did not let him join the Marines without learning a trade. Reynaldo then went to Moler Barber College and passed his state license exam before joining the Marines like his older brother, Peter.

But even in the later 1940s, Tomas’ heavy hand was never far away. Reynaldo also recalled bringing his first \$50 or \$60 paycheck to his father’s Pittsburg [California] pool hall. His father took the money and handed Reynaldo \$5 for his work and expenses. Tomas then pocketed the rest, telling Reynaldo that he could consider the money his donation to offset the family’s living expenses.

During this era, Reynaldo and Tomasa helped their mother operate her restaurant. They helped her open the business, cook and wash pots. Reynaldo said it continues to amaze him that his without any help from their father, could open such an operation in the middle of World War II. He also reports that his mother also learned one of her first English expressions as a result of the business: “You pay! You pay!”

After that the eatery closed, a few years lapsed before from 1951 to 1954, Jovita opened a second restaurant at 5857 San Pablo Avenue, called "La Tapatia." This time, the younger children helped with Daniel and Raul working as waiters.

The restaurant closed not because of a lack of success but because Tomas became envious that his wife earned more money than him, said Raul Arellano.

But even as the Arellano's struggled, other members of the family began showing signs of their growing economic clout. Nellie and Mario in 1947 bought the six-unit apartment building at 626 Jefferson Street in Oakland, where the Higaes's once lived.

Earlier, during the full employment economy of the World War II years, the family began to sport cars. Mario Ybarra, a welder and steamfitter in World War II, drove a green Plymouth. Manuel drove a black Ford. Tomas himself is remembered for driving a 1939 Cadillac.

Despite the increasing signs of affluence, and their relatively close proximity to civic landmarks such as the Oakland City Hall and the Oakland Tribune, the family remained humble. West Oakland was largely black and Mexican. The nearby avenues, mostly white, were considered uptown. Although the tall buildings of Oakland's civic hub with within eyeshot of West Oakland, they might as well been on the moon.

"It was light years away," Raul Arellano said emphatically on August 5, when he, sister Tomasa, brother Reynaldo and sister-in-law Hilda Arellano took a nostalgic tour through some of their former West Oakland haunts. "You had no comprehension of the socioeconomic barriers then."

If the family was not mindful of the differences that marked their West Oakland Mexican status from the nearby pillars of society, others reminded them of it. Reynaldo remembers someone stopping him at knifepoint while riding his bike. He was accused of being a "paddy-lover" or some who like the gringos too much. He escaped with only a bruised ego.

Raul said that he and other brother, Daniel, used to made fun of for eating burritos for their school lunch made by Jovita. But they got up and ate them away from the rest of their classmates, so as not to inflame them with obviously Mexican food. Reynaldo added that he was beaten up once after being spotted eating homemade tacos at school.

By the late 1940s and the early 1950s, life had changed at 738 Adeline Street. The older brothers and sisters had married and started their own families, leaving the two youngest children in the home with Tomas and Jovita. The two boys especially became close. They not only served as altar boys at St. Joseph's but they also befriended a pair of brothers, the Chins.

At the family picnic, Raul said he thinks the associations with friends had a profound influence on Daniel and himself. He thinks the Chins, and other Chinese friends, helped instill a love of academics in his quieter, cerebral brother. At the same time, young Daniel Refugio Arellano even acquired his first girlfriend, Florence Wong, from nearby Chinatown.

Raul Added that he also learned about the ways other families lived from an old childhood friend, Nora. The contrast was startling. Raul said he got a taste of how families could live.

#### *Tomas Changes Last Name To Arellano, Finds Missing Father*

It was, apparently, while living in Oakland that Tomas took back his father's last name, Arellano, in the process creating a sensitive issue among the members of the Arellano-Higaes family. As noted earlier, Tomas was married in 1928 and his first child was born Alicia Higaes in 1929. Exactly why he made this decision is unknown. What is known is that Tomas was constantly asking for clues that might lead him to his birth father, Daniel Arellano. A contributing factor might have been Jovita, who was openly feuding with one of the Higaes women. In an effort to retaliate against the Higaes's, it might have been Jovita who encouraged her husband to take back his birth name.

