



ASK PAPÁ

By Nancy Gonzalez Schwebach

I loved to read, and the summer I turned 12, I visited the nearby library often. One day, a large book caught my eye. I found it was about genealogy, which was a new word for me. Intrigued, I took the book home.

Once home, I looked through it carefully. The old pictures of people who had lived a long time ago, along with their births, marriages, and where they lived, sparked my interest because

I didn't know much about my own family. I wondered what my

PAPÁ HÉCTOR NEVER REALLY TALKED MUCH, BUT I WANTED TO KNOW MORE ABOUT OUR FAMILY.

ancestors were like and where they came from.

I decided to find out.

"Mamá," I asked my mom while she was fixing dinner, "where were you born?"

"Well, in Mexico, of course."

"Yes, but what part of Mexico?"

"In Coahuila. It's a state."

"Oh. What's it like?"

I wanted to find out more about her family, her parents, brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts, cousins, as well as her grandparents. She came from a large family and told us stories from her childhood, but she didn't know all the details. She said, "If you want to know more, you'll have to ask Papá Héctor."

Papá Héctor was my mom's father. Before we moved to Texas, USA, I had seen him only a few times, and he was very reserved and seemed a little stern. Since we'd moved to Texas, Papá Héctor started visiting us every Saturday morning.

Whenever he showed up, my brothers and sisters and I would greet him quickly and then leave. But I knew the only way to find out more about our family was to ask Papá. One Saturday morning when he was watching a TV program, I sat next to him on the sofa and blurted out, "So how have you been, Papá Héctor?"

"Good, good." He barely looked at me.

I stared at the floor, not knowing what to say next, and then started

again, "I wondered if I could ask you something."

This time he turned to look at me, somewhat surprised, as he answered, "Sure, what do you want to know?"

I explained that I wanted to know more about our family. That's how he started telling me about where he was born and his life in a little mining town up in the Sierra, about his parents and siblings and all the fond memories of his childhood and youth. As the weeks went by, little by little he started opening up more and more. We became the best of friends.

I discovered that behind his stern appearance he actually had a great sense of humor! He also had an amazing memory and rattled off every person's full name, with exact birth, marriage, and death date, as well as the official names of places. He made sure I learned how to write them in Spanish correctly.

I learned that Papá Héctor had been the *presidente municipal* (mayor) of his town twice—and other things I never imagined. My mother was surprised. "I don't get it," she said. "He talks more with you than he ever did with me."

I think he was flattered that I would be so interested in his life. I waited impatiently for Papá Héctor to arrive every Saturday morning. Since he had started talking more, he smiled more often and would sometimes burst out laughing. My younger brothers and sisters all agreed he was much more

fun, and we sat around him to listen to his stories. He told us of his childhood pranks, his travels, and how he and my grandmother had fallen in love.

Pretty soon I had not only a rough sketch of our family tree, but I also had a visual image of each person he described to me. They were no longer unfamiliar names of people I'd never met, but somehow they became real. Each person he described now had a place in my heart.

The missionaries taught my family the gospel two years later. My grandfather didn't approve of our new religion, but he still showed respect for my decision to join the Church. Papá Héctor died suddenly when we were away on vacation, and I never had the opportunity to say good-bye.

I'm grateful that I took the time to get to know him, and I'm grateful for his friendship and for the wonderful heritage he left me. Knowing a little more about my family and ancestors has given me great joy and a sense of identity. It makes me feel proud of my roots, of our customs, warm culture, and beautiful language. And I suspect that he, too, must feel proud. **NE**

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Did You Know?

You can add your family's stories, audio files, and photos at **FamilySearch.org**. What stories can you learn from your parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles? Find time to listen and record what they have to say and then add them to **FamilySearch.org** and enrich your family.