

CHAPTER VII

UNA SENORA EN SAN ANTONIO

This chapter defines Jeanette Herrmann de Longoria's role in Chito's life for the next twenty years. The chapter recounts the first meeting between Jeanette, her first husband Morris Jaffe, and Chito and the future ramifications of their encounter. Who was Jeanette? How did she come to play such a pivotal role in the life of Chito? This chapter elucidates her role and her view of Chito's business and family life. Morris Jaffe was equally important because of the part he later played in Chito's law suit against his brothers.

At age sixteen, Jeanette Herrmann met a handsome ex-World War II pilot named Morris D. Jaffe at a San Antonio drug store. Born on March 8, 1927, the San Antonio native, who had attended local schools, was in junior college. A year later, in the same drug store, Jaffe asked Jeanette to look up a telephone number for him. At the time Jaffe was working as a private pilot for Miguel Alemán. A year later, in the same drug store, when Jeanette was eighteen, Jaffe asked her for a date. In 1946, Jeanette, nineteen,

and Jaffe, twenty-four, borrowed two hundred dollars to be married.¹

Jaffe and Jeanette had little money in their first years together. Jaffe gave up his life as a professional private pilot and tried his hand at real estate development. He built his first modest middle-class home in San Antonio. It was a small house with a flat gravel roof. The house sold immediately, and he soon contracted to build ten more. Later he went into partnership and developed the Elena Village and Shopping Center, which was another instant success. By the age of 28, Jaffe was named the the South's youngest and largest builder; it was estimated that Jaffe had built one out of five new homes in the San Antonio area.²

With the success of his initial housing developments in the early 1950's, Jaffe and Jeanette were on the road to prosperity. As a side line, Jaffe bought his first air plane and used the plane to search for uranium deposits. He used an air borne geiger counter and was the first to discover uranium deposits in Texas. By the age of thirty, Jaffe had amassed a small fortune through his real estate development and uranium discoveries. Jeanette and Morris were often partners in their real estate ventures. They

¹ Telephone interview, J.H.de L. 5-15-89.

² Ibid.

had six children, Jennifer, Judy, Douglas, Jeffrey, Jana and Jolie. Each child's name began with the letter "J" except for Douglas who was named after his father.

As the children grew, Jaffe and Jeanette never set strict rules about school attendance. It was their philosophy that the children could learn as much at home with Jeanette or out on the building sites with Jaffe as they could in school. Their attitude towards school drove school administrators to distraction, and none of the Jaffe children attended college. Douglas quit high school after only two years. Nonetheless, the Jaffe children learned other skills, and they all excelled in their chosen professions.

The Jaffes moved from smaller homes to more commodious lodgings, eventually living a 300 Alameda Circle in the exclusive Olmos Park area of San Antonio. The house had forty rooms and occupied a square city block. The decor of their home, by all accounts, was as unique as its owners; nothing was left to a conventional style.

Petite and fair of complexion, Jeanette, with her magnetic personality and fine sense of humor, made life in the Jaffe household a continuous adventure. She was gifted with the ability of making each one she met seem very special, her attention focused solely upon the person with whom she spoke. A flair for the dramatic and an intense

interest in design set her apart not only from the ubiquitous San Antonio housewife, but also from the mundane San Antonio social and charity set of matrons.

Neither Jeanette nor Morris conformed to the norms set by San Antonio society, yet to be included in a Jaffe party was an event in itself. To paraphrase George Santayana, gentility is a dead give-away of the middle class, and the Jaffes could never be defined as such.

By the 1960's Jeanette and Jaffe were famous for their hospitality. Early on, Jeanette had developed her talent for entertaining. She made her guests feel immediately at home, in fact often the guests felt so at home, that it was hard to get them to leave. The Jaffe home was always filled with houseguests from far and near. Jeanette's fame as a hostess spread across Texas. Her parties were memorable because of the care she took to assure that all was arranged to perfection.

Jaffe and Jeanette's social set included Lyndon Baines Johnson and his wife Lady Bird. The Jaffes often spent weekends at the Johnson ranch. They also counted John Connelly, Baron Rickey de Portonova, Miguel Alemán and the Meacom family of Texas as good friends.