Tomas also tried to convince at least one of his siblings to join him in taking back the Arellano name, said [Cora] Aguilar. "My brother Thomas, tried to get Henry to change his name to Arellano but Henry said no," [Cora] Aguilar said. "He said: "The man who is a father to me is Manuel Higaes."

Despite having taken back his birth last name, Tomas and Manuel continued to have a deep respect for each other. In fact, Tomas instructed his children to refer to Manuel Higaes as "Don Manuel," using the formal Spanish term of respect.

"We called him Don Manuel because my father never inbred in us the term of grandfather for him, for his own reason," said Reynaldo Arellano, at the 1993 Arellano-Higaes annual family picnic. "He always believed that his own dad was alive and he would find him one day."

[Cora] Aguilar said she never asked her father if he was hurt by her brother's decision to take back his birth name. "I think my dad might have gotten a little offended, but being the youngest, I don't remember," she said.

[Cora] Aguilar said Tomas was a wonderful brother. Even so, she recalls their mother being "deeply hurt" by his incessant quests to find his father. [Cora] Aguilar said she remembers her mother wondering why Tomas, as the eldest with the deepest memories of the straits his father left his family in, would want to bring Daniel Arellano back to the U.S.

In 1950, after almost 30 years of searching and asking for him, Tomas finally found his long-lost father, Daniel! Relatives offer different versions of how he was found.

Alejandra Arellano-Holmes wrote recently that her father's search received a break when he and Jovita were in Azusa visiting her mother's relatives. One of the relatives mentioned she knew an Andrea Arellano (Landeros). Tomas, never one to pass up a tip that might lead to finding his father, looked in her. Andrea Arellano (Landeros) turned out to be Daniel Arellano's sister.

Andrea told Tomas that his father was in El Paso, Texas. Daniel Arellano was working as a fruit and vegetable peddler, at least part of the time according to Alejandra Arellano Holmes. Tomas went to El Paso and persuaded him to return to Oakland and live with his family.

"Tomas prided himself that he kept his name and was able to tell his, Daniel, that they did not deny him," Alejandra Arellano Holmes wrote.

Tomas Arellano however writes that she and Paula Rondero think that Mariano Perez, a witness at the wedding of Tomas and Jovita, knew of an Arellano family and told Tomas. Included among this Arellano family was Andrea Arellano (Landeros), of Los Angeles, living on South Bonnie Brea Street, who was Tomas' father's sister, his aunt.

Reynaldo Arellano said his father telephoned Daniel Arellano the night he met with Andrea Arellano.

However, Daniel Arellano was anything but polished when he joined his family in the Bay Area in the 1951 or 1952. Several family members recall his personality as unpleasant and even crude at times.

Daniel Arellano lived with Tomas. Mary Avila said her father visited three days just after he came to California. [Mary] Avila continues to have vivid memories of biting comments her father has made.

[Daniel] Arellano died in Pittsburg [California] where he worked with Tomas around the latter's pool hall.

Even after he dies, the name Daniel Arellano stirred deep feelings within the Higaes household. Despite this, [Cora] Aguilar also remembered a scene that indicated how Manuel Higaes, displaying trademark diplomacy, handled the awkward situation. In early 1956, while pregnant, she said she told her parents she was considering naming the baby Daniel if she gave birth to a boy. [Cora] Aguilar recalls her mother said nothing, but looked at her husband. Manuel simply said it is a good name.

"I thought it was very generous of him," [Cora] Aguilar said, who eventually did name of her sons, Daniel.

### *The Family In The 1950s And 1960s*

In the mid 1950s, Eisenhower was President. The U.S. and the Soviet Union were in the Cold War. Elvis Parsley's reign as the King of Rock and Roll was starting. Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis were highly successful partners on the big screen. Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz starred in "I Love Lucy." In baseball, the New York Giants were flirting with the possibility of moving to San Francisco.

But, to paraphrase the late columnist Herb Caen, you can make a case that San Francisco had already become major-league when Tomas and Jovita sold their home on Adeline Street and moved to a Victorian home at 3267- 20th Street, near Folsom, in San Francisco's Mission District in 1955. They took their youngest children who were still living with them, Daniel and Raul. The 20th Street home was originally two units, but Tomas converted it to a three-unit dwelling for the extra income.

