

A Gathering of Voices

The Native Peoples
of the
Central California Coast

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"I'm an Indian, But Who Am I?"

by Patrick Orozco, as told to Lois Robin

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In the Central Coastal area of California, the tracing of family lineage is particularly difficult. Here, ninety percent of the indigenous people died by the end of the fifty year Mission period. Following those years, further devastating attacks on Indian life and culture continued. Very few native people have intact family histories.

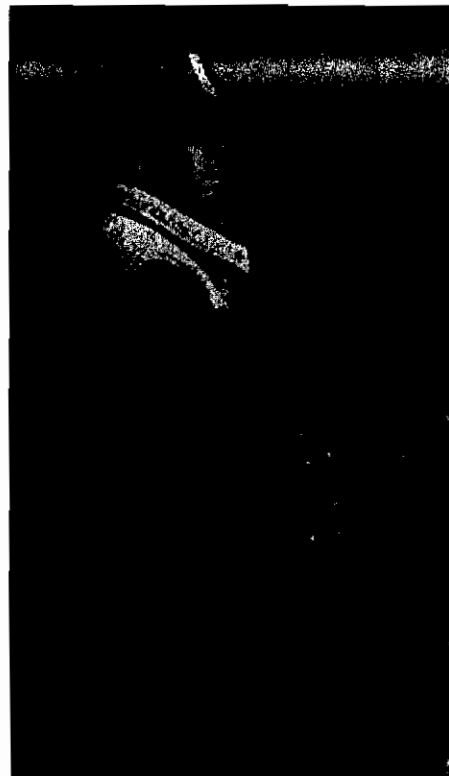
Patrick Orozco is a descendant who has always known he is Indian, but twenty years ago knew little of his particular background or culture. Through these years with great effort he has recovered pieces of his identity but still continues his search. Oral traditions, memories, intuitions and recorded information are interwoven in the fabric of his identity.

Patrick has been culturally active in the Santa Cruz, San Benito and Monterey County areas. He goes into the schools with remembered songs and stories, dances, and regalia. Helping other Indian people trace their lineages is gratifying to him. He brings an Indian voice into the broader arena, testifying at civic meetings, monitoring with archaeologists and speaking for the needs and dreams of his neighbors and community.

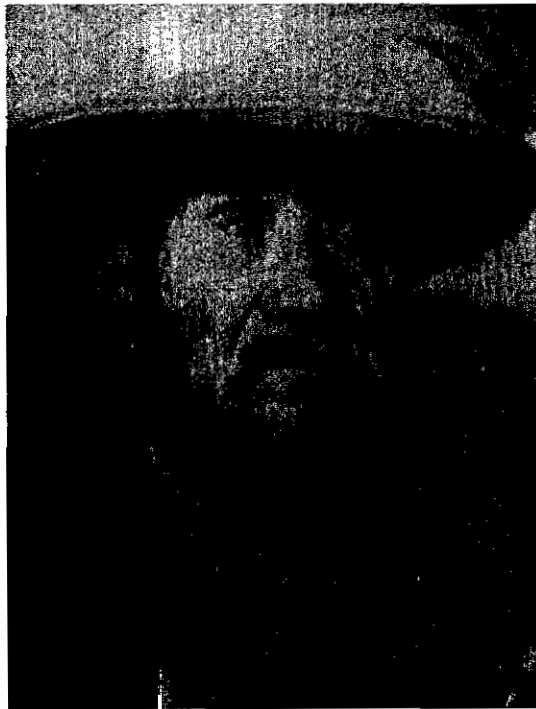
—Lois Robin

"I'm an Indian. But who am I?" This thought comes to me as I sit on the Lee Road¹ burial ground one day in March of 1975. As I sit there with other Indian people, surrounded by policemen, county officers and the Sheriff's SWAT team, I know that the answer must come. I know if I make it through this showdown alive, I will find the answers to this question.

Our people's graveyard was being excavated by giant machines to lay a foundation for a warehouse. Human bones and skulls surfaced and were being crunched. A judge issued a restraining order to the developer, then rescinded it, succumbing to commercial pressure. Our cemetery would now be bulldozed. We had to take a stand—and we did. With rifles and bows and arrows, we went into the cemetery at night. We would not shoot first, but if someone shot at us, we would return fire. We understood that we might lose our lives defending our religious rights, our culture, our people. When day break came, we faced a sea of law enforcement and weaponry.



