

The Freeway Happened to Us

Logan Heights Family Reunion Picnic

It's starting to sound like one of those iconic stories of American life. It's not the one about how everybody's ancestors were immigrants. It's the newer one, about how the neighborhood changed when the freeway came through town. According to Augie Bareño, when the freeway came through Logan Heights, it meant a racial transition as well as the usual social and economic upheavals.

Bareño, whose parents immigrated to the United States from Mexico in the 1920s, grew up at 2721 Newton Avenue. "Logan Heights then was a racially mixed community," says this board member of the Logan Heights Historical Society.

LOCAL EVENTS

"There were lots of Anglos there." And they lived in harmony with the Mexicans,

"because in those times, things were different. Everybody was poor together. It was almost a *Happy Days* kind of thing: you didn't know you didn't have, because everybody didn't have."

He credits area churches for the peaceful existence between whites and Mexicans in a period when many other places in the United States were experiencing demographic turmoil. "Our Lady of Guadalupe, St. Jude's, St. Ann's — the Catholic churches were a major socializing force. And the whites were Catholics, too. It was very mixed, until the freeway."

A second stabilizing force was work, which had brought the immigrants to Logan Heights in the first place, beginning in the early 1900s. Although the jobs didn't pay a lot, there were enough of them to go around, says Bareño. Initially the work was for the railroads. Then other industries, like those along the waterfront, got established there.

"The canneries hired predominantly women, so mothers from the 1930s through the 1950s all worked in them," says Bareño, whose own mother was a housewife. "There was one bus, number 11, that went up and down all of Logan Heights, and for everybody who didn't have a car, it was the principal means to work and to pleasure, because it went to Horton Plaza. In the afternoon, number 11 would smell terribly of fish, because the cannery ladies were riding to and from their shifts. These ladies had the smell ingrained in their skin. However, people were tolerant, because it was everybody's mother, and they knew the money would feed the family. So it was something you learned to tolerate and to respect."



From the Logan Heights Memory Album (clockwise from top left): "Los Gallos," cannery workers at bus stop, Rachel Ortiz (present-day Logan Heights leader) in 1950s performance

African-Americans, too, lived in the Logan Heights of yesteryear, Bareño says. "Records show that the first ones settled there in the 1920s. There was a gathering of people primarily in the Imperial Avenue-Commercial Street area." From then until the 1960s, he maintains, the community was "always one."

"It may sound corny, but we were old-fashioned. If you fought somebody, it was a fair fight. There were no knives or guns. People didn't always love each other, but they knew how to get along."

But then, when the freeway was built, the community experienced what Bareño calls "a ripping apart." Interstate 5, completed in 1964, "essentially destroyed Logan Heights," says Bareño.

Did anybody try to fight the freeway? "It wasn't done in those days. There was no public-input process. Most people didn't even realize what it was. And the people who did understand were able to get market value for their homes and continued an upward spiral. That was predominantly Anglos. They left." As for the majority of Mexicans, "they stayed, and the freeway just happened to them."

And what of the African-

Americans' fate? "I remember the adoption of the Rumford Housing Act [the Fair Employment and Housing Act of 1963]," says Bareño, "which made it law that you couldn't not sell to blacks. Until then it was very, very common practice to discriminate. There weren't deed restrictions; it just didn't happen."

It's one reason why Logan Heights residents didn't sell to more African-Americans when all those real estate transactions took place.

"But [housing discrimination] is a part of San Diego's history, of course. It isn't just Logan Heights' history."

Bareño is asked how he would describe the current residents of Logan Heights, whom the U.S. Census characterizes as overwhelmingly "Hispanic."

"No question, it's still an immigrant population, struggling to survive. Unfortunately, from a land-use perspective," says the retired county administrator, "the zoning is pretty well established, in that its character is essentially industrial and commercial."

The rezoning that occurred after World War II, in other words, which at first brought more work, later began to

erode the neighborhood as businesses crowded out residences.

Today, Bareño's former family home on Newton Avenue is gone. And in its place? "An aluminum recycling plant," says Bareño, who works as a land-use consultant in National City and lives in Otay Ranch.

Still, he'll return this weekend to *la Logan* for the reunion. He encourages other former residents to do the same and to bring photos of the old neighborhood. The *Logan Heights Memory Album*, published two years ago by the historical society, is a pictorial record of those years before the freeway. Because of the book's success, there are plans for a sequel.

—Jeanne Schinto

Logan Heights Family Reunion Picnic
Saturday, August 3,
12 noon-7:00 p.m.
Cesar E. Chavez Bayside Park
(foot of former Crosby Street)
Logan Heights
Free
619-498-3949 or
619-238-0317

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