"We didn't have much money then and I and your father (Daniel) would do whatever jobs we could, which wasn't much as far as it went," Uncle Raul wrote. "I really don't know how my mother made ends meet. My father's income was unreliable at best."

Shortly after arriving in San Francisco, the two brothers worked a memorable side job together. On may 16, 1955, they ushered at the only West Coast appearance of then heavyweight champion Rocky Marciano at Kezar Stadium. Marciano pummeled British challenger Don Cocknell.

"He hit him everywhere," Uncle Raul said Marciano's performance against an outclassed British fighter.



Daniel and Raul both completed high school across the street from Kezar Stadium, a 60,000-seat stadium that housed the San Francisco 49ers, at Polytechnic High, located in the Haight-Ashbury District of San Francisco, at the time. Daniel graduated from the school in 1956. Raul graduated from Poly the following year.

Not long afterward, Raul took two steps that shaped his life. "The best thing that ever happened to me was I got a job at PG&E on my 18th birthday and, met (my future wife) Loretta and the rest is history," Raul wrote.

By the turn of decade, the Arellano's and the Higaes's had a baby boom like the rest of the country. A typical year might have been 1960 when the following grandchildren were born: Daniel Arellano (to Raul and Loretta); Paul Limon (to Paula Rondero Limon and Carlos); Lori Alcala (to Mary Arellano Alcala and Ramiro); and Christopher Arellano (to Daniel and Ramona Arellano). Raymond Torres just missed being part of the Class of 1960 by a single day, having been born Dec. 31, 1959 to Tomasa Arellano Torres and Luis Torres. Jerry Aguilar was born in 1959 as well. Others, missing being part of the Class of 1960, were Eric Holmes who was born Dec. 5, 1958 and Ramona Holmes, born on Oct. 26, 1957 (to Alejandra Arellano Holmes and Roger). Reynaldo "Bear" Arellano and Michael Arellano were born in 1961.

But these children, the third wave of Arellano's and Higaes in the U.S., had already been preceded by several other grandchildren and would be followed by several dozen more, But the effect of being in American for more than 40 years by 1960 were reflected in the family's lifestyle. Unlike their bilingual parents, almost all of the grandchildren of Tomas and Jovita, the third wave of Arellano-Higaes family members in America, grew up speaking only English. Communication with Tomas and Jovita, who still spoke almost exclusively Spanish, was difficult for the grandchildren.

During the late 1950s and 1960s, Tomas moved forward with his own brand of political activism, appearing before the Oakland City Council. After years of failure, he convinced the Council to fly the Mexican flag over City Hall on Cinco de Mayo day in 1961, years before it was fashionable to campaign for civil rights and "ethnic" issues.

"He would never march in a picket line. He would never go to a social demonstration," said Reynaldo Arellano, describing his father's preference for working within the system.

Yet, even as Tomas achieved a measure of public success, his private life was taking a beating. His marriage to Jovita crumbled. In 1962, Tomas and Jovita separated. They never reconciled.

But even as the newest Arellano, Higaes's and Rondero's were being born or entering schools, the eldest members of the family began to die.

Alejandra, the Indian girl who was snatch away by Daniel Arellano, and later married Manuel Higaes, died in 1962, after having spent the last 10 years in a wheelchair. In her final days, Alejandra thrashed from side to side in her bed. Mary [Mary] Avila remembers her mother called Manuel and her children into her room, where she was lying, and said good-bye to each of them. She said her mother appeared ready to die after a hard life.

"She said, 'I am going to die. I am going to my grave where I don't have to see what I don't want to see' " [Mary] Avila said.

"She told me: 'Take care of your brothers,' "[Cora] Aguilar said.

In her final days, Alejandra said she longed to see her lost son, Santiago, one last time. Alejandra eventually dies at Highland Hospital in Oakland, a few days after Mother's Day.

