

No Dogs or Mexicans

By Robert G. Kahl

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My mother was born in Hayden, Arizona in 1926. When she was a child there, a sign on the public pool in Hayden was posted that said, “No Dogs or Mexicans Allowed.” When they wrote “Mexicans,” they meant Americans of Hispanic descent. The sign was not entirely accurate. Hispanics were allowed to swim in the public pool – but only one day out of the week. The pool water was not chlorinated at the time. Due to concerns about polio and other potential diseases, the water was changed in the pool each week. The town would allow the Hispanics to swim in the pool the day before the water was changed – when the risk of contracting disease from the water was highest.

The Gadsden purchase of 1854 transferred land from Mexico to the United States in what is now southern Arizona and southwest New Mexico. In this land area that had been part of Mexico, all residents were given full US citizenship. If you were a Hispanic resident, however, you were still called “Mexican” and the terminology prevailed for decades.

When I was about ten years old, I once asked my mother, “What are we?” I had heard the terms Mexican, Mexican-American, Hispanic, Hispanic-American. “And what’s Chicano?” My mother’s response was loud and clear, “We’re American, Damn It!” I would realize decades later why this hit a nerve with her. Sometimes my mother would say that “we’re Basque” – a region of northern Spain and southern France where many people would prefer to be independent of both Spain and France. But usually, we were just “American.”

I use the term Hispanic as it is defined broadly in Wikipedia to mean any people, nations, and cultures that have a historical link to the Spanish language or the country of Spain. This includes Mexico, Central America, South America, the Caribbean islands, Spain, and other countries that were once under the colonial control of Spain. The Collins English Dictionary defines Hispanic as “a citizen of the United States of America who originally came from Latin America, or whose family originally came from Latin America.” Some people will disagree with the Collins definition that starts with “a citizen of the United States of America” but to avoid the hyphenated version “Hispanic-American,” I will simply use “Hispanic.”

Some people think the term “Hispanic” is used to claim European (or white) heritage and exclude Native American heritage. That is not my intention. According to my DNA results from Ancestry.com, my ethnicity estimate is 16% Native American (Sonora desert region), 9% Spain, 7% French, 68% northwestern Europe (my father’s ancestors were primarily German and English), 2% Middle East, and 2% Native American (Andes region). Like most people who get their DNA results, I found that my ethnic background was somewhat different from what I

expected. Ancestry claims that they test specifically for the Basque region but that did not show up in my DNA results.

The 16% "Native American – Sonora Desert" region is consistent with comments by my Uncle Abe and my mother's first cousin Maggie who said we had Opata Indian ancestry. According to Wikipedia, the Opata people were three indigenous groups in what is now the state of Sonora, Mexico. Population estimates range between 20,000 and 70,000 at the time of their first contact with the Spanish in the mid-16th century. By 1764, the population estimate for the Opata had declined to 6,000. There were military conflicts with the armies of Spain, Mexico, and the Apache Indians that took a heavy toll. By 1800, many of the Opata people were Christian, spoke Spanish, and were under the rule of the Spanish Government. Some sources indicate that as an identifiable ethnic group, the Opata are now extinct or nearly extinct.

Neither my grandmother nor my mother spoke much about discrimination and how it affected them. This aspect of my family's history was revealed to me more fully in the last few years of my mother's life or after her death.

After my mother died, I was going through her papers (letters among family members, etc.) and found my mother's birth certificate with a note on the front of the envelope that contained it. My mother had written, "Get this corrected." When I looked at it, I saw the reason for her note. There were boxes for the "Color or race" of each parent and both had "Mex" written in the boxes by the doctor who signed the birth certificate. As my Uncle Gilbert pointed out more than once, "Mexican" is not a race, and it certainly isn't a color.

I also found my grandmother's journal among my mother's papers. There was one newspaper clipping near the back of the journal. It was titled "Court Smashes Racial Barrier" and was dated November 22, 1950. Porfirio Gonzalez, a Tolleson, Arizona farmer and other parents of "Spanish American" descent had initiated the lawsuit. They were supported by the "Alianza Hispano Americano (Alliance of Hispanic Americans), a fraternal benefit society of some 15,000 to 20,000 Spanish American residents of five states."