*Patrick Orozco at the Lee Road site.
Photo by Lois Robin*



Francisco Rios ("Papa Grande"), great grandfather of Patrick Orozco. Courtesy of Patrick Orozco.

At the last minute, the bulldozers were made to stop further desecration, and the law enforcement personnel called off by local political leaders. These county leaders worked out an arrangement with the property owner who intended to construct his warehouses over our ancestor's bones. In the settlement, construction of warehouses was permitted on the half of the graveyard already bulldozed, while the remaining half of the burial ground was given to us Indians along with five acres of adjacent slough land.

To become an entity and negotiate our situation, we organized as a local branch of the Northwest Indian Cemetery Protective Association, as we had involved this national organization in our resistance.² Eventually, this group evolved into the present Pajaro Valley Ohlone Indian Council. Now we had a victory, some land, a non-profit status and even an official designation—Ohlone. But did we know who we were? At the age of forty I was to begin a quest that would be more addictive than anything else I've ever experienced.

My family had always known about this graveyard

and watched over it. Grandma Rios told me how her father, Francisco Rios, who they called Papa Grande—Great Father, would come by with his whole family in the buckboard.³ He would stop and go into the graveyard to pray. When he came back to the buckboard he would tell the family, "Your people are there. Respect them and protect them." This is what we were doing at Lee Road, protecting and preserving our burial ground. My grandmother Rios told me she was present at the last burial at the Lee Road site. She was ten years old. We knew we were Indian people, but this showdown at Wounded Lee, as it became known, was the first time I heard us called Ohlone.

The questions burned. What was my tribe? Were there songs and dances to be learned? What happened to my people? Who were the conquistadores and what happened to us in the missions? These thoughts and dozens of others consumed my mind. Somehow, even with the demands of a growing family, I must find the time, strength and resourcefulness to address these insistent questions.

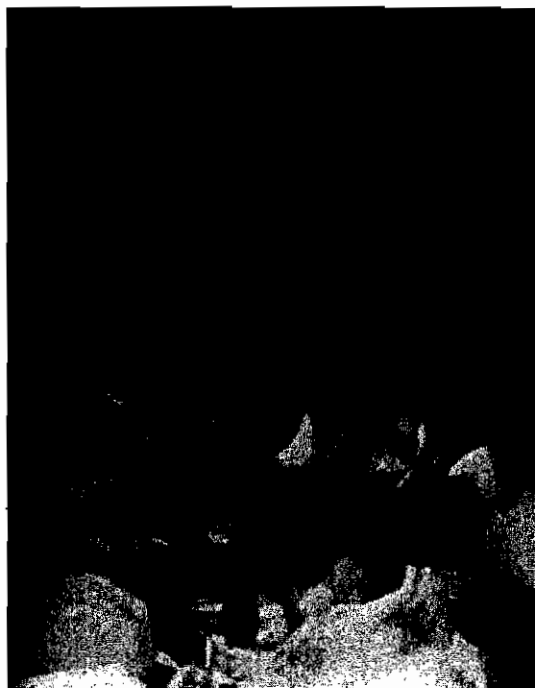
Now I began speaking to all the old ones. My first conversations were with my grandmother, Rose Rios, my mother's mother. My grandmother became crippled early in life and was confined to a wheelchair. Yet with her powerful spirit, she was able to raise nine children and stay involved and active in family affairs. Grandma Rose knew that her husband was Chumash. "But I'm an Indian, too," she liked to say. Recently I've been able to prove her statement. Indeed she was from an Ohlone tribal line. Her father, Francisco Rios ("Papa Grande") was listed in the Monterey Indian Census of 1880. His father, also Francisco Rios, was listed in the Carmel Mission records and was Rumsen Ohlone. On her mother's side of the family, I have been able to trace and document family roots that go the Santa Clara Mission records and indicate Ohlone origins.