Considered one of the wealthiest in Texas, the Meacom family owned oil and gas land. Often Jaffe and John Meacom Jr., an independent oil operator, joined as partners in oil

and real estate ventures. In the early 1960's, John Meacom Jr. had financial difficulties and requested Morris' help. In return for bailing him out, Meacom ceded some potential oil and gas land to Jaffe as payment. In order to save taxes, Morris put the title of the land in trust in the names of his six children, who were still minors. The children's investment was named Texas Trust. In the 1960's, after several of the children had reached their majority, oil and gas were discovered on their land, eventually producing enough revenue to provide each child with an income of approximately \$100,000 per month. Later this income substantially affected the lives of Chito and Jeanette.

One of Jaffe's virtues or vices, depending on one's perspective, was his penchant for "going for broke".³ Often Jaffe invested his liquid financial resources in a venture which failed and left him temporarily short of funds. At other times his ventures were successful beyond reasonable expectation. In one of his down periods, Jaffe wanted to use the money from the children's trust, yet the children had reached their majority and refused to allow their father total access to Texas Trust monies. At this point, the children were richer than their parents. It was another example, this time on the United States side of the

³ Telephone interview, J.H.de L., 5-15-89.

Río Grande, of losing the whole in order to avoid paying higher taxes to the government.

Jaffe, in the meantime, had become an active and loyal supporter of the Democratic party in Texas. Although he elected to remain in the background of state and national politics, he quietly offered financial support to his political friends.⁴ Later, Jaffe spent at least 9 million dollars in an attempt to save the crumbling financial empire of Billy Sol Estes, as a favor to President Johnson, who had been Estes' friend for many years. The endeavor was in vain. Mr. Estes was eventually convicted of fraud.⁵

In the 1960's, Jaffe spearheaded the development of the Central Park Mall in San Antonio, which was the most popular shopping mall in that city for the next twenty years. Jeanette owned fifty percent of the enterprise.

⁴ Later, Morris and his son Douglas were involved in the 1989 ethics scandal surrounding Speaker of the House, Jim Wright of Texas. Douglas arranged for a blind trust belonging to Wright and a partner, George Mallick, to purchase a share in the Sabine Lake oil exploration project in Orange County Texas. The day that the acquisition became final, the well shares were sold to a German-owned company, Union Rheinische Petroleum for a profit of more than \$340, 000., or forty times the original investment. The well did not produce the anticipated oil and the project was closed down. The other partners in the Sabine oil project lost their investment. The Jaffes, father and son were invited to testify before the House Ethics Committee. They refused to appear. Later, they were formally subpoenaed to appear before the House Ethics Committee, which was held in camera. Wall Street Journal, April 26, 1989.

⁵ New York Times, April 21, 1989.

Jaffe operated the realty of the mall which Jeanette designed and decorated. The Central Park Mall, 300 Alameda Circle and the children's trust, called Texas Trust played an important role at the end of Chito's life.

As their circle of friends grew, Jeanette and Jaffe often travelled in their private plane to parties throughout Texas and Mexico. It was at one of these parties that Jeanette and Jaffe met Alice and Chito Longoria in Nuevo Laredo.

A friend had assured Jeanette that she would enjoy meeting the Longorias since her friend thought Chito reminded her so much of Jaffe. Jeanette remarked dryly, "One Jaffe in my life is enough. No thanks".⁶ When they were introduced, Chito spent the time describing his collection of African wild game, which he kept on his ranch a few miles from Nuevo Laredo. Jeanette recalled of her first encounter with Chito, "I thought he was pretty boring myself".⁷

Chito and Jeanette and Jaffe were reintroduced in 1963, after Alice's death, when Chito started attending parties in San Antonio, as the "extra man". At one such party, Jeanette and Morris were invited at the last minute. Jeanette found herself seated across from Chito, whom this

⁶ J.H.de L. Oral History. Cassette 8, transcription p.2.