The defendants in the Tolleson case, Ross L. Sheely, school official, and the Board of Trustees of the Tolleson School District, defended their action on the grounds that "children of Mexican descent often are unable to speak English fluently and retard an entire class if not placed in a separate school." The students that he was referring to were not Mexican immigrants but American children of Hispanic descent. Federal Judge Dave W. Ling issued a decision in favor of the plaintiffs, declaring that the school district policy was "discriminatory" and ordered an end to the segregation. After the decision, Assistant Maricopa County Attorney R.H. Renaud, who helped defend Tolleson School District, insisted that the decision would not affect existing state laws segregating "Negro" students. Some people never give up.

According to my mother's first cousin, Flora, my mother was always a "fighter." Flora was younger than my mother and recalled that the first day that she arrived at elementary school to start first grade, my mother was in a fight on the playground with "one of the Kelly girls." Flora

recounted, “they were punching with their fists and pulling hair, and everything.” Yes, my mother was a fighter.

My Aunt Ofie (short for Ophelia), said that my mother, Aurelia or Arlie, wanted to join the Girls Scouts when she was in elementary school in Hayden and was told that she couldn’t because she was “Mexican.” Aunt Ofie said, “Oh, your mother made a big fuss. The principal, teachers, and Momma (my grandmother) all got involved.” School officials decided to compromise and created a second Girl Scout troop in the small town of Hayden. So, they had one troop for the white girls and another for the Hispanic girls. The new Girl Scouts troop in town was a small victory for the Hispanic residents of Hayden but this caused my grandmother, Jennie Lorona, to question other aspects of life in Hayden.

My grandmother’s journal has sporadic entries, but she did write when she felt something was significant. She had the following entry in her journal, dated September 7, 1937:

A commotion among the Mex. colony is started and formulates into a boycott against the theater, over the cause of the lady that is humiliated in the theater under its rule of segregating the Mexican race.

After three nights of boycotting and observing, the authorities are afraid that picketing trouble may lead to further disturbance, a committee is formed to see that any demand wishes shall be presented and made in a peaceful manner.

The judge is informed of circumstances and we are assured the company (*Nevada Consolidated Copper Corp.*) has nothing to do with theater rules or regulations or management besides the property ownership as the theater manager wants us to believe. A mass meeting is held of the Mexican colony and the problem is presented, explained and decided that a smaller selected group may arrange a way to protest said rule of segregation of the Mexicans for no other reason than because they are of Mexican race (*my grandmother underlined these words*).

According to my Aunt Ofie, my grandmother was one of the organizers of the boycott by the Hispanic residents to protest the segregated seating in the theater. Most people in the town were Hispanic and the theater operator quickly relented. After the boycott was over, my aunt said most kids and adults sat on the same sides as before, but it became a matter of choice rather than a requirement.

The town of Hayden was founded in 1909 as a wholly owned entity of the Ray Consolidated Copper Company, part of the Guggenheim corporate group which also held the controlling interest in the American Smelting and Refining Company (ASARCO). In 1912, the company completed construction of the Hayden smelter and began processing ore from the Ray copper mine near Kearny, 17 miles away. The Ray mine was eventually purchased by Kennecott

Copper in 1933. The purchase also included the town of Hayden. In 1954, Kennecott sold the town of Hayden to the John W. Galbreath Development Corporation. Hayden was subsequently incorporated as an independent municipality in 1958. In 1958, Kennecott began operating a second smelter in Hayden which was closed in 1982. In 1986, ASARCO (now ASARCO Grupo Mexico) purchased the Ray mine and Hayden smelter facilities from Kennecott Copper.

There was an article in the Hayden High School paper dated April 16, 2002 that described Hayden in its glory days (1940s). Of course, when the author wrote "rich," they meant relatively rich for an Arizona smelter town.

