

[Cecilia Richards Alvarez]

Marie Carter

Anthony,

New Mexico Interview

1,100 words

Old Timers Dictionary

In

Detail

Cecelia Richards Alvarez

The day was Sunday. I recall it quite well. Because the neighbor's little girl woke me up to tell me that my cat had, had kittens in her barn. Just why I selected that particular day to go to La Union, in search of a former resident of Anthony, is something I cannot explain.

When I knocked at the front door of the woman I sought, there was no response, so I meandered around to the back door, unaware that she was sick in bed. The maid came to the door and opened her mouth to tell me, I feel quite sure, now that I recall her expression, that the doctor did not permit her mistress to see anyone. But just as she was about to utter the fatal words, a tall elderly man shoved her aside and invited me to enter.

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Having preceeded me as far as the bedroom door, he stepped aside and bowed me into the presence of Cecilia Richards Alvarez, who favored me with a beautiful smile and inquired:

" What is it you wish?"

" Information."

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" Regarding whom?"

" You."

" Oh!"

"It isn't anything to be alarmed about," I assured her. I merely want to know how long you have been in the Southwest and the year in which you arrived?"

" Well I can tell you that in a few words," she said. " I came here with my parents when I was sixteen years of age."

" Here?"

" Yes, to La Union. But in a few months we moved to Anthony." she explained.

" Oh: I see. What year was that?"

" 1890. I was born in fort Stocton, Texas," she added.

" Do you mind telling me the year?"

" Not at all," was her gracious reply. "January 25, 1874."

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" Now we're going places!" I exclaimed.

[Her?] expression was quizzical as she softly murmured:

" Ah, you are young."

" Not as young as I sound," was my retort.

Mrs. Alvarez laughed and came right back at me with: " You'll do."

" Would you like to know who sent me to see you?" I asked.

" Very much. You see," she added, "curiosity is one of my faults.

" I must be afflicted the same way," I said,"or I wouldn't be here today. But then, I'm drifting away from my main object. I believe I was going to tell you--"

" Who sent you to La Union," she supplied.

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" Thanks. Well, it was a former neighbor of yours--Mrs. Pat Coleman."

" Oh, was it?" Her soft low voice throbbed with a note of pleasure.

" You must have known Charley Miller, too," I observed.

" Yes, I knew him very well. Mr. Miller, Mrs. Story and I were in business on the same street."

" I believe that was old main street?"

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" Yes, west of the Santa Fe tracks. The present main street was a mere wagon road. Anthony was a stopping place for travelers. Mr. Royal Jackman was the station agent. A man by the name of Scott was the first postmaster; he carried the mail on horseback. Charley Miller ran a store and a flour mill. And the Pat Colemans had a sheep ranch."

" I suppose farming was the chief occupation?"

" Yes, but the farmers were often discouraged. The Rio Grande was muy furioso." She lapsed into Spanish; then continued in perfect English: " "There was a flood almost every spring. The Mexicans were very brave though and patiently rebuilt their farms and homes over and over again. We used to ford the river or cross on crude rafts."

" Didn't the people ever try to build a bridge?" I asked.

" Oh, yes, but the river would rise and wash them away. The year after I was married the flood damaged our ranch to the amount of five thousand dollars."

" Did you marry someone in Anthony?" I quizzed.

" No. I married Mr. Alvarez, a rancher of La Union."

" If you don't mind telling me, I should like to hear about your engagement and wedding. For I think the old Spanish engagements were very romantic."

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" You refer to the prendorio, or engagement announcement. I think we took marriage more seriously in the old days. As, no doubt you know, there are slight variations in the old customs of every country. So it was with the prendorio. Some families discarded the

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letter, but my family, or to be exact, the boy's family, adopted it. The parents of my future husband wrote a letter to my parents which they presented in person, asking them for their consent to the marriage of their son to me. Fifteen days later my parents wrote a similiar letter, which they presented in person, to the boy's parents in which they gave their consent."

" Did you your parents give a reception?"

" Oh, yes, and it lasted all day. While my parents received their guests I remained hidden in another room. And, during the reception, refreshments were served. When it came time for the boy's parents to enter, they left their son outside. Finally they called me in; then they called the boy in."

" Were you embarassed[?]"

" Very much," she replied. "If my face was as red as my ears felt, I am sure that it was the color of a poinsettia."

" Did the boy bring you a gift?"

" Si, senora, la cajita bonita!" she said.

" A pretty little box, eh? Well, what did it contain? Now you have me curious."

"No more so than I was," she laughed. "Upon opening that pretty little box I fairly gasped with surprise. Of course I expected jewelry, but not as beautiful as the pieces I received; they were family heirlooms.

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Accepting the gift was accepting the boy, so he placed a diamond engagement ring upon my finger. Then, after my father announced our engagement to the guests, congratulations

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followed. The ladies remained inside but the [men?] went outside and celebrated by shooting off guns in our honor."

Cecilia [Richards?]: Born in Fort Stocton, Texas; January 25, 1874; moved to Pecos with parents; moved from Pecos to La Union; moved from La Union to Anthony, New Mexico, 1890. Attended Loretto Academy, Las Cruces, New Mexico; Father was English, mother Spanish; Married Deonicio (Dennis) Alvarez; Husband born in La Union, which used to be called, "Amoles," after the roots of the palm Plant from which the natives made soap. Mrs. Alvarez is the mother of Cruz [Richards Alvarez?], Attorney of Old Mesilla; Joe Richards Alvarez of La Union; Edward Richards Alvarez of La Union; Estella Richards Alvarez, who is now Mrs. [Paul?] Scharmen, Country Club--El Paso.

Amoles: roots of the Spanish palm, a fungus from which soap can be made. Can also be used for soap in its raw state, by soaking it in water for about an hour, after which time it forms a lather. [Mexicans?] liked it better than any other kind of soap for {washing?} wool blankets. Furiose Furioso : furious, and la cajita bonita, pretty little box. Prendorio: engagement announcement.