

"My Roots"

As the reader was able to read in the previous pages, the revelations described in that little history were enough to ask for more of the same. And sure enough, a few days after Hector received my writings, he called to tell me that what I had wrote in those pages had made his eyes cloudy with tears! He made me promise that just as soon as I could, I should write more of the same and send it to him.

Probably by coincidence, at about the same time, the older of my sons (Herbert), wrote to me asking for some facts about the names and ages of our relations --be they dead or alive. He said he was planning to begin a sort of record of all of the ancestors of our family so that in some latter years, his son would know a little bit about his heritage. And so I wrote what follows in these next pages. Of course not all happened just as I describe in these pages--an improbable task! After all, I did not have a single note from which to refer to. I was using only my memory and imagination to produce what follows. And, as I had promised my son, Hector, as soon as I finished them, I sent a copy to my sons and daughter.

It seems to me that Hector could not have chosen a more appropriate title for this chapter! He chose to call it:

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Howdy hijos:

Wishing that everything is going well. I write to you these few lines so that you would know that we are well, and also to answer your letter in which you ask me about some facts regarding my parents. I hope that it is what you want to know regarding the subject. I would have liked to tell you some things about your mother's side, but if you do what the end of this letter says, we might be able to gather the most essential things so that you would put in writing what you propose to do. It won't be much what I tell you about my parents either, because they lived in a time in which the most important thing for them was to live just one day at a time without even thinking that some day somebody would have liked to know any part of their lives. Therefore, what follows of them are things that I heard them talk about.

What I do know, is that both branches of my family, they had their start in an area that nowadays it is part of the state of Jalisco. For some reason, that part, which was considered to be a colony of Spain, was very sought after by the Spanish conquerors. This turned the entire region into a place in which even nowadays, it is still possible to encounter a nucleus of people in which the majority of them have a light complexion and blue eyes!!! My parents were born in that region. A curious thing was that of the four brothers that we were, only the last two came up with some color in their eyes. (my mother told me that her last son had even clearer eyes than Gabriel). In contrast with the eyes that the two older ones came up with, my mother's eyes were sort of greenish, and if she would have dressed a little better, she could have been considered, if not beautiful, at least pretty. But in the years that I knew her, I never saw her with her face made up--always only natural. Her complexion was very white, her way of dressing was of the most ordinary, her height was very short (perhaps 5 feet at the most), and her skirts were never higher than her instep.

My father's eyes were light blue and he must have been a very tall man, because when I knew him, he was already over seventy years old, and still, he was very erect. He was easily over 6 feet tall, and also his complexion was very white. Again, very strange that of the entire family, only Miguel and me came up with our eyes different than the rest of the family. Both families were people that worked under respective farms due to the type of region of that part of the state.

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It was not until after the Mexican revolution (1910-1921), that communities began to get organized, and grow into the cities that are there now.

My mother's parents lived in, and raised their family on a farm that was not very far from a town that is now called Degollado, Jalisco. Consequently, all of her family considered themselves to be originally from that town. My grandfather's name was Celso Castellanos, and my grandmother's was Felicitas Etchegollen, and both of them lived until they were nearing 80 years of age!!! It is said that they died of old age. I remember hearing my mother say that her grandfather, by her father's side, was called 'El Castellans'. She did not say why they called him by that name. Perhaps it was on account of his last name. Possibly, it could also have been that he was from a region of Spain called 'Castilla'. As for my grandmother's last name, Etchegollen, it definitely sounds like a name from people originally from the border between France and Spain.

We must remember that in Winnemucca, there were several 'Basque' people with that name. Consequently, from my mother's side, there is the strong possibility that her ancestors were from that part of Spain.

I couldn't tell you a thing about my parent's ancestors, because, as you well know, my father was an old man when we started to understand things, and he didn't talk too much anymore. The only thing that I could tell you about him, is that he was born in 1862 in a place not very far from the city of Arandas, Jalisco--about 80 miles north of Degollado (where my mother came from).

