

By Don L. Searle

What happened to Paola Yáñez, her doctors said, was a medical miracle. The Quito, Ecuador, teenager's condition suddenly improved, her father was able to give her one of his kidneys, the transplant operation was a success, and she had a second chance at life.

But Marco Yáñez, her father, says that what happened to him was equally amazing. He found the gospel, and the change it made in his life gave him a second chance too.

A childhood bout of nephritis had damaged Paola's kidneys, but medicine had helped her live. When she was 15, however, her condition worsened. One kidney failed, and the other was deteriorating rapidly. Despite dialysis treatments, Paola was slowly dying. She was allowed to drink only a cup of water a day, and her activities were severely restricted because her lungs, pancreas, and heart had been affected.

It was impossible to take her to the United States or Cuba for a transplant—she would have to find a donor in Ecuador. Tests showed that her father could not be a donor. Her mother could, but then doctors found that dialysis had left Paola's level of antibodies so high that the transplant would be rejected. Paola prayed that somehow her life would be spared.

At this point, in June 1988, the Latter-day Saint missionaries knocked on the Yáñez family's door. Paola's mother, Carmen, recalls that she invited them in so she could taunt them. When they told her they had a message that could help her, she angrily said,

THE Real MIRACLE

The hand of the Lord was evident not only in Paola's recovery but also in her father's conversion to the gospel.



“How can you help me when my daughter is dying? I don’t believe there is a God!”

Despite Carmen’s initial antipathy, the missionaries continued to visit the family. At first Marco felt that he was simply too involved in his daughter’s care to pay attention to the missionaries. But finally he listened, out of curiosity. He found they had answers to his questions about the purpose of life.

Marco did not believe in a personal God. For him, God was a universal energy source or a great, distant being uninvolved with human beings. But when his daughter’s condition was at its most critical, he prayed, asking God to either heal his suffering daughter or take her. He prayed, “If You exist, please show me. Please give me the life of my daughter.”

Following his prayer, Marco felt strongly that Paola’s condition would change. He asked the doctors to test him and his daughter again. They told him the test would be a waste of time, but they agreed to do it.

They found that Marco actually *was* a suitable donor—and that Paola’s condition had improved enough that she could receive a transplant!

The day before the surgery, Marco and Paola accepted priesthood blessings from the missionaries.

Both Marco and Paola expected to recover in the hospital for some time after their operations. But Marco was able to leave five days later, and Paola, who expected to stay for two months, left after only 13 days. Marco attributed their quick recovery to their priesthood blessings, and he knew that he had to take the missionaries’ message seriously.

Marco and Carmen Yáñez were baptized on September 11, 1988. Paola, who had heard the missionary lessons before her surgery, and her younger sister, Patricia, were both baptized on November 3. By that time their father had received the Aaronic Priesthood and was able to baptize them.

Brother Yáñez believes that the Lord answered his prayer and allowed him to be Paola’s donor in order to change his heart. “If they had operated on my wife instead of me, I believe I would have gone on living the same life,” he says. It was not a life he is proud of—drinking, smoking, and gambling. He overcame his addictions, he says, because of the answers he received to his prayers. But it was very difficult; he acknowledges that only God could have helped him change.

Brother Yáñez says he now has a strong testimony of the Word of Wisdom and the law of tithing. When the missionaries were teaching him, he was keeping his business open seven days a week to pay for Paola’s U.S. \$1,000-per-month treatment. The law of tithing “was very hard for me to accept,” he says, but he decided to keep the Sabbath day holy and test the promise in Malachi 3:10 by paying tithing. When he closed his store on Sundays, he says, “those who used to buy on Sunday bought on Saturday—and they bought more.” Today he is much better off financially than he was when he operated his business seven days a week.

When Marco Yáñez looks back, he is surprised at the changes in himself. He recognizes that his pleas for his daughter’s life brought the whole family to a level of spirituality he never dreamed possible. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.