Hayden life during its glory days was a beautiful mining town torn between two races. One race, which was richer than the other were called the Anglos, or the white people, the others were Mexicans. Hayden was the rich part of town; it contained a strip full of buildings, including a theater. San Miguel and San Pedro were the poor part of town where all the Mexicans lived... Presently, there are few Anglos living in the area, almost all the buildings are dead, yet each holds stories of the Mexicans' troubles with racism during Hayden's glory years.

The original copper smelter in Hayden operated with ethnic distinctions according to several members of my family and published sources. Although the white and Hispanic workers could be on the same working crew doing the same work, the white workers received a higher wage. The highest level of employment that a Hispanic worker could get was as a foreman. All the people in administration or management were white.

In an unpublished essay about growing up in Hayden, J.G. Martinez describes the employee housing provided to workers by the company.

The housing for Anglo employees was built by the company or under contract in subdivisions that were gridded, most streets paved and included some sidewalks. The houses were well designed with modern conveniences available in the 20's and 30's. They had indoor plumbing, furnaces, and most yards were landscaped. These houses were rented to Anglo employees at very reasonable fees, but they went with the job. If an employee quit or was fired, he lost use of the house.

The housing in San Pedro was quite different in that employees were given a strip of land approximately 50 feet in width and the only thing the company furnished was a water faucet somewhere on the lot. These leases, including water, were also very reasonable.

The houses in San Pedro were simpler in nature as there wasn't much incentive to spend money on materials and labor for housing on land that was leased.

My grandfather, Abraham Lorona, started working at the smelter in Hayden in May 1922. His oldest son, my Uncle Abe, started work there in 1937. During the early years of the Depression, the Hayden smelter shut down for awhile. Like many people during the Depression, my grandfather travelled to find work elsewhere and the rest of the family would soon follow. My Aunt Ofie said my grandmother was good at hiding any concerns about employment and moving. When it was time for the family to move, my grandmother made it sound like a grand adventure for her children.

In August 1933, the family moved to Mission Valley on the east side of San Diego and my grandfather worked there in the agricultural fields. They were not there long. By January 1934, they had moved back to Hayden and my grandfather found work as a miner in Copper Creek.

Copper Creek is an isolated mining camp about 30 miles to the southeast of Hayden. A large-scale mine never developed there but there has been much prospecting in the area over the years. Although my grandfather started work there in February 1934, the rest of the family did not move there until June 1935. My grandfather built two houses in Copper Creek. The first one was rudimentary with a dirt floor and a canvas roof. The second one was more like a real house.

My grandmother prepared meals for the miners who worked there without their families. My grandmother would also drive to Tucson for food provisions and soda pop for resale in the mining camp. My aunt said that they would occasionally have a community dance. In Copper Creek, people behaved better than the dance hall in Hayden where the dances usually ended with a fight among some of the attendees who had been drinking.

My mother and Aunt Ofie often spoke about their years in Copper Creek in glowing terms. It was higher in elevation there, approximately 4,000 feet. So, it was cooler than Hayden or Tucson, had more vegetation, and the air was clear. Copper Creek is also at the base of the Galiuro Mountains which have peaks as high as 7,663 feet. My Uncle Abe was a teenager at the time and hiked extensively in the surrounding area, as did some of the younger children.

In October 1936, the copper smelter in Hayden had restarted operations and my grandfather went to work in the mill at the smelter. In February 1937, the family moved back to Hayden.

My Uncle Abe and my Uncle Ray (Aunt Ofie's husband) both worked at the Kennecott smelter. My Uncle Abe went to work in the smelter in 1937, joined the Army during World War II, then eventually went back to work at the smelter after the war. He remained there until he retired. Both my uncles built their own houses within a mile of Hayden in the town of Winkelman on adjacent lots.

