

Por aquel entonces...

by Norma L. Rodriguez

Antonio Longoria



Credit: refusingtoforget.org/the-project/

The prematurely silenced voices of Jesús Bazán and his son-in-law Antonio Longoria speak volumes to their descendents. The ranch cemetery where they are buried is, indeed, tierra santa. In the background one hears the mournful call of the dove and the agonizing lament of the old windmill as its weathered broken blades painstakingly turn and screech with the wind. For me these sounds of the isolated borderlands, albeit beautiful, are also painful, poignant and perpetual reminders of an ill-fated autumn day in 1915 when the two innocent men were murdered by Texas Rangers on the Bazán ranch.



The questionable circumstances of the murders and the forcibly delayed burials without caskets will forever haunt me, but I find comfort thinking about the lives of Jesús and Antonio before the murders. Looking out across the pastures of tierra colorada (sandy red loam), I envision the two ranchers working the land and tending to their livestock and crops. They are remembered for being active in community politics and working positively for the rights and betterment of their families and ranch community. I wonder, "What were they really like? What were their long-term hopes and dreams for themselves, their families and their community? What greater things might they have accomplished had their human rights not been denied?"

Upon viewing the Longoria homestead made of sillar (lime and clay) by Antonio's hands in 1900 and now lovingly restored, I conjure up idyllic images of Antonio with his wife Antonia and their children sitting outdoors on wooden benches under the anacua

on cool summer evenings or around the fireplace in winter. The children are seated around Antonio who holds the baby in his arms, the baby who never knew his father but would grow up and become my loving father. In my visual image Antonio is reading to his children or telling them family stories, the same stories I later heard from Antonia when I was a child.

Sunrise and sunset at the ranch give one pause to bask in God's beauty. At dawn the purple-tinted dark gray sky slowly changes to shaded blues. Slowly the clouds take on a lavender-pink hue when a sliver of orange appears on the horizon as the sun sluggishly takes a peek, embellishing the clouds with golden contours before it bursts forth onto a new day. In the evening the sky changes from blue to pink and then to golden amber as the sun gradually blends into the horizon and darkness ensues. I like to think that Jesús and Antonio enjoyed the beauty of sunrise and sunset as much as I do.

Butterflies dart about among the chaparral, cenizo and the tombstones. Observing the delicate beauty of the butterflies, I imagine that I hear the innocent, joyous laughter of children at play through the generations as the mariposas alight on their heads and outstretched fingertips with the finesse of a father's and a grandfather's loving touch. Las mariposas, symbols of resurrection and freedom give one hope for a better world: one free of injustice, violence and inequality. Because there

was no justice for Jesús and Antonio, there will always be an open wound in my heart, but I do find some solace here en el rancho de las mariposas y la tierra santa.

...y un siglo después

Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr's epigram "the more things change, the more they stay the same" describes the Bazán-Longoria ranches today. Portions of the ranches have been divided through inheritance and they are still owned by descendents of Jesús and Antonio although they are no longer working ranches. Cattle graze on leased-out pastures but gone are the voices and sounds of everyday activity and atmosphere of a thriving multi-generation ranch community of a century ago. Today the ranches are a destination for upkeep, family gatherings and hunting. Witnesses to history, they are a welcome respite from the noise and fervor of the city.

The Longoria homestead and escuela are restored. The anacua, known as the family tree, still thrives majestically in front of the homestead. The dilapidated chapel that stands on land donated to the church in the 1920's by the Bazán family may soon be rebuilt through the efforts of a local priest, family and community members and friends with ties to the community.

The ranch road where the men were murdered is now a busy farm-to-market shortcut for heavy freight traffic between the Rio Grande Valley and Laredo. During most of the day the noise is deafening and one feels the heat and vibration of the big rigs as they whoosh by just a few feet from the graves, but early in the morning and late in the



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Ode to Yanaguana- the land of sacred waters

-by Gianna Rendon

Yanaguana, the land that we now call San Antonio
Yanaguana- the bodies of indigenous people whose blood and
sweat and tears run through the San Antonio
River and Edward's aquifer

Yanaguana- the refreshing water of life that
runs through all of us and connects us as one
people.

Yanaguana- You are on your death bed and
I write this so you know before it is too late how
important you are to us.

We are not surprised. Your death has been
years in the making.

Yanaguana- they have built on top of your
Edward's Aquifer Recharge Zone all in the name
of profit, slowly suffocating and polluting you.

Yanaguana- they have poisoned you again
and again with fluoride and large corporations
like the Calamut refinery have gotten away with dumping toxic
chemicals into you and your people.

Yanaguana- they have appropriated your name and used you as a
catchy saying to attract tourists.

Yanaguana- this past summer they tried to bottle you but your
spirit was too great and you still had fight in you.

Now Mother, they are planning to murder you. The City Council
and SAWS wants to build a pipeline over your sacred lands and rob
another land of their mother water in order to fuel their greed.

The pipeline will slowly suffocate you until you are no longer
deemed necessary.

They will bottle your sister's body and sell it for a profit.



They will use that body of water up like it
is expendable until it too is sucked dry and dies
slowly.

And together you will both cry out to us to
stop before it is too late. To change our ways.
To realize that you are sacred, that you are not
infinite, that you are a gift to your people and not
meant to line wealthy men's pockets.

By the time we come to our senses you will
be gone and the only memory we will have left
of you is your blood, your sacred water pumping
through our veins and in the end those will also
run dry.



¡AGUAS!

La tubería es muy larga
Por ella correra agua quien sabe donde
California y quien sabe cuantas más
nos venden el agua embotellada
Todo mundo bebe ese liquido salvavidas
Hay mucho pero mucho interes en el agua
¿Porque morir de sed habiendo tanta agua?

—Enrique Sánchez



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afternoon when the traffic stops there is a certain serenity that
permeates the campo santo.

The tradition of taking flowers to the cemetery on el dia de
los muertos has been handed down from one generation to the
next for centuries. This year the centennial anniversary of the
murders is no exception. Family members of Jesús and Antonio
will travel long distances to visit and place flowers on their
graves and at the graves of other family members in a larger
cemetery nearby. No se olvidan.

Regarding how descendents feel about the violence that
resulted in the deaths of Jesús, Antonio and thousands of other
innocent victims, little has changed in one hundred years.
Emotionally we carry the burden of inherited loss in the silence
of our hearts just like previous generations did. The history of
the murders is passed down from one generation to the next
through the oral and written tradition.

With regard to the lack of public knowledge and awareness of
this important part of history, there have been some changes in
the last in the last twenty-some years. Family members of the
victims and historians have written and published articles,
essays, poetry and books, conducted interviews of witnesses
and survivors' accounts, produced a documentary and created
websites to bring this hidden part of United States and Texas
history out of the shadows. Currently a group of scholars is
collaborating their research, families' accounts, historical data
and artifacts with a museum for a 2016 exhibition that will
commemorate the centennial of this period of history and its
ramifications.

Note: This literary ofrenda is dedicated posthumously to my
great-grandfather Jesús Bazán (1848-1915) and my grandfather
Antonio Longoria (1866-1915), ranchers and pioneers of the
borderlands on the 100th anniversary of their murders.