

# The Oakland Tribune

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Pilgrims in Alameda? The idea is not as crazy as it sounds.

According to "Beyond the Mayflower," an article in last Sunday's USA Weekend Magazine, 35 million Americans are blood relatives of the 102 original Mayflower passengers. Assuming there are about 280 million people in the United States, 12.5 percent could trace their lineage back to the Pilgrims.

Let's consider Alameda an average American community, just this once, and apply that percentage to our population. With about 75,000 Alameda residents . . . carry the one, check the decimal place. . . that's 9,375 Pilgrim kin in town.

Sunday's article was quick to point out that the Mayflower's descendents have blended with other immigrants in true melting pot fashion. There is no telltale nose, no cut to the jaw that gives away a child of Plymouth Rock. So how can we recognize the bloodline? Perhaps the spirit and tenacity of the Pilgrims is too strong to have been diluted over time.

Let's review the history. The Pilgrims were religious separatists who left England and its church. They first went to Holland, then, in 1620, traveled to a new land across the ocean. Their journey lasted 65 days in a merchant ship with no stabilizers, no buffets. They didn't know anyone in their new home because there was almost no one there to know. Nearly half died the first winter. But, by autumn 1621, the Pilgrims could enjoy a harvest celebration, the model for today's American Thanksgiving.

Many of you, surprised by the high odds of elite ancestry, may be wondering if you can finally say, "My family came over on the Mayflower, too. So there."

Perhaps you already have the documents to prove your Pilgrim pedigree. But if you don't have every branch labeled on the family tree, if you don't really believe Uncle Phil's story that the family is descended from Russian royalty, here's a quiz to help determine if you are one of Alameda's Pilgrims. Score five points for every "yes" answer.

1. You don't mind crossing a bridge or transiting a tunnel several times a day. In fact, you relish every trip. There's something about crossing a body of water that gives you a strong sense of satisfaction.

2. You've changed churches at least once. The good news is you didn't have to travel 65 days to do so. With all the churches in Alameda, you probably park in the same space as before and walk an extra block.

## Humor ~ Lit Writing

3. Stand in line for breakfast at Jim's or Ole's? Perish the thought. You arrive well before the crowds, stake out the best table and plant a flag, or, more likely, the Sunday paper.

4. On the subject of staking your claim, being first on the scene – you were one of the people waiting outside Trader Joe's on opening day.

5. Corn? Love it. Ditto for pumpkin. You even know how to cook those bumpy squashes that everyone else uses for decoration.

6. You have an unexplained attraction to people named Miles or Priscilla and to Longfellow Park.

7. Like the Pilgrims who wrote the Mayflower Compact, you believe that a community needs the order provided by rules and regulations. You respectfully pray for a motorcycle cop to appear whenever a car zooms by in a 25 MPH zone. Come to think of it, you wonder what would be wrong with a few pillories for speeders?

8. You never take a mild winter for granted. On a sunny December day, you walk along Crown Beach in shirtsleeves just because you can. You even kick off those buckled shoes (and they're so danged hard to find these days!) and run your toes through the sand.

Add up your points. Now, throw away the scorecard. All of us are children of one kind of pilgrim or another. We, or our parents or grandparents, left a known commodity in search of something new. We can look east to the hills, west to the ocean, south or north and think, "That's nice. But I've found something that suits me better." And that's the real pilgrim's pride.

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# The Oakland Tribune

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A driver wants to turn left on a certain street, but is faced by a "No Left Turn" sign. So he makes three right turns to wind up on his intended route. In my hometown, the maneuver is called a "New Orleans left." It's a well known strategy in a city where a legal left turn is about as common as a bland diet.

In an older city with narrow, well-traveled streets, one person making a left turn can hold up traffic until Mardi Gras. The "New Orleans left" is an accepted aspect of life. I imagine that readers from other historic cities may be nodding their heads, recalling phrases like "Boston left," "Philadelphia left," or even "Montreal au gauche."

The Bay Area has its own left-turn-starved zones, San Francisco's Market Street for one. Perhaps there is a "Burlingame left" and a "Sunol left," too. The term "Berkeley left" seems redundant.

## Humor ~ Lit Writing

Here in Alameda, we have limited rights to left turns. Most are allowed at the driver's own risk. Some are time sensitive. Left turns onto and off of Park Street are squeaky clean in the morning and illicit during late afternoon.

But the left turns from Otis onto Bayview and Broadway, two popular thoroughfares, had always required a strategy, and a certain amount of nerve. Would you get rear ended while you waited for a break in oncoming traffic? Would you have to run the yellow/red to make the turn? Would a yellow/red runner in the other direction crash into you? Drivers traveling straight on Otis had to decide which was faster – the pseudo-turn lane or the busier right hand lane.

As of last week, dedicated turn lanes and traffic signals have been added at the Otis/Bayview and Otis/Broadway intersections. The old street striping is a memory. The old strategies harder to dislodge. (How many of you found yourselves in a right-turn-only lane that didn't used to exist?) The new reality is that drivers traveling in both directions of Otis have time and protection as they turn left. The only side effect is an additional wait at the stoplight now that the left turn option has been added to the cycle.

Why the change? I imagine that engineers studied the two intersections, the traffic patterns, the complaints, the accident reports. They created a solution, gained approval by each layer of management and, voila, left turn lanes were born.

But is there a deeper meaning when a city takes the challenge out of left turns? One friend suggested that it was a symbolic of the city's changing political views. I would no more go there than turn left from Park onto Central at 3:35 p.m. with a motorcycle cop parked at Starbucks.

But there is a difference between a city that goes so far as naming its "No Left Turn" strategy to one that make left turns easier.

New Orleans, like many cities, takes pride in its quirks. Certain street names are knowingly mispronounced. A sandwich with lettuce, mayo and pickles is called "dressed." Voodoo is simply an alternative religion. The quirks and the lore provide unity among natives and old timers. There is a belief that one must live in the city for a long time, perhaps a lifetime, to understand "the way things work."

I have lived in San Diego, San Francisco and Oakland. Only Alameda shares aspects of my hometown's belief system. We have "Ver-sayles" Street. We know good reproduction Victorian wallpaper when we see it. We take pride in knowing where the waterfront used to be, where the farms used to be. And, perhaps, in knowing the best way to turn left from Otis onto Broadway or Bayview.

But now, that strategy is a vehicular dodo bird. Someone could have moved here yesterday and made that left turn as if she was in Topeka or Topanga. That's a good thing for a new resident. It's welcoming, in a way.

Is it bad for everyone else? Is it progress? Or the gentle slope from unusual to ordinary?

I don't know. I just thought I'd give you something to think about while you wait out the extra turn signal at the intersection.

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