⁷ Ibid.

time she found handsome, charming, and very flirtatious. Chito spent most of the evening dancing with Jeanette. This shocked other Longorias at the party. It also annoyed his date. No one had ever seen him dance before.⁸

Morris and Jeanette were delighted to renew their acquaintance with Chito and subsequently invited him to be their house guest on his next trip to San Antonio. After the first weekend, Chito became a regular at the Jaffe home, adored by parents and children alike. In public, Chito declared his love for Jeanette and announced that were it not for his good friend Jaffe, who was already married to Jeanette, he would marry her in an instant.⁹ There was always a mild flirtation between Chito and Jeanette, but Jaffe was impervious. Jeanette never took their flirtation seriously because she was married and the mother of six children.¹⁰

The Longoria family did not take the flirtation of Jeanette and Chito as lightly. Even the matriarch of the family, Doña Sara Theriot de Longoria, was aware that Chito was in love with Jeanette. She asked her younger sons on several occasions to try and put an end to the romance.

⁸ J.H. de L., Oral History, Cassette 9, transcription p. 4.

⁹ Ibid, transcription p. 9.

¹⁰ Ibid, Cassette 8. transcription p.5.

She referred to Jeanette as "una señora en San Antonio" and did not approve at all of their friendship. She said "the lady is married", that being a sufficient reason for termination of the relationship.¹¹

Besides raising their children and their full social life, Jaffe and Jeanette continued the development of the Central Park Mall. Jeanette maintained her position as designer. Because of her experience as a designer, Chito asked her if she would advise him on the decor of the church he was building in Nuevo Laredo in memory of his father. Jeanette was delighted to accommodate. She travelled to Mexico in search of statues and marble for the church, and often met with Chito to confer on purchases. According to Jeanette, money for the decor of the church seemed to be of no consequence to Chito. She assumed that the Longorias were one of the wealthiest families in Mexico and that the brothers were in agreement that the church should be spectacular.¹²

After several years of visiting back and forth between the Jaffes and Chito, Jeanette suggested to Jaffe that perhaps it might be better if Chito did not visit them as often. She admitted that she was becoming overly fond of Chito and that it was difficult to keep her emotional sense

¹¹ Deposition of Federico Longoria, Vol. III, p. 991.

¹² Ibid, Cassette 9, transcription p. 18.

of balance with his frequent visits. Jaffe retorted that Chito was much too old for her and she was being foolish. He ignored her plea and declared that Chito was always welcome.¹³

Chito had encouraged the Jaffes to travel with him to Africa so that Jaffe and Jeanette might become as fascinated by African wild game as he was. In 1964 Chito issued a formal invitation. They were to be the guests of John Meacom Jr. Meacom was reciprocating because Chito had taken the Meacom family on safari some years earlier and had whetted their interest in wild game preserves. At the last minute Jaffe decided not to go. He suggested that Jeanette invite her best friend Josephine Gill to travel in his place. Surprisingly, because Josephine's husband was very protective of her, he assented to the trip and after some fast packing, the ladies left two days later. They were accompanied by Chito, former President Miguel Alemán and his aide, Coronel Solano.¹⁴

The group arrived in Rome and then flew on to Africa where they transferred to a private plane for the last leg of the trip. They flew for hours and transferred several times. Finally arriving at the Meacom camp in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), Jeanette and her friend Josephine were

¹³ Ibid, Cassette 8, transcription p. 6.

¹⁴ Ibid, Cassette 8, transcription p. 7.

dismayed to discover that the Meacom ladies had already left and the area was inundated with large black flies.

Jeanette and Josephine were extremely uncomfortable not only because of the flies, but also because they were the only women in the camp. After two days, the ladies decided that it would be more appropriate if they left. In the evening, after the men had returned from their hunt, Jeanette put on her boots and bathrobe and trudged over to Chito's tent and said, "Let's get the hell out of here".¹⁵ The ladies packed their belongings and waited until morning to leave.

The ladies paid a guide to show them the way out of the hunting area. Chito delayed his departure for another day, but eventually he caught up with them. With Chito, the ladies flew to Salisbury, where they were joined by Alemán, who also declared that he was elated to be gone from the camp and the flies. John Meacom was angered that the ladies had broken up his hunting party. Jeanette and Josephine flew directly to Rome, and Chito and Alemán continued on a tour through the rest of Africa.¹⁶ Jeanette met Jaffe in New York and Josephine met her husband in France for a tour of the wine country.

¹⁵ Ibid, Cassette 9, transcription p. 9.

¹⁶ Ibid, Cassette 8, transcription p. 6.

