

When San Jose Was Young

A Series of Interesting Articles of An Historical Nature Prepared Especially for The News by a Well Known Author and Journalist.

NO. 57 A BULL FIGHT ROMANCE

Probably the only girl who ever faced an angry bull in the arena at Santa Clara was Miss Jesusita Robles, daughter of Secundino Robles. She is now more than eighty years of age and is the widow of Miguel Espinosa. She lives in Gilroy.

Mrs. Espinosa told me the other day of her experiences in the arena. Her father, when she was a mere child, taught her to ride, to throw the riata, to face the savage bull brought by him to meet the bear. She was quick, alert and graceful, and she was always at Secundino Robles' side. She was his favorite child. Today she has one of the few existing pictures of Robles. He delighted in his little daughter's daring. She saw many bull fights and her greatest admiration was for the toradors. If only she could pin the banderitas on the wild bull, she felt that she could be the happiest person living.

Banderitas were like ribbon-decorated arrows. In order to excite the bull they were thrust into his neck before the fight. They adorned the animal, but they also drove him into bellowing fury.

Secundino Robles told his daughter that she might go into the arena wearing a scarlet dress and pin the banderitas on the bull's neck. It was for the child almost like being a man, a hero, a torador. Clad in a scarlet dress with short skirt, low neck and short sleeves when she was only fifteen years old, at the Santa Clara Mission, Miss Jesusita Robles first thrust the banderita into the bull's neck. As usual, the animal started to charge, but she rode a trained horse that knew when to dip and swing away from the bull at the right moment. Great was the applause of the crowd. Jesusita was the true daughter of Secundino.

Jesuita was called the girl torador. Her fame spread. San Francisco, then in the mad excitement of the gold rush, wanted to see the girl pin the banderita on the bull at the Mission Dolores.

Secundino arranged a bull fight at the Mission Dolores. There were two tiers of seats crowded with people. Thousands were turned away.

As the time approached for entering the arena, the fifteen-year-old girl in her short scarlet dress grew afraid. Not of the bull, but of the crowd. The thought of appearing in that costume before all those strangers so terrified Miss Jesusita that her courage weakened. She simply could not appear.

Unobserved by them, she watched the fight. What she saw was the beginning of romance in her life. Miguel Espinosa of Monterey, an amateur, volunteered to go into the arena and meet the bull. This he did so valiantly that he hurled the animal to the ground, stood upon him and bowed to the applauding San Franciscans. But he saw only Jesusita Robles. You can guess the last chapter of the story. The parents objected, but Miss Jesusita became Miss Miguel Espinosa. The Espinosas had 24 children.

Miss Espinosa's memory of the old days is vivid, but all she retains in substance of that time are two Canton shawls, more than sixty years of age, given her by Miguel Espinosa. One shawl looks like a large yellow-red flame splashed with blue light. The other is creamy white embroidered with bold blue, black, yellow and red blossoms. A few years ago Madam Calve in her great role of "Carmen" wore such a shawl. Stanford University has tried to buy Miss Espinosa's shawls because they seem a part of the existence of the institution.

"Not for a thousand dollars will I sell them," says Mrs. Espinosa, hugging close her treasure. "I am very poor, but they are all I have left. Perhaps I shall need them when I buy back the ranch."

Mrs. Espinosa is sustained by the dream which keeps alive so many broken Spanish Californians, "When I buy back the ranch."