I remembered my grandmother using the word *Calentaruc* during the time I was growing up. *Calentaruc*. Certainly, grandmother, who did not know how to read and write, had no way of knowing this word unless it had been handed

down to her by her elders. It rolled on my tongue, *Calentaruc, Calentaruc*. One day I saw the name Calentaruc on a map⁴ of Indian villages of this area, and the connection came to me. Grandma must have known about neighbors or people who described themselves as Calentaruc. I realized she knew more about our family than she had ever expressed. I began talking to her, and though she never talked about Indian ways directly, now she began to remember and share valuable information. From this information I began to make family charts. Yet I realized that I would need supporting documents to know if those who intermarried were of Indian origins or not.

Grandma sent me out to gather herbs that could be used for medicines. When I brought them back, she would name them and tell me their uses. There was *yerba buena*, a highly rated herb that could be used for many ailments, such as stomach ache, and was also a soothing drink. There was willow bark for headaches, yarrow for toothaches and *campanoche* or *fireweed* for wounds. And always huckleberries for food and pleasure. Herbs and plant materials through their odors and aliveness connected us to our past. They have been there for a long time, renewing each season.

The most moving moment with grandmother was when she remembered a special song. In my research, I had come on a phrase of a song translated from Spanish to English. In it was the Spanish word *volcano*. That made no sense to me as there are no volcanos here. Grandmother said that in Spanish *vulcano* referred to the river mouth and she began to sing a song about the river mouth of the Carmel River. She knew few Indian songs, but this one, because of its beauty, stayed with her. The song, she said, was about young men and women who meet, coming from the hills toward the mouth of the Carmel River. It is a love song. In it is mention of the abundance of wild rose and the wild grape. The Indian words translate as "From the wet hills, the Indian women come down singing". These are images that come to mind when I sing this song. The words of the song meant so much to me that I learned them in their original language. The time and place of this

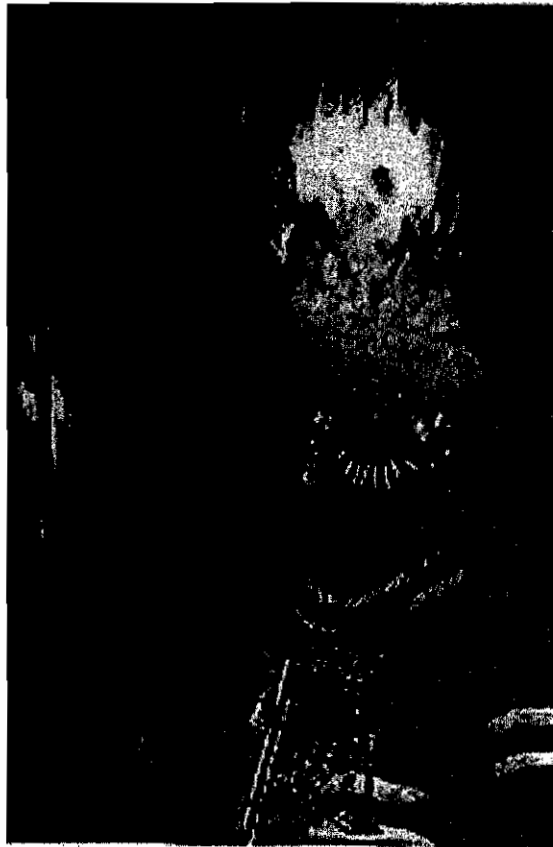


*Rose Rios, maternal grandmother of Patrick Orozco.
Courtesy of Patrick Orozco.*

moment, when Grandma began to sing, are etched in my mind. Whenever I sing this song, I am moved to tears by its ancient beauty.

Grandma wanted me to look up relatives from the Rios side of the family. Grandma said, "I want you to go to Los Angeles and look for my Uncle Ramon Rios." On a visit to L.A., I mentioned Uncle Ramon to a friend, Ray Belarde. He said that he knew many members of the Rios family and was related to them. He offered to introduce me to them, but there wasn't time. By now my great uncle must be gone. Grandma herself died in 1987 at the age of 87. Perhaps a Rios reading this article might have known either Ramon or Vicente Rios. They were born in Monterey; their mother was Leandra Soto. I would like to hear from them, as I promised Grandma to follow through on this.

About this time, a relative offered me a very informative book *San Francisco or Mission Dolores* that contained the accounts of Vizcaino, Portola, and de Anza. I learned that these explorers were greeted by a gentle, kind and sharing people. This is what stands out for me, the quality of the native people described by all the explorers. Gifts of food



*Patrick Orozco in regalia, 1991.
Photo by Lois Robin*

were given by the natives to these strangers. The strangers were accepted as brothers, though they were odd looking with their white skin and armor. I also read about the experience of my people in the missions. Many of the elders still had a mission fantasy, so I had to find out for myself what the mission experience meant to our people and culture. Little by little over the years information has come to me, so that I have my own understanding of what happened there.