Working in a copper smelter is dangerous work. At the end of my sophomore year in college (1974), my uncles talked to somebody at the Asarco smelter in Hayden and I was hired there for the summer. The summer workers performed a variety of maintenance jobs or just filled in where necessary. For a few days, a group of us were removing the bricks from one of the

furnaces to be relined and we literally had to run several times to avoid molten copper that was splashing in our direction. I was told by an employee that about two months before I started, one of the crane operators died from an accident. The crane operator began to pour molten copper into a mold that had some water at the bottom and the molten copper exploded upward and broke through the glass cage that surrounded his seat and controls. He died a few hours later at the hospital. After my first week at the smelter, my Uncle Ray said to me, "Well, now you know why you're going to college."

After a few weeks of maintenance duties, I was assigned to run a long set of conveyor belts that fed the first set of ovens to remove moisture from the ore. I would go home afterwards and find the pores of my skin filled with black dust that I would try to dislodge with a hot shower.

After more than 100 years of operation, the copper smelter has left a legacy of environmental contaminants for the residents of Hayden, Winkelman, and surrounding areas. The EPA declared the ASARCO facility, former Kennecott smelter, and all tailings facilities as a superfund site after an Arizona Department of Health Services assessment in 2002. Elevated levels of arsenic, lead, and copper were found in the air, soil, and groundwater. Between 2008 and 2009, soil was excavated and replaced in about 250 properties in Hayden and Winkelman. The site continues to be monitored by the EPA, ASARCO, and the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality.

My grandfather was involved in the organization of a labor union at the Hayden smelter. The primary goal of the Hispanic labor union members in those years was to get rid of the dual pay scale so that Hispanics would be paid the same wage for doing the same work as whites. Things finally began to change after World War II when military veterans returned to Hayden after the war. After putting their lives on the line, they weren't willing to be treated as second-class citizens in the workplace any longer.

My Aunt Ofie said that the management of the smelter did not appreciate my grandfather being involved as one of the leaders of the labor union, but they were afraid of the potential backlash if they fired him. So, they gave him a "promotion" and showed him to his new office – with no work to do. My grandfather said that he couldn't just sit around all day and quit his job in April 1944. The family moved to Tucson and my grandfather soon found work with the Southern Pacific Railroad Company.

My mother described the move to Tucson from Hayden as traumatic for my grandfather. He had many family members near Hayden, and he was happiest when he had horses. Prior to the move, he took his horses to his uncle's ranch on the other side of the Gila River. My mother started her senior year at Tucson High School and graduated there. She missed her former high school friends and relatives in Hayden. But she also did not like trading the large house in Hayden with a big shady garden, chicken coop, and barn for a house in Tucson that was on a corner with pavement and noisy traffic.

When my mother spoke about Hayden, she did not talk about the ethnic discrimination in the town, the schools, the theater, and the public pool. She spoke (or wrote) about her relatives, horse riding, the pomegranate and palm trees, the family piano, their donkey that died from a rattlesnake bite, and their Dalmatian dog that died from poisoning.

Ethnic discrimination in Tucson existed but it was not as pervasive as it was in Hayden. My grandmother became active in the Tucson Hispanic community as an organizer and was proud to be the “Jefe de Zona” (Chief of the Zone) of Alianza Hispano-Americana (Alliance of Hispanic-America) – the organization that provided legal support for the plaintiff in the Tolleson case described earlier. My grandmother made sure that all five of her children had membership cards for the organization.

A few times, I wondered why my grandparents got divorced. In the late 1940s, divorce among Catholic Hispanic families was very rare. When I asked my Aunt Ofie, she said, “Oh, I don’t know. Your grandfather wanted to go find himself.” Another family member offered an explanation that made more sense to me.

According to my mother’s first cousin Flora, my grandmother’s political involvement led to arguments with my grandfather. Flora said, “I loved my Uncle Abe, but he had a temper. He never hit anyone, but he had a temper and was angry about your grandmother’s political involvement and her time away from home to meet with other people. He started yelling at her one day. Your Aunt Ofie stepped in and told him to get out of the house. He did, but he felt humiliated and didn’t go back.” So, they got divorced.

My mother attended the University of Arizona and had a boyfriend for nearly two years before they were married shortly after he graduated from the University of Arizona’s College of Engineering. I never knew about my mother’s first marriage to Alejandro (Alex) Kanaan in 1948 until she moved to an assisted living home and I was going through her papers to reduce documents that she had saved. I found the marriage certificate and the judicial annulment papers dated about one year later.