After the Jaffes had returned to San Antonio and Chito to Mexico City, the visits back and forth continued. Jaffe continued to ignore the flirtation between Jeanette and Chito.

In 1967, a fire damaged the Jaffe home at 300 Alameda Circle and the family moved to an apartment while the house was repaired. Chito again extended an invitation to the Jaffes to join him on another safari in Africa. Because they were cramped together in a series of small apartments, and unhappy with their temporary living arrangements, Morris and Jeanette accepted Chito's invitation but also took their children.

The Jaffe family and Chito left together from San Antonio, traveling to London, Paris and then to Rome where events unfolded strangely. In Rome, Jaffe became angry with Jeanette. He was annoyed with the flirtation between Chito and Jeanette, hated to travel in general, and wanted to go home. He returned to San Antonio with Judy and Jeffrey. Jolie, too young to travel, had remained at home. Jennifer, Douglas and Jana remained with Jeanette and Chito on the continuation of their safari adventure. This time they went to Mozambique, which the children and Jeanette loved. The flirtation between Chito and Jeanette became more intense. With Chito, they returned to the United States via India, Hong Kong, Japan, and Hawaii. Chito left

Jeanette and the children in California and returned to Mexico.¹⁷

Somehow, Jeanette did not consider the possibility that Morris might be seriously angered by her flirtation with Chito. After all, he had tolerated the situation for the past five years and had never mentioned to Jeanette that she might be out of line. Nor had he ever mentioned the subject to Chito.¹⁸

When Jeanette and her offspring arrived at the San Antonio airport, Jaffe was there to meet them. He flatly announced, without preamble, that he wanted a divorce. He had met a woman who was living in the same apartment building. He wanted to be free to pursue a new relationship. Jeanette was shocked. She had no idea that Jaffe was considering a divorce. Within a few days she pulled herself together, arranged for the children to be cared for, and, escorted by her brother Ronald Herrmann, flew to Juárez for a one day divorce.¹⁹ The date was July 28, 1967.

Jeanette and her remaining children moved to a different apartment and she continued her work at the Central Park Mall. She completed the restoration of their

¹⁷ Ibid, Cassette 8, transcription p. 13.

¹⁸ Telephone interview with J.H. de L. 6-9-89.

¹⁹ J.H.de L. Cassette 9, transcription p. 16.

home at Jaffe's request. With all the children except for Jolie, Jeanette moved back to 300 Alameda Circle. Jaffe insisted that Jolie remain with him. He said that since she was still a child, it was his desire and duty to raise her.

Seven months after her return from Africa, Jeanette went on a buying trip to Nuevo Laredo for wrought iron needed for the Mall. Jeanette stopped by to see an old friend who had been assisting with the Longoria church after Jeanette had discontinued her work there. Her friend was on the telephone with Chito discussing a detail of the church when she mentioned that Jeanette was with her. Chito rushed over. The two had dinner together, catching up on all that had transpired in the last seven months. Chito explained that he had not called her because he did not want to exacerbate the problems she and Jaffe were having. He thought that if there were any chance of reconciliation, he should not be in the way. Jeanette said that it really did not matter because she and Chito were both Catholics and she was a divorced woman with six children. Marriage was out of the question.²⁰

They had agreed to meet the next day, but in an ironic turn of circumstances, each waited for the other in the

²⁰ Ibid, transcription p. 18.

wrong place. Jeanette returned to San Antonio sure that she would not be meeting Chito again.

Chito sent Jeanette's friend from Nuevo Laredo to San Antonio, to inquire if Jeanette would reconsider and marry him. Again, Jeanette responded that the circumstances were too confusing. She was pressured by her parish priest to reconcile with Jaffe, and he reminded her that as a Catholic, she could not remarry. Chito's family also urged him not to marry. They did not approve of Jeanette. They told him in no uncertain terms that he and Jeanette would never be accepted if they were to marry.

Chito's family had his future planned and it did not include another wife. Gloria, his daughter, lived in Mexico City and had already made arrangements to build Chito a small house in her garden. It was not unnatural for the family to be protective of Chito.²¹

Nevertheless, Chito called and begged Jeanette to come to Mexico City and talk to him. She flew down and within a few days, they had decided to marry as soon as possible. On Jeanette's return to San Antonio, Jaffe had a violent confrontation with her. He declared unreasonably, since they were divorced, that she had no right to see Chito.