1962, however, was not completely gloomy for the family. The first Arellano-Higaes picnic was held that year at Alum Rock Park in San Jose. Reynaldo Arellano, who organized the first five picnics, said the picnics were held in the memory of his grandmother, Alejandra.

As the decade wore on, the family suffered two other significant losses.

Jovita Arellano dies on March 16, 1966, a year after she cheerfully became a U.S. citizen.

Manuel Higaes, who first agreed to pose as Alejandra's head of household, then became its real one, died in 1967, on a tourist trip to Mexico. He died after disregarding a doctor's recommendation that he not go because his heart might not be able to take the trip. Unlike Alejandra, he had fond memories of Mexico and had yearned to return there for years.

"I'm old and it's the last chance I'll get," Cora Aguilar said, quoting her father's determination to return to Mexico. Manuel left with Mary and Pete Avila. Once in Mexico, they separated as Manuel sought to find a priest he had met at St. Mary's Catholic Church in Oakland. He arrived in a small town en route to the meeting with the priest and accepted an invitation to enjoy music at a local dance hall. He dies suddenly at the dance hall amongst strangers who had no idea who he was. The U.S. Embassy intervened before local authorities could bury him and his body was brought back to the Bay Area for burial.

The Arellano-Higaes family began holding its annual family picnics in 1962. The idea of meeting annually at a picnic had been about a decade old, said Reynaldo Arellano, who organized the first five picnics.

The first was held in 1962 at Alum Rock Park in San Jose. Reynaldo said the picnics were held in the honor of his late grandmother.

But even as the second wave began to have its own children, the exodus out of Oakland, started by Tomas and Jovita in the mid-1950s, continued. Besides San Francisco, family members eventually moved to San Jose, Santa Clara, Sunnyvale, Forestville and Hayward. The suburbanization of the family brought with it new tastes. The days when the Higaes and the Arellano's shared a flat, or lived with a mile of each other, were gone forever. Instead, many members of the family embraced tract houses in suburbia.

Reynaldo Arellano, for instance, smiles and raised his eyebrows when he talked of his move to "gringoland" after being discharged from the Marine Corps and moving to San Jose.

He was very interested in emulating his neighbor's outdoor barbecues of hamburgers and hot dogs. "You mean you don't want beans and tortillas?" he playfully asked late last month, echoing how he might have felt when he returned in 1952 after returning from a stint in the Marine Corps.

The Arellano-Higaes diffusion of the genes is still evident to this day as family members now live from Alaska where Ramona Holmes lives to South Carolina where Raymond Torres lives with his family. Both are great-grandchildren of Alejandra and Daniel.

With the continued growth and dispersion of the family, it became harder for members of these second-generation Americans to stay in touch. The significance of the lives of Daniel Arellano, Manuel Higaes and Alejandra Higaes, if they arose in conversation, was sometimes lost on a generation that listened to speeches at the Annual Family Picnic spoken in Spanish by Tomas Arellano translated into English. The family's second generation of Americans, for instance, would have had an easier time discussing football, popular music or cars than they would have discussing how their family arrived in the United States.

In the 1970s, the second wave of Arellano-Higaes family in the U.S. also experienced the same social upheaval that rocked the rest of the U.S. when several members of the family got divorced. Even so, the family continued to grow as many members of the third wave were busy marrying, working and attending and graduating from college in the 1970s and the 1980s. The music that Tomas Arellano had given way to popular culture. Cousin Daniel Gregory Arellano is remembered for his eight-track tape of an obscure Beach Boys concert. Cousin Paul Limon once took disco dancing lessons during the "Saturday Night Fever" craze. Rosanna Alcala Lee is recalled for playing hard rock "Derek and the Dominoes" while attending St. Mary's College for her game Uncle Daniel Refugio Arellano, who himself is known for his love of the Moody Blues. This Daniel Arellano, former Marine, also marched against the Vietnam War and on another occasion delivered clothes to striking United Farm Workers in Delano. Raymond Torres did not join the Marine Corps of his uncles, but the Peace Corps. By this time, intermarriage with non-Mexicans had become routine.

Yes, as the years went by, the family continued to suffer losses.