According to what I heard my father say, his ancestors were grand landowners because every now and then, he used to say that they were owners of a big chunk of land. During the revolution of 1910, the majority of the big landowner's properties were taken away from them and were shared among the working people that worked the land itself. As it turns out, my father's ancestor's properties were taken away during that period. When their properties were taken away from my father, he already had a family (as we all know, he had been married once before he married my mother). He had 9 children!!! I knew one man and two women from that family. The name of the man was Salvador, and the names of the women were Delfina and Tomasa. According to my father, every time one of his sons or daughters got married, they moved out of

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town. Some of them moved even out of the state. One of the daughters, Delfina, got married to a man from La Piedad, and when my father's wife died, the only daughter left with him was the youngest of them all, Tomasa. My father told me one day that shortly after he buried his first wife, he and his last daughter of only 19 years, decided to move to La Piedad where Delfina already lived. My father thought that perhaps Tomasa could stay with her older sister because my father didn't know what to do or where to leave her after he was left alone with his youngest daughter as beautiful as she was.

Years later when I had the opportunity to meet her, she was a woman of about 30 years of age. Her hair was long and blonde. Her eyes were green, and she showed that her ancestors definitely were Europeans. Delfina's husband accepted Tomasa to stay with them for a while, but only until she got married or she went to work. Even if it was to work as a maid at some rich people's house. We must remember that in those days, it was very rare, almost impossible, that a woman worked out of her home.

My father had to find another place to live. He found a family that gave him a room to sleep in, in exchange for him doing domestic jobs around the house. He had to go wherever he could to find a place to eat. Every now and then, he would go visit his two daughters and he would stay with them for a couple of days at the most.

As we know, he was a man raised on a farm, and he did not have many skills to make his living in a city. He found that he could make a living buying, then selling grain. Things like corn, or wheat. He would buy it then resell it to the small stores. He was able to earn some money at this. Some days he did real good, and other days he did not, but he didn't know what else to do. It was the only way for him to earn a living.

One day somebody told him that in a house that was just across from the park, they were selling some very good food. When he went for the first time to buy a taco, he found that the person that cooked and sold such good food, was a lady of 70 years of age!!! There was also a younger lady of about 24 years of age, and also there was a little girl about 4 years old. We all know who they were. Who could have known that that old man still had about a third of his life left ahead of him, and that right there, in that very same house that he came to, just to buy a taco, he was going to live to see

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the guys that you are looking at in this picture that was taken only hours after he died!!!! Wow!!

Regarding my mother's side, curiously, something very similar happened to her as it did to my father as far as the reasons why they had to leave their places of birth. As I mentioned before, that part of the state of Jalisco was very sought after by the first Spaniards. This indicated that the region had something that they liked. Evidently, something very worthwhile was in that region.

When the "Revuelta " (the revolution), it was in that region that the local people resisted the most, which brought tremendous hates and reprisals from both parts. When the big farms started to fall into the hands of the revolutionaries, they committed horrible crimes. Afterwards, they would burn their homes to the ground. After that, they would rape any woman that they could get their hands on. As you may remember from my last letter, when I was about 14 years old, my mother tried to tell me the reason my sister, Lupe, had not been my father's daughter, but foolishly, I didn't want to listen to what she wanted to tell me on that occasion. A big mistake on my part. Now I recognize it. We can see very clearly now that she wanted to pour out her heart in that way opening her mind to her oldest son. And when I didn't want to hear what she wanted to tell me on that occasion, she turned to that girlfriend of hers. I think I also mentioned in that letter that I sent you, that when my mother's friend told me that Lupe was not my father's daughter, she also told me not to blame my mother. That she couldn't help it. What I really wanted, was that my mother not feel guilty about it. Erroneously, I thought that by ignoring it or just not paying much attention to what she wanted to tell me, I would help my mother get rid of her bad feelings that she seemed to carry with her. When I told her that as far as I was concerned, nothing would change, even if Lupe was not my father's daughter, she never said anymore about it and our lives went on..