I also went to the dance lodges held by other Indian people and to the mountains and prayed. An old Indian doing a ceremony at the burial site told me I would be seeing things. She said, "Don't be afraid, you will see your people." I did see the smiling faces of Indians, elders and children. I saw they were old ones because their teeth were missing. First they were smiling. Then sadness came. They were so happy before the contact with the Europeans. But they smiled because they knew

the identity of the Indian people would come back.

As these bits of information about my ancestors came to me, I had many startling experiences. One time, sitting at the cemetery at Lee Road, a shadow fell across the gravestones. It was the shadow of an old lady with a cape. "Am I imagining this or not?" I asked myself. I said to the shadow, "I'm here to protect your place of rest from vandals."

Now we find that not only are our graves vandalized, but those of non-Indians are, too. How beautiful it would be to go back to the mountains, to a little cabin, to live there forever and not worry about this world.

My search for genealogical information led me to the churches. I was inexperienced with churches. I began with baptisms and making my own charts. I asked questions: "Where was this person born? What year? To whom?" The family tree grows fast as two sets of parents on both sides are recorded. The old Diocese in Monterey had records from 1769 to the 1900s. Their books are fragile and difficult to read. The other churches have valuable records from the 1900s to the present. The church personnel try to be cooperative, but they are busy with many people coming in. They don't want to take time with you. I always had the feeling that I was a big bother to them. But I persisted anyway. If I couldn't find the information, I had to check with schools to get the names right and with cemeteries to find where they were buried. I also read voting registers and residential directories for each city to clarify addresses. This was a long, slow search with many dead ends.

Randy Milliken, the anthropologist, got the Indian census from Monterey County, 1852-1880. From this I was able to see the Rios family. The first 700 baptisms from Carmel, Santa Cruz and San Juan Bautista Missions came by directly contacting various anthropologists who had access to these records. By reading them, I also found out about the lineage of my great-grandmother on my mother's father's side, Mamita.⁵ Unfortunately, Mamita's lineage is still incomplete, and I cannot

yet determine her tribal origins. I saw Mamita in a dream. I had this dream four or five years ago. The dream took place in Corralitos Creek. A group of people were sitting under a sand dune along the creek. There was a creek between me and the people. When she saw me, she looked at me. She told me something with her eyes; I didn't hear a voice. She was happy in the work I was doing. The look was of satisfaction.

Although great-grandmother is faded in my memory, I still remember her kind, peaceful face, full of love. Great-grandmother Mamita was a midwife. She was at my mother's birth and assisted the doctor. She was a midwife for her son's and daughter's families and brought many children into the world. She was a healer as well, and gave advice and helped to solve problems. She was held in high esteem, and Indian people and others would bring her gifts as thanks for her healing skills.

I was born 200 feet away from the Pajaro River on Bridge Street in Watsonville, now called Rodriguez Street. Apparently there were birth problems, and Mamita had to call on Dr. Glure for assistance with my delivery. I was only two the last time I saw her, at her death bed. She was sitting up, and my mom said she reached down and patted me on my shoulder and told her "This is the one who will bring all these things back." I was born September 5, 1939, and she died September 20, 1941.

I lived with my mother, Annie Marques, my father, Porfirio Orozco, and grandmother Rose Rios for many years at a great old house in Watsonville. It was a wonderful old house, and I remember every room and corner of it and the garden outside, too. Pleasure and happiness come to me when I think of my years in the old house. Then when I was eight, my mother and father split up. This was largely due to my father becoming involved in gambling. Unfortunately, Keno games were being played almost directly across from the old house. My father became addicted to them and also began to drink.

