

84 of 87

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# People You Should Know



Bertha Moraga . . .

## She Lives on the Sunny Side

By JOHN McCORMICK

EVER MEET A GAL who doesn't know how many great grandchildren she has? Ever meet the woman whose father carried the mail between Ventura and Los Angeles on horseback before there were any roads? How about a woman who met her husband in the first dance hall Oxnard ever had?

You really should meet Bertha Moraga, one of the grandest women this county has ever produced. She'll be 87 the last day of next month, but you'd think she was in her early 20s the way she carries herself. With sparkling eyes and an alert mind, she is a bundle of mental and physical energy — and you'll darn-well believe she will live forever.

If we were to list the names of her children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren

and great-great-grandchildren it would probably fill most of this magazine. If they were all gathered under one roof they'd probably fill the Oxnard Auditorium. A couple of years ago some of her children got together in an attempt to figure out just what the head-count of the family actually totaled.

"We got to 140 great-grandchildren," son Rudy said. "But we had to give up, we couldn't count them all."

"AH, WHO CARES?" It really doesn't make any difference," Bertha added. And that pretty well sums up Bertha's philosophy.

Born on the Camulos Ranch in Piru April 30, 1883, she was the first of eight children of Frank and Petra Moreno. Petra's maiden name was Fulmore and she was born on

the north hillside of Piru. "My grandfather on my mother's side was German," Bertha said. "You see, when the Indians left Piru, the Germans and the Spanish had taken over I guess that's how my grandparents got together."

Speaking of her grandmother Fulmore, she said, "She died the day after she gave birth to my mother, so all the kids were raised by the other grandparents — the Dominguezes — who were large land-holders in the Piru area."

On her father's side, the grandfather, Frank Moreno Sr., owned a feed store in Los Angeles. However he moved to Ventura and opened another feed store on Meta Street near the present railroad tracks. "Besides selling feed, he rented horses, saddles, buggies and the like," Bertha said.

... Bertha's father grew up in Ventura and

*I'll keep with in a good picture of her & look pretty*

*1911 June 20 1 11*

PAGE THREE



Bertha at 17 was going steady with Tony Moraga, but the courtship carried for five years before they married.

Tony Moraga at 18 was a hard-working cowboy and ranch hand for Louie Maulhardt.

## Husband Drove Stage Between Port Hueneme and Montalvo

became a rider for the U. S. mails, riding horseback to deliver and pick up mail in Los Angeles.

"He carried a big long rifle stuffed down through a holster in his saddle," she said. "And he packed a couple of six-shooters on his belt."

"IN THOSE DAYS of no roads, he followed the Santa Clara River to the Piru area where he crossed it. Of course, during the rainy season it got pretty dangerous riding horseback across the river. Some men drowned during those years."

Shortly after Frank and Petra had Bertha, they moved to Santa Paula. However Frank died when Bertha had just become a teen-ager. She had to go to work in the citrus packing house to help support the family. It was the first packing house in Santa Paula, owned by Nathan Blanchard, and she said she will always remember the long hours — going to work at 7-a.m. and many times not getting off until 11 p.m. "But, what the heck, when you're only 14 you are young and healthy and can stand it," she said.

It was the turn of the century, Sept. 16, 1900, a day of celebration for the Mexican people — for them to enjoy Mexico's Independence Day. Bertha met a husky young man by the name of Tony Moraga. Their meeting was at the first dance hall in the new city of Oxnard. Of course the town didn't incorporate until 1903. It seemed to be love at first sight for the young couple, and it wasn't too long before Tony proposed. However, Bertha had to refuse because of working to help support her family. In fact, it was five years later that they wed.

In that period from when she first met Tony until the wedding, her mother had started entertaining a local barber in Piru. His wife had died and he was left alone to raise some children.