In February 1975, Johnny Rondero, who along with his brother Peter, was whisked away to the U.S. by their mother Jovita Arellano, died at 50. He was a newsstand dealer who had been living at San Francisco's Henry Hotel.

On May 31, 1982, Tomas Arellano died. Tomas, who shaped his family's history by seeking out Higaes and later taking his birth name back, never became a U.S. citizen, saying to do so would mean "stepping on his (Mexican) flag." In his final years, he became a Baptist and began to quote the Bible freely, outraging some who remembered a different Tomas in his younger years. Today, he is buried next to Jovita St. Mary's Cemetery in Oakland.

In recent years, some of his brother and sisters have also died. Nellie and Joe both died in 1995. Henry died. Lupe died in 1993. Joe died in 1995, only months after Nellie. Today, only three of Alejandra's children still survive, Cora Aguilar, Mary Avila and Helen Anaya.

It is now 2000 and the surviving sons and daughters of Alejandra and either Daniel or Manuel are in the 70s and 80s. Even their grandchildren are mostly middle-aged. The memories betray their ages. The Arellano home at 738 Adeline Street in Oakland was razed years ago and the West Oakland Health Center sits on the home's former site. Tompkins School was torn down. St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Oakland, where Tomas and Jovita married in 1947, burned in either 1963 or 1964. Polytechnic High school has closed. The property Mario and Nellie Ybarra bought in the late 1940s was seized by the City of Oakland in the late 1970s. A multi-layer parking lot was erected in its place. The 17th Street home where Hilda Diaz lived, at the time Reynaldo Arellano began courting her, has been razed. Its former site is now the middle of Warren Freeway.

One institution that has endured is the annual Family Picnic, even if not every family attends every year. The family itself is so large that cousins often lose track of other cousins' children, or even spouses. The memories of each generation are different. Some remember Alejandra, Daniel and Manuel. Others might remember only Tomas or Jovita. Still others might have remembered only the Family Picnics of the 70s, 80s or 90s. But they are united by the same history and same sense of pride in the family's accomplishments.

Reynaldo Arellano mentioned this pride earlier this year when he accepted a civic award. He said that his brother and sister have produced 16 college graduates, two with a doctoral degree, one a masters and a lawyer. Everyone else was working and contributing to society, he said.

“In accepting the award, I was filled with pride and a deep sense of nostalgic love and respect for my mother, Jovita Arellano, and my father, Tomas Arellano,” Reynaldo hold a gathering. “Even though they had a limited elementary school education in their Mexican homeland, they loved their children enough to teach us respect and appreciation for education...So, for my parents, for my children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews, I recognize the sacrifice, the hope for the future and the hard work, as well as the gratifying rewards, education, and our United States of America have blessed our family.”

#### THINGS TO REMEMBER WHEN SOME DEVELOPS THE ARELLANO-HIGARES VERSION OF TRIVIAL PURSUIT:

OUR INDIAN ROOTS: The Tarahumara tribe in Mexico, from which the family descends, is noted for developing expert farmers and exceptionally fast runners. In recent years, they have suffered a terrible famine. More information about the tribe can be found at the following web sites:

- [www.canyontravel.com](http://www.canyontravel.com)
- [www.kalmbach.com/trains](http://www.kalmbach.com/trains)
- <http://gomexico.about.com/travel/gomexico/musbl96.html>
- [Archive/Feb97/copperCanyon.html](http://Archive/Feb97/copperCanyon.html).

POTENTIAL FAMILY AUTO FAMILY HISTORY TOUR: The Higare's on Third Street, between Jefferson and Clay Streets. They then moved to 626 Jefferson Street, across from the old St. Mary's School. The Arellano's lived on Alice Street, Fifth Street near Jefferson Street, Fifth Street near Linden, Third Street near Jefferson Street, 535 Grove Street, 972 Eighth Street, 804 Filbert Street and 738 Adeline Street.

BURIAL PLACES: Oakland's St. Mary's Cemetery is the final resting place for Manuel and Alejandra Higare as well as Tomas and Jovita Arellano. It also has the remains of Josefina Arellano, daughter of Tomas and Jovita.