At the time, Jaffe had no idea that Jeanette had been in Mexico City making her marriage plans. Jeanette was too

²¹ Ibid, transcription p. 20.

frightened to tell Jaffe of her impending wedding, and on the night of her departure, she sneaked away. She took her friend Josephine Gill along to be her witness. Chito and Jeanette were married the next night, March 1, 1968 in Mexico City. Chito's mother Doña Sara, gave her consent for his marriage, but did not attend the wedding, although she was in Mexico City at the time. His brother Alfredo, his sister Laura Salido, his son Chito Jr. and his wife, were the only Longorias to attend the wedding. The rest of the family refused to attend.²²

After their marriage, Chito and Jeanette bought a house on Las Palmas in the Lomas district of Mexico City. True to her nonconformity, Jeanette painted the exterior of the house black. Her new in-laws were shocked by her marriage to Chito and attempted to isolate her from "polite society". Yet Jeanette, with her sunny and guileless disposition, made friends immediately.

Josephine Gill's friends in Mexico City took Jeanette under their wings, which only served to further infuriate the Longorias. She joined a woman's charitable organization in Mexico City called Las Mexicanitas, which

²² A rumor started by the Longorias at the time of the wedding and still alive today, was that Jaffe and Jeanette agreed to divorce and allow Chito to marry Jeanette so that they could gain control of the Longoria fortune. This story repeated on May 9, 1989, by a resident of San Antonio, Texas, as the "absolute truth".

was founded by Amalia Cárdenas, widow of President Lázero Cárdenas. Señora Cárdenas found Jeanette to be a delight. Soon Jeanette had more friends in Mexico than she could handle.

After two years of marriage, Jeanette and Chito celebrated the birth of their daughter Jeanettita. That her half brother and sisters on the Longoria side were thirty years older further scandalized the Longoria family.

Meanwhile, Jeanette's family situation in the United States presented problems. Jeanette had trouble gaining custody of her six children from Jaffe. He refused to relinquish custody of the baby Jolie, and he had encouraged the older children not to visit their mother in Mexico. Eventually, she was forced to hire lawyers and threaten a law suit in order to gain custody of the children. The boys and Judy remained in San Antonio, and Jennifer, Jana and Jolie came to Mexico to live with Jeanette and Chito.

Jeanette and Jaffe had never settled on a division of their community property, and Jaffe merely sent a nominal amount for support of the children. He may have hoped to gain control of the Central Park Mall without any compensation to Jeanette. In fact, the settlement was not concluded for another fifteen years. During that time, Jaffe maintained control of the home at 300 Alameda Circle

in San Antonio, the Central Park Mall, and other assets of which fifty percent was owned by Jeanette.

Notwithstanding the problems of child custody with Jaffe, Chito was occupied with the development of Bosques de las Lomas and often took Jeanette to the new housing development. Chito wanted to build a home there and encouraged Jeanette to choose a site. She found a large lot to her liking and drew up plans that shocked even Chito. He balked. The plans were much too elaborate. Jeanette retorted that if the house could not be built the way she envisioned, then they should not build at all. Eventually, Chito acquiesced, and the construction began.

During their first years, Jeanette had no idea that Chito was having financial and managerial disagreements with his brothers. She assumed that their disagreements centered around the fact that he had married her and they heartily disapproved. She could understand their point of view and was not terribly concerned. After all, they had built a life in Mexico City without the aid of the family and had many friends. Money was rarely discussed.

The house was built of Carrara marble with a central hall plan. To the left was a gigantic room with forty-foot, opaque ceilings which slid back at the touch of a button. Sunken in the center of the room was a marble swimming pool. At either end of the pool were large areas

designed for couches, rugs, and chairs for guests to enjoy the pool, the air and the view of the gardens adjacent to the room. Leading from the pool area were the family and guest bedrooms, each decorated in a different period, and each containing a bathroom, dressing room and walk-in closets. All ceilings were forty feet high, as were the windows.²³

At the other end of the house was the ball room, the formal dining room and the Moroccan room, furnished with Moroccan rugs and settees which were gifts from the Prince of Morocco. The Hunt room contained all of Chito's African safari trophies and a thirty-foot long sunken bar. The gardens were extensive with two lakes filled with exotic birds and tucked away in a corner, a tennis court. The house and grounds were surrounded by a high stone wall with gates and a gate keeper's quarters. The house servants resided in the main house on the ground floor. The house has been photographed for numerous magazines, both of the United States and Mexico.