Then my mother and grandmother moved to a house on East Lake Street. I would go off for hours



Mamita. Mary Dixon, great grandmother of Patrick Orozco. Courtesy of Patrick Orozco.

to play by myself in the land around the house. I had a special hideout. It was in a thicket of willows, where I could move the vines and make a little house for myself. It was my own ruk, as the Indians here called their tule houses. Although at that time, I did not know of ruks, my house evoked the world of my ancestors. Near my hideout, I discovered an old handmade willow bridge. It was crudely made and very frail and provided a path across an old ditch. But the most astonishing experience was finding an old skull lying on the ground there. From its eye emerged a lizard or snake. All these experiences aroused an ancient, dreamlike feeling and had meaning for me. I felt certain I was on the site of an old village.

During this time, also, I hunted little animals with a sling shot or by setting snares, mostly birds. I felt badly about doing this, but I was hungry much of the time. I made a fire in the field and cooked the little birds. I knew at that time my mother had little money to feed us. Grandma used to ask me to bring her mud hens, which I did. She cooked them in a delicious manner. She would skin them and use vinegar to tenderize them. They had a very

dark meat. She insisted that I bring no more than we needed, usually about three.

Grandma was always interested in birds. When she heard an owl in the trees she shook her head and said, "Not good. Signe del muerto. Don't ever kill an owl. There is a certain time when an owl approaches you and is singing—it's good luck. Also, when a hawk is singing. When birds are singing, it is always good luck."

I missed my father and rarely saw him. We had hard times; mother could barely support us. Yet, one day, without warning, my father returned and took all of us kids in the car to the Hollister area in the Gavilan Mountains. Our destination was the Almaden Winery, where he was a worker, and where we were to live for the next few years. This was a marvelous place for a young boy. I had a beautiful sense of freedom, and everywhere around us were wild animals; tame deer, quail, coyote, pigeons, mountain lion and bobcat. Many Indian people lived there, and I enjoyed a fine company of boys. I liked the rattlesnakes and king snakes and particularly the tarantulas. I was never afraid of them and could sometimes demonstrate power by handling a tarantula in front of the others. It made them respectful of me.

An elder, Manuel Orango, once pointed to two of the Almaden Mountains and told me that if I listened well, I could hear an Indian shouting to his brother, because the brother had taken his wife. I would listen carefully to see if I could hear him, and I did hear some whispering in the air, but I couldn't swear to it. Apparently these mountains echo, and I was hearing the voices of drunken people and thought it was the brothers shouting.

Trading as my forefathers had done was instinctive with me. Once my younger brother had a tiny puppy that I coveted. I was a good marble player and so had a great stack of marbles. First I offered him a handful of marbles for this dog I called "Tootsie." He declined. When finally I offered him a whole huge sack of marbles, he accepted and Tootsie was mine. She remained with me for many years.

A teacher at the school once took us to a place where there was a cave with hand pictographs on the wall. I was awed but to this day have not been able to find the cave again. But I remember the mark of my people on that cave wall.

Once while attending school, I was chosen to be in a school play about pioneer days. I'll be darn tootin'. I was a real Indian, and they made a cowboy out of me for the play. The incongruity bothered me, but I tipped my hat and slowly rode away.

At this time, my father taught me what I know about hunting, what to wear, how to smell the deer, to make sure it was a buck, important knowledge about hunting. My father was an Indian from Baja California. He knew these arts well, and he was a fine teacher. My father never spanked me, and he kept his word. After he returned us to mother, he and she remained good friends throughout the years.

I came to know my mother's father, my grandfather, Louis Marquez, when we moved around the area picking crops at various ranches. Often we would camp in the middle of a field and build a fire. There grandmother would make very large delicious tortillas. Stories would be told, mostly about animals. One story that impressed me very much at the time and has stayed with me throughout the years was about an Indian boy who was turned into a bear by a bad shaman. My heart would jump as I heard how this bear could only become human again when a person who loved him shed tears for him . . . and how eventually, a woman did.

Grandmother would do her work in the hop fields from her wheel chair. She kept the family together. Her brother, called ChiChi (an Indian name), would bring us watermelons and soda pop. These occasions were very pleasing to me. One place we worked was the McGrath Ranch. McGrath actually funded the funeral for Papa Grande when he died.

At an earlier time, my family worked at the cattle ranches in Monterey County: Rancho San Carlos, Riley Ranch and others. I went there sometimes to trace records.

My grandfather was a strong, vital person and wonderfully kind. Yet he drank seriously and heavily. Many years before I was born, he was a bootlegger. I remember his disinterest in money. He would throw a handful of coins into the air and not bother to pick them up. I used to check in with him, when he was drunk or sober, to see how he was doing. Even after my grandmother remarried, Louis used to hang out at her place. All three of them got along well—grandma, her second husband and Louis.