LOVE STORY: Cora Aguilar said that she and her husband, Joe, first eloped to Tijuana only to find that a judge would not marry them because they were not Mexican citizens. The justice of the peace urged Cora, then 15, to return to school. They were then married by a justice of the peace in Oakland. [Cora] Aguilar recalls being asked if she was pregnant at the time. Knowing that the odds that she would be married would improve if she said she was pregnant, Cora said she was when she wasn't. Even after they were married, she and Joe lived with their respective families for three months! The couple later had a formal Catholic wedding for Alejandra's sake, Cora said. Joe and Cora have been married for 57 years.

MONEY FOR NOTHING AND THE HAIRCUT IS FREE: No one has to tell Uncle Rey how hard it is to convince people you can get something for nothing. In the late 1940s, he was prepared to take his barber licensing examination in San Diego. However, the exam called for him to give a haircut and shave to someone, then pay them for their experience. Uncle Rey spent a lot of time on the streets of San Diego, striking up conversations with strangers and offering to give away free haircuts. People looked at him with askance and walked away. He met a couple in a public park and explained his situation. He even tossed in a free diner and direction to the barber's chair. (I do not understand the previous sentence). It worked!

THE SURGEON GENERAL COULD NOT HAVE SAID IT BETTER: Tomas Arellano is still remembered for saying, “Si Dios quiere que fumamos, nos fuera dando una chimina arriba de la cabeza.” Or, “If God intended us to smoke He would have put chimneys on our heads.”

THE ERA BEFORE BILINGUAL EDUCATION: In the Oakland School system, Peter Rondero remembers doing well in the 8th grade until a fateful spelling test. Then a Miss Zangker asked him how to spell local. After Peter responded “L-O-C-O,” he found himself in the 5th grade the next day. From here on, I did well, even if I was the oldest kid in the fifth grade,” he writes.

O DANNY BOY: The original Daniel Arellano isn't remembered for being lighthearted, but even he might smile if he know that there are not fewer than three Daniel Arellano's walking around in 2000. One is Daniel Refugio Arellano, son of Tomas and Jovita; the second is Daniel Gregory Arellano, the son of Raul and Loretta Arellano; the third is little Daniel Gilbert Arellano, the two-year-old diaper-wearing son of my wife, Christine and I (Christopher Arellano).

AIN'T NO MOUNTAIN HIGH ENOUGH NO PICTURE BIG ENOUGH: Dolores Torres Ferris might have set the standard for being a true fan of popular musicians as a teen. Dolores somehow persuaded her parents to hang three large pictures of Diana Ross and the Supremes in the family hallway.

DOUG CUNNINGHAM SWEEPS FELT FOR A TWO YARD LOSS: It wasn't the Family picnic, but for a few seasons in the late 1960s, brothers Raul and Daniel Arellano, their children, and cousins such as Louis and Raymond Torres, showed up faithfully to watch the 49ers play in the late 1960s at the old Kezar Stadium. The family members met in the general admission section most Sundays to cheer on a team that had questionable talent most of the time. End zone seats were \$3.50 for adults and .50 cents for children then. Cousin Robert Arellano watched the games for free from the rooftop of a nearby house that overlooked the stadium. These were the days of John Brodie, Matt Hazeltine, Roland Lakes, Herman Weidemyer, Jimmy Johnson and Gene Washington. In another sign of how much time has passed, one of those 49ers of that era, Dave Wilcox, was elected to the football Hall of Fame by the old-timers committee! Ouch!

YOU WILL THE GRAND PRIZE IF YOU REMEMBER THE NAME OF THE HORSE AND COW WHO PRANCE AND GRAZED AROUND "HOLMES HILL" (WHEN IT WAS KNOWN AS 5980 VAN KEPPEL ROAD IN SUMMER OF 1970: Dolly and Moo. Of course, right?

Moooooo...

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Written by Chris Arellano with information compiled by Cora Aguilar, Helen Anaya, Jess Anaya, Catherine Arellano, Daniel Arellano, Hilda Arellano, Reynaldo Arellano, Raul Arellano, Mary Avila, Alejandra "Allie" Arellano Holmes, Peter Rondero and Tomasa Arellano Torres.

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