"She liked this barber, and I thought

to myself — if she marries him I'm going to get out of here. I'll go marry Tony," she commented. It sounded as though she didn't like her mother's selection for a new husband. Not the case, however. "Haircuts were only twenty-five cents," she said, "so how could the poor guy support his own kids, my mother, and the eight of us? I figured I wasn't going to keep working to help pay for that gang." Bertha said Louis Gutierrez, the barber, did eventually marry her mother. "He was a very fine man, kind to all of us kids."

**BERTHA MARRIED** Tony Moraga at the Ventura County courthouse in 1905. Shortly after, she became ill and was taken to the first hospital in Oxnard.

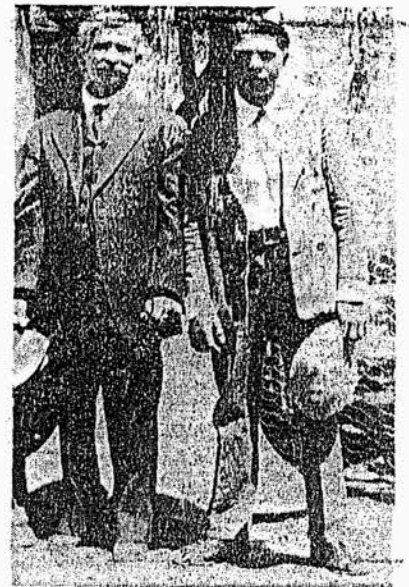
"Dr. Livingston — I don't remember his first name — made a hospital of his office. It was located where the rear parking lot of the Edison Company in Oxnard is at the present time," she recalled. "It was a two-story building with several rooms, but only one nurse."

"Tony thought maybe we should be married by a priest so we got married again in that hospital. Dr. Livingston and the nurse stood up for us."

Tony Moraga was born on his parents' ranch in El Rio. It covered the property where the new Esplanade was recently built in the Wagon Wheel area. When he was 14 he drove a two-horse stage between Hueneme and the railroad depot at Montalvo. In those days there was no railroad through Oxnard. The coast route of the Southern Pacific ran from L.A. to Saugus with a cutoff through the Santa Clara River Valley to Montalvo and then on up the coast to San Francisco.

One of the difficult chores for young Tony was fording the Santa Clara River during the rainy season, since his stage coach driving was long before a bridge was built.

"ONE DAY A TRAIN hit the stage,



Louie Gutierrez, the gentleman on the left, was a Piru barber who became Bertha's stepfather shortly after the turn of the century. His son is unidentified.

killing one of the horses and breaking Tony's arm," Bertha said. "His father whipped him for it, not knowing that it was not Tony's fault. It made Tony mad and he ran away. He went to Louie Maulhardt's ranch. Tony went to work for Louie and stayed on the job for 25 years."

Tony and Bertha made their home in a small frame house located across Highway 101 from the present Esplanade. Although Tony died in 1950 of cancer, Bertha still lives in it today.

In the early days of their marriage, El Rio was a bustling little community centered

# Sold Esplanade Land for \$1 Per Acre

by an intersection that was bordered on the southeast side by Simon Cohn's general merchandise store. The intersection was that of the highway to Los Angeles and the road to Oxnard or Satcoy.

When the bridge across the Santa Clara River was built about 1906, the road from Ventura swung off the bridge on the south side and through El Rio just as it is today. There was no Highway 1 cutting through the Wagon Wheel area. As the automobile became popular, drivers coming from Ventura would drive into the center of El Rio and then turn right at the main intersection and go west until they crossed the railroad tracks before turning south again to go to Oxnard.

**SIMON COHN'S STORE** was a mecca for all the farmers, farmhands, cowboys and sugar factory workers. Farmers dealt with old Simon on long-term credit plans. They charged all of their food, clothing and supplies on an annual basis. It was not a case of paying the bill every month. It was more "I'll pay you when the crop is harvested, shipped and sold." He was as much a banker as a merchandiser. And farm workers and their families dealt much the same way with Cohn because paydays were not always once a month from the farmer.