For a while I stopped working on Mamita's ancestry. I turned instead to Grandma Rios' ancestry on her mother's side. Grandma knew that her grandmother was last married to someone named Flores, and that she lived in Los Gatos, but she did not know her maiden name. I went to the *San Jose Mercury News*, and read in the obituaries that Narcissa Geneve Flores died in 1915 in Los Gatos. In her obituary I also learned the name of her brothers and from that derived her maiden name, Geneve.

Then I went to the cemetery where she was buried, to verify my information and also pay my respects. At the location of that cemetery, I found the Los Gatos Library instead. In the library I was told that the cemetery had been moved four miles away. When I found the cemetery, there was an old stone with the name of Narcissa Geneve Flores, born 1850. It had taken many hours of research to get to her grave. I prayed and spoke to my ancestor, talking to her about the things I knew of her from my grandparents and telling her that I would be continuing to search for the traces of our family. It was a high moment.

More remained to be done. I needed to locate the baptism of Narcissa Geneve in order to learn the name of her parents. The microfilm at the the Santa Clara Mission records was not clear, and although I saw the name of Narcissa Geneve, I could not read her parents' name. I became bogged down and did not know how to get around this problem.

Often when I am stuck, I will give a little prayer and ask for help. As happened many times during



Annie Marques Orozco, mother of Patrick Orozco, 1991. Photo by Linda Yamane.

my search, when this occurred, a way opened up to me. At a meeting related to archaeological monitoring, a question arose concerning my credentials. The county planning department asked the archaeologist on the project to research my background. A genealogist, Mrs. Edith Smith, was consulted, and she found the original records I needed at St. Joseph's church in San Jose. It was St. Joseph's that recorded baptisms, births and marriages during this period in Santa Clara County. These records disclosed that Narcissa's father was a Frenchman named Alexander Geneve, married to Juanita Chavoya. They were married in Santa Clara County. I have a birth certificate for Juanita Chavoya dated 1835. She was fifteen years old at the time she gave birth to Narcissa. This was an important key to tracing the lineage.

Juanita Chavoya's parents, also on the birth or baptism records, were Jose de la Cruz Chavoya, from Mission Dolores and Maxima Vasquez. Data from before this time was to be found in the mission records. I thought I would have to travel widely to continue my search, and I doubted that I could afford to do that. But then I discovered the

necessary records at the Family History Library at the Church of Latter Day Saints. I wondered if I would have to become a Mormon to use the library. Fortunately, it was not necessary. The Library is very helpful. If they don't have it, they'll get it for you. They believe that Indians are the direct descendants of Israel, and so they try to obtain microfilm of birth, death, marriage, baptism and census data. I ordered about twenty reels of different mission records of California.⁶

From the Mormon Library I learned that the father of Maxima Vasquez was Jose Antonia Vasquez from Mission Dolores at San Francisco. The mother's name was not clear. Again, when I hit a snag, help was forthcoming. This time help came from an accomplished woman named Charlotte Farrel. I had met her niece at an Indian gathering. She told me her aunt had been doing California Indian genealogical research, prompted by an interest in her own roots. However, I was not prepared for the extensiveness of Charlotte Farrel's work or the generosity of her help. In her library, she had volumes of hand printed genealogies. She was able to go quickly in her records to Maxima Vasquez, and found that Maxima's mother's name was Maria Leocadia. Next to Maria's name, it said *India*. It was this word that my search was about: *India*. At last, here was proof of Grandma Rios' belief that she was from an Indian family.

Maria's parents were Pedro Pablo and Maria Pelagia and these two were from the village of San Juan Bautista south of San Jose. The people at this village were referred to as the Santa Teresa Hills tribe or "Ritoxci." They must have been baptized in the Mission. Their baptism number of 738 indicates that they were among the earliest converts. It was thrilling to know that the history in my bones was confirmed by the written record.

