

From El Triunfo to Mexicali

A Letter From Rey Arellano to Lynn Holmes

November 3, 2004

...I have often thought of my grandmother [Alejandra Arellano] leaving Mexico with her 6 children. Looking at the dates posted: – 1917 –



Tomas 13 yrs old
Henry 11 yrs old
Santiago 9 yrs old
Maria 5 yrs old
Nellie 2 yrs old
Helen 1 yr old

and she [Alejandra] starts out north – 150 miles to the border crossing at El Paso Texas, United States. How much money could she have had? Mode of travel – walk, hitch a ride on a wagon for a short distance. No one spoke English. Spanish could have been prominent in a border town, but what a challenging experience.

On my mother's [Jovita] side, my grandmother Josepha married Estaquio Romero and had at least 5 children. The Mexican government (at about the same time 1917) was granting homestead acreage if families relocated from southern Baja California to Mexicali on the border to USA to stop the encroachment by U.S. settlers. So, they boarded a sail schooner and were to sail north – a trip of a few days. A violent storm sent them out to sea for days and weeks. The ship was loaded with families, children, and infants. Soon they ran out of food and water and many perished. But the Romero's all made it.

My first trip to Mexicali had to be in the late [19]30's. I had to be under 10 years old. I stayed in Grandma's [Josepha's] house – an adobe brick shack with a roof, dirt floor and a "ramada" for the kitchen – an area with rock and grill for a stove. Water came from the canal. No electricity. Kerosene lanterns to find a place to sleep on the floor.

But my memories are happy, almost festive. Grandma Josepha was always happy to see us. She would wring a chickens neck and have môle, ready in no time flat. Fresh corn tortillas, frijoles and "um...um...um" chow down. I picked cotton a few times while in Mexicali but my mother [Jovita] could out pick me every time.

When Grandma Josepha died, people came to the ranch, the adobe house, for the wake. They came by horseback, by horse drawn wagons and very few cars. The next day there was a long procession to the cemetery. The men of the family would dig the graves. I remember because as I watched, my uncle Guadalupe Romero tossed me a shovel and said, "you are old enough to help bury your grandmother." Taking the shovel, I jumped into the grave we were digging and went to work. I remember that due to the sandy soil we had to dig like a bowl  not  because the sides kept sliding down.

For a 16 year old, Americano this was quite a culture shock. ...



Hilda & Rey Arellano & Lynn Holmes
at Korbel Winery 2003