When the present 101 Freeway was built, the old intersection of El Rio was wiped out. Both the freeway and the on and off-ramps now encircle what was the business center of that community.

Tony and Bertha were parents of 13 children, including one set of twins. Only six are still living today. They are: Mrs. Freda Martinez of El Rio; Mrs. Eva Merrill of Gardena; Mrs. Evelyn Lopez, who lives next door to Bertha; Mrs. Bellah Davis of Oxnard; Tony Moraga of Oxnard and Rudy



Willie Donlon shot this picture in 1906. From left are Ray Connelly, Matt Borchard and Albert Gistler. The house in background belonged to Sam Fong Yee who was marooned for several days because the flood from the Santa Clara River moved through this section. Yee's house was situated just about where the Sears store is located in the new Esplanade at Wagon Wheel. When the men came to rescue Yee he was having a drink of Saki, claiming his food had run out.

Moraga, also of Oxnard. Both sons work in construction.

Cancer killed Bertha's husband in 1950, she claims. "Wood-splitting is what caused the cancer," she says disgustedly today. "He was always splitting wood and many times sharp pieces of cut wood would scratch across his stomach. I'm telling you those scratches would bleed and I just know that they infected his stomach." A theory of Bertha's she fully believes.

Although Tony has been gone 20 years, Bertha apparently never slowed down. She is a member of the Fifty-Plus Club of Oxnard. "I go to the dances and parties every Thursday," she gleefully says. "By golly, I love to dance and I have a good time."

**SON RUDY SAYS** that he has long tried

to get his mother to move into Oxnard where he and brother Tony can keep an easier eye on her. "But she won't move," he says. "I tell her I can get her a new modern place but she won't budge."

"What the heck, I like it here," she insists. "I can look out across the highway and see that beautiful Esplanade and watch all the cars go by."

"My husband's father owned that property and he sold it to Abe Hobson for \$1 an acre," she laughed. "But that was all right, he only paid fifty cents an acre for it." Then she really chuckled.

"Hobson put a slaughter house there for awhile. He later built one near the Ventura River banks in Ventura." She was referring to another county pioneer whose daughters married and, with their husbands, developed Rancho Casitas which became the Walter Hoffman ranch — now under Lake Casitas. Although Walter died many years ago, his wife, Edith Hobson Hoffman, remains active in many business and political fields while living in Ventura. The other daughter married Fred Smith and lived in the Ojai until her death a couple of years ago.

Both Walter Hoffman Jr and Mrs. Kay Haley, are the children of Mrs. Hoffman — and are active in many county civic affairs.

**BESIDES THE DANCING** at the Fifty-Plus Club, Bertha says she is a big winner at Bingo. "You know something, I won so often that they were getting suspicious of me," she laughed.

Five years ago much of the Moraga family got together for a reunion honoring Bertha. At that time they were able to count 90 great-grandchildren. However, that was not all, so they gave up. A couple of years ago Rudy said they tried counting again. "This time we counted 140, and still didn't get them all, so we gave up. There just doesn't seem to be a way of counting them all."

Bertha interjected. "Some of my grandchildren have kids by bunches. One of them down in Orange County has 14 kids. And my grandkids are so spread out. I've got one granddaughter in Sacramento, one in Tokyo, one in — oh what the heck, how do you expect me to count them all?"

Bertha is a very happy woman. She enjoys her home which she keeps very neat. She likes to walk, enjoying the chats as she strolls through El Rio. And her longtime neighbor and friend, Nazarene Donlon, is a daily companion as they chat on the telephone and visit with each other. Between the two of them they can recall much of the history of this county.

About Bertha's health at her age she said, "People sometimes ask me how come I live so long. I tell them — Be happy whatever happens. If they talk against you, to hell with them. Be happy and enjoy a good life."

Obviously she practices what she preaches. Bertha Moraga, a grand gal, is someone you really should know.



Tony Moraga loved watermelon and was caught by photographer munching through a section. Cancer caused his death not too long after this picture in 1950.