I sent all these names to Randy Milliken. He wrote me back a letter saying, "Congratulations, Patrick, you have located your family roots." He was able to confirm all the connections. He found that Pablo had the Indian name of "Hugjolis" and that Maria Pelagia was called "Yunen." Their marriage was July 2, 1785. She must have been around

twenty, and he thirty, when they were baptized in the mission. In short, by tracing back seven generations of grandmothers, I came to the point where Europeans made contact with my people, and records confirmed my Ohlone roots. Randy also provided names of the other children of Maria Leocadia. I wonder if her descendants can be located, and if they are aware of their origins.

This is the only lineage I completed. It tells me for sure of a lineage on my mother's mother's side. Other lines are only partially completed, but with each new piece of information, I myself feel more complete. It is an addiction, pursuing these matters, but as the resources become more familiar, and I know where to look, it becomes easier. It is costly, also. I may have spent a thousand dollars in pursuit of this information. This documentation is not only fulfilling to me, but it has been necessary to counter charges that have been made against me. These allegations, that I am not a true Costanoan Indian descendant, are damaging and upsetting. Other people come to believe the false allegations. Much time must be spent in refuting them.

I believe that the least reliable method of documentation is Department of the Interior (BIA—Bureau of Indian Affairs) enrollment lists. You see, those names were gathered because of law suits against the U.S. Government. The government agreed to pay native people a certain amount of money, and it just wanted to take care of the matter. It gave applicants questionnaires and did not require any documentation of their replies. I would not be satisfied with information from roll call records. The ancestry of my mother's father was believed to be Chumash. However, the only documentation I have of it so far is from an enrollment list. While this is a clue, it is not proof. I am still looking at other sources to confirm it.

Anthropologists such as Rob Edwards and Randy Milliken have been helpful to me in my quest for identity and in my efforts to protect grave sites. They have led me to good sources of information, such as J.P. Harrington, Kroeber, Heizer, and other anthropologists. They often know from previous work where burial sites are located. If a burial site

is threatened by development, I can ask the County that an evaluation report be filed before any development takes place. Archaeologists and Indians appeared to have opposed interests twenty years ago. The Indians wanted the graves to be untouched, and the archaeologists wanted to expose them for scientific purposes before they were destroyed. Now they have come together to protect resting places from destruction. Archaeologists respect our feelings and value our knowledge;

we value the information they bring us.

From my connections with close relatives, from recollection of childhood experiences and talking with the elders, comes the base of my Indian experience. With this base and the genealogical proof of my identity, I am secure enough to continue with other dreams and activities and the continued pursuit of my ancestry. I am an Indian, and I know who I am.



Notes:

- ¹ Lee Road is in Watsonville near the confluence of the Watsonville and Struve Sloughs. CA-SCR-107 is located there.
- ² The Cemetery Association was formed to preserve and protect Indian burial grounds, villages and ceremonial sites. Victor Cutnose was the director at that time; the organization was based in Arcata, California.
- ³ Francisco Rios (Papa Grande) was listed in the 1880 census as Indian. His father, also Francisco Rios, was listed in the Carmel Mission records. The senior Francisco Rios married Leandra Soto at Mission San Miguel. The generation before that is unknown, but a Rios family with apparent ties is mentioned even earlier in the Mission Records of San Luis Obispo and San Miguel.
- ⁴ A map showing the Calentaruc tribelet territory at the coastal plain near the Pajaro River is in Margolin (1978: 2). The map is based on research by C. King and R. Milliken.
- ⁵ Mamita's birth name was Mary Dixon. Her mother, Maria Petra had several partners. The first was Paul or David Dixon. The second was Jesus Romandia, with whom she had Edward Andrew Romandia, the half-brother listed on the Chumash BIA rolls of 1928-1933. The third was Dolores Tarango. From this last stepfather, Mamita acquired the nickname "Tarangita." Mary Dixon also had three different partners: Jose Cruz in 1893, Terso Marques in 1898, and Martin Soto in 1918. She had 14 children. She lived in Tortilla Flats in Carmel for most of her life until her house was taken away for nonpayment of taxes. Then she moved to Seaside and died there in 1941 at the age of 64, disheartened from the loss of her house. Mary Dixon spoke Rumsen. Her tribal origins are still uncertain, but she was a well-known and revered Indian elder of her time.
- ⁶ A useful related source is *Spanish Mexican Families of Early California, 1769-1850, Volumes I and II* (Northrup 1976, 1984). It does not have copies of records, but it does give marriage, birth, death, baptism and other data.

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