Before the house in Bosques de las Lomas was completed, good friends, Norma and Diego Redo, asked if

²³ See National Geographic, May, 1978, p. 643. Gossip circulated around Mexico City at the time of the publication of the magazine said that President José López Portillo, who with his family was also pictured in the magazine, was annoyed that Chito and Jeanette were given a double page spread, while the Portillos received only one page.

Chito and Jeanette might give a luncheon for the Governor of California, Ronald Reagan and his wife Nancy. Jeanette hesitated because the house was not complete, but the Redos insisted that the Reagans would be delighted to see it. The end result was a large party centered around their indoor swimming pool. The theme was Japanese. The Longoria parties in their new home were often mentioned in newspaper society columns world-wide.

Their next party, at the house's formal completion, was in honor of Merle Oberon, the actress.²⁴ The party was a celebration of the premier of her final film, Interval. Many actors and actresses from Hollywood attended, including Cary Grant and Ricardo Montalban. In Jeanette's words, the movie "turned out to be a flop but I guess it was a success for her and her love life. She married Rob Walters, her co-star, and moved to Los Angeles".²⁵

While Chito and Jeanette were finishing their house and entertaining at lavish parties, the Longoria brothers in Nuevo Laredo were being informed of their brother's flamboyant social and financial expenditures by Alfredo, the youngest of the brothers who had come to help Chito run ELSA in Mexico City. They were also able to read about

²⁴ Merle Oberon at the time was married to Don Bruno Pagliai, a fellow industrialist and old friend of Chito's.

²⁵ J.H. de L. Cassette 9, transcription p. 26.

them in the society columns. The brothers perceived that Chito was spending their money with abandon and they were determined to stop him.

Jeanette began to realize that there were financial difficulties when her allowance for their houses began to shrink. Chito announced that to economize, the servants should not eat the same food as the family. Jeanette objected and pointed out the difficulty of arranging two separate menus. If the servants were no longer allowed to eat meat, then they would not eat it either. After that, all meals at the Longoria home were Mexican. Beans, tortillas, enchiladas, chiles rellenos, hearty soups, and chicken were the main fare for the next several years. Guests and friends unaware of their financial problems assumed that Jeanette preferred Mexican cuisine.

Chito became erratic in his efforts to save money. On a trip to Italy with Jeanette, he insisted on a suite at the hotel in Rome, yet he did not allow his wife eat the cheese or drink the soft drinks that were for sale in the small refrigerator of their suite. He was in Italy to purchase another mill which cost a half million dollars for his industrial development at Tutitlán.

Unknown to Jeanette, The Brothers had met with Chito in Mexico City and demanded that he stop building his extravagant new home. Chito had promised that he would

stop as soon as the money he had prepaid the builders was expended. The building continued, and The Brothers became highly agitated. ELSA was losing money because of bad debts to the farmers and the high cost of the new plants. By the end of 1972, Chito was experiencing grave financial difficulties and the future looked grim, in the opinion of The Brothers.

Jeanette's marriage to Chito had further alienated him from the rest of his family. They did not approve of her because she was a divorcee, nor did they approve of Chito's extravagant new home. They blamed Jeanette for every unfortunate event that occurred.

Yet Jeanette was now very important to Chito. It was through Jeanette and her new friends in Mexico that Chito was able to solve his tax problems with the Mexican government. Jeanette recalled that it was not Hugo Margain who took a hard line against Chito but Luis Echeverría, the President. Margain had gone out of his way to be of assistance to Chito and ELSA, and was later fired by Echeverría in 1973 because the President considered Margain too soft on businessmen and their tax positions.

Even though their financial problems were mounting, Jeanette managed to entertain their friends, both social and political, and keep Chito's name in the public eye. This of itself was a major contribution, since it was

always possible for lesser known men to be quietly
bankrupted or even thrown in jail.