I wondered why neither my mother nor anyone else in the family had ever mentioned this to me. So, I asked my mother about it. She said, “Oh, we weren’t married long, and I told him that I was glad he was leaving.” Her new husband Alex was from the Philippines and his family was of Armenian descent. A day or two after they were married, Alex flew back to the Philippines and apparently didn’t return to the US. I asked my mother why she got married if she felt that way. She replied, “Well, my mother and Ofie wanted me to.”

After my mother died, I was in Los Angeles and visited her cousin Flora. I mentioned what my mother told me about her first marriage and Flora said, “Oh, that’s not what happened. Sit down. I’ll tell you what happened.” Flora told me a different version. According to Flora, Alex flew back to the Philippines and shortly thereafter, my mother received a letter from her new mother-in-law that said, “You’ll never be accepted in this family because you’re Mexican.” Perhaps my mother never talked about it because it was just too humiliating for her.

The ethnic discrimination against Hispanics of the 1920s to 1960s in Arizona was not as vicious as the discrimination against blacks in the South, but it was pervasive. It was probably worse in towns like Hayden because the policies were initiated by a corporation that owned nearly everything that was around. Hispanics were second class citizens. While we often think of the impact of discrimination as being economic in nature, it impacts families in many other ways.

Hayden and Winkelman Today

Ironically, the copper mine in Ray and all smelter facilities in Hayden are now owned by ASARCO, which became a wholly owned subsidiary of Grupo Mexico in 1999. In Hayden, ASARCO employs just over 600 people according to the latest statistics available from the company. However, most of the workers live elsewhere and commute to Hayden.

The towns of Hayden and Winkelman are now nearly ghost towns. Many businesses have closed and the buildings that hosted them appear abandoned. It is estimated that there are about 50 families that live in each town. The two towns once had a bank, a pharmacy, a theater, a bowling alley, a bar, and a few eating establishments. Not anymore.

In Hayden, the public pool is now closed the entire year, even though the air temperature usually exceeds 100 degrees during the summer months. The Hayden Public Library is closing its doors at the end of July. There is still a senior center and police department that are operating.

The Gila River flowed over its banks in 1983 and 1993, which caused flooding in the lower section of Winkelman. The Coolidge Dam, further up the Gila River, was in danger of failing during the 1993 flood and the federal government paid people to move afterwards.

Winkelman now has one restaurant off the main highway and a general merchandise store called Giorsetti's that is still in operation. The two schools (K-8 and high school) for the Hayden-Winkelman Unified School District are still in operation, although the number of students has declined from 589 in 2001 to 246 in fiscal year 2018. Some of the students come from areas outside the two towns.

References:

Much of this account is based upon oral accounts told to me by various family members. It is also based upon documents such as the journals of my mother and grandmother, my mother's birth certificate, and other family documents.

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Photos



1920c Abran & Jennie Lorona



1933c Children of Abran & Jennie Lorona - Aurelia, Ophelia, Edilia, Gilbert - and Sarah Bernal



1933c City Terrace, CA. Front: Flora Trujillo. 2nd Row: Gilbert, Aurelia, Ophelia Lorona, Alfred Lorona Jr.,
3rd Row: Robert Figueroa, Edilia Lorona, Art Moreno, Abraham Lorona, Maggie (Betty) Steuckert.



1936-1 Copper Creek, AZ. Gilbert Lorona and Flora Trujillo



1941-8 Hayden, AZ. Aurelia and Ophelia Lorona.



1942 Hayden, AZ. Abran Lorona and horse Blue.



1943-11 Hayden, AZ. Cecilia Rodriguez, Leonor Flores, Alex Bernal, Ophelia and Aurelia Lorona.



1945 Tucson, AZ. Abran Lorona and daughter Aurelia Lorona at 47 W 5th Street.



1950c Arizona. Flora Trujillo Ochoa