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## Wally Trabing's

Mostly about  
People

## Last Of The Ohlones?

Is Dolores Pratt of Live Oak, the last of the full-blooded Ohlone Indians in this area?

She doesn't really know, but she does know, for sure, that she and her four brothers and her mother are the last full-blooded Indians within her family line.

Her ancestors were San Jose and San Juan Bautista, mission Indians. All her brothers have married white women and she is married to Patrick Pratt.

When the Higuera die, (she is the youngest (46) and only daughter) the pure blood line will be broken.

While visiting Mrs. Pratt, in her strongly family-oriented home, I was introduced to her 81-year-old mother, Carolina Corona Higuera, of Pacific Grove.

She was born in 1900, at San Juan Bautista, near the mission.

Carolina's grandmother was Mrs. Ascencion de Cervantes, also of San Juan Bautista who, before she died at nearly 100 years of age in 1930, was the subject of a feature in the San Francisco Chronicle. Just before she died, the noted anthropologist from the Smithsonian Institute, J. P. Harrington, spent three months listening to her stories of Indian culture. Mrs. de Cervantes' mother, Barbara Serra, is buried at the mission, taking her name, according to family history, from Father Serra, who baptized her.

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Mrs. Pratt's father was Joseph Higuera, a Coastonian, born in the Gilroy area. His line goes back to his grandfather, who was born in the mountains of Loma Prieta. Higuera means "fig tree" in Spanish.

"My mother tells the story that my father's mother was lured down from the Loma Prieta on a white stallion to the village of Soquel, but panicked at all the people and dashed off to the mountains again," said Dolores.

There has been news photos of the old Higuera adobe near Warm Springs. It was part of the old Los Tularcitos rancho between Mission San Jose and the pueblo, San Jose. There is also a Higuera Creek between Carmel Highlands and Big Sur.

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Mrs. Pratt's skin is a beautiful copper, something you don't see much any more.



Dolores Pratt

She had not retained the language and little of past lore, preferring, during her growing up, to blend in with the general population.

"I am proud of my heritage, but I grew up just a regular girl."

Her great-grandmother, however, staved off death for three months when she learned of her chance to preserve her Indian past.

The following was gleaned from the dramatic Chronicle double-page feature.

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Word apparently reached the Smithsonian Institute that a 100-year-old Indian woman was near death in San Juan Bautista. Harrington rushed out and moved in. The old lady was staying with her daughter in Monterey.

As the story goes, Dona Ascencion had put on her black silk dress, made for her burial, propped herself up and called in her friends for a last meeting. She believed that she had three days remaining.

At this point the news reached her that a scientist

from the nation's Capitol was coming to see her. It perked her spirits up and she began to improve. Harrington was like a tonic, for the old woman wanted the old ways to be remembered.

She had been known as "doctora." The backyard of her humble home was often filled with the sick who had come to be treated with herbs and prayer.

Her own mother, the last of the mission Indians, died at 84. Her Indian husband died a week later from grief.

Dona Ascencion kept active. She used to tell her patients that "the bed eats people."

Day after day, Harrington pressed for stories and information — tid bit by tid bit.

She had lived in the hills between Monterey and San Juan. Indians lived together for sociability and for protection.

Their houses were shaped like beehives. They were made by planting willow poles in the ground, each a step apart, so that they formed a circle. The tops were pulled together and tied. Then the walls were made by deer grass or bullrushes.

Fires were built in the center of these wigwams, on the earth floor. The smoke drifted out a roof hole in the center.

At night, thatched mats were laid on the dirt and sleepers would curl up under bear skins or other skin robes.

Upon awakening the sleepers would proceed to the creek and jump in the cold water. Babies were included. This was year around. The old lady said that very few people ever caught colds.

Breakfast was mush, made from boiled acorn kernels that had been pounded and blanched with water to remove the bitterness.

Or they would eat roots or meat or greens. Work was unknown, except for that used in survival. The men hunted most of the day, and it was suspected that they would build fires and eat the choicest parts of the game.

The women gathered wood and roots and generally gossiped. They were wonderful basket makers. The weave was so tight that the baskets were water tight.

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The old lady told about the dances and how the men were deadshots with arrows.

She spoke of their songs and of the good life they had.

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Then, Mrs. De Cervantes began to weaken again after three months. The pain of a tumor pulled her down.

She donned her black silk dress, and had chairs brought in the room, all facing her bed. It was like a little theater. Her friends and family filed in and waited.

And, then she died.

Now, Dolores, a state certified nursing assistant, lives out her life amid modern conveniences.

"No," she said. "I am not into jumping into a cold creek of a morning, thank you."