Years later when I started to read about the Mexican revolution, I started to think that maybe one of those men that was looking for a way to avenge himself any way he could, and remembering what my mother's friend had told me. She told me that my mother couldn't help it. That perhaps one of those men was the father of my sister Lupe!

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My mother had a cousin that lived not very far from our house and when my aunt Juana came to visit my mother, I would hear them talk about their younger years and about the lands and farms, and things of that sort. On one occasion when my aunt had gone, I asked my mother about the lands and farms that they had talked about. To this, she said;

"The lands and farms that all my brothers and sisters had worked were taken away during the 'revuelta'

Without her really knowing, her face showed that she had suffered more than the rest of her brothers and sisters. She still had one sister that lived in Degollado and when I bought my first car, your mom, you and me used to go and visit my aunt Carmen, and when we returned to La Piedad, I would tell my mother that we had gone to visit my aunt in Degollado. My mother would tell us that we should not be a burden to her sister, and would almost prohibit us to go there again!! Your mother once asked me:

"It is strange that your mother doesn't want us to visit the only sister that she has."

One day I asked my sister Lupe, what the reason was that my mother and my aunt Carmen never visited each other--being that they were the last sisters from the whole family. Lupe told me that when my mother needed one of her sisters, they all turned their back on her. After this, I started to pay more attention when my mother would talk to my aunt Juana. But I was not living there anymore. I was already married, and there were very few opportunities to listen to them talk. I came to the conclusion that from what I had heard on all previous occasions, the only person that helped my mother when she was pregnant with her daughter, was my mother herself!! And that all of her sisters (among them my aunt Carmen) did absolutely nothing to help her out.

I believe that the sorrow that my mother seemed to carry on for the entire life, stemmed from that situation. When her father died, I think Lupe was only 2 years old, and it was then that the grandmother decided that there was nothing for them in Degollado and decided to move to La Piedad, where the grandmother had a nephew

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who was a bachelor. He lived alone, and she thought that maybe this nephew might let them live in his home for a few days. And that is how the 3 women ended up living in that house. The very same house that was in front of the park that sold some very good food!!! The very same house that a lonely old man went to to eat some tacos!!! The very same house in which my three brothers and I were born, and lived in until we were married!!!

It wouldn't be until 1955 (33 years after the three women had gone to visit the nephew) when a brother of the nephew decided to sell that house. In 1922, when the grandmother asked her nephew if they could live there for a short time while they could find some way to earn their living in that strange town, the nephew decided to go to California for a while. He left his aunt in charge of the house, and the "while" in California stretched on for almost 33 years!!! During the 33 years that we all lived there, my parents never paid one cent of rent because Jose Tinoco (the name of the nephew), sent enough money to pay the taxes for the property with instructions that nobody was to bother the family the he had left there to take care of the house.

It was right there in that house that the old man of 62 years went to buy a taco, and he never left that house until he was taken to the cemetery 25 years later. I wanted to buy it when I learned that my brother would have to leave the house, but when it was put up for sale somebody else had closed the deal and there was nothing my mother could do but leave the house.

Nobody knew how or why such a couple that differed in age by so much could establish a relationship that lasted over 25 years. There has always been cases such as this, but the majority of the time, one of the parties was rich, and the other one would expect that before long they would get all the money! But in this case, the older partner was just as poor as the younger one, leaving one to speculate that perhaps the grandmother felt that there was not much left for her and she would rather leave her last daughter with some man, because in those times when a woman became a mother without a husband, she was exposed to a very adverse life until her death. Now days there is no such thing, but unfortunately that was the case back then. Maybe when the grandmother weighed the alternatives, she felt there was nothing strange about the fact

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that she had started something that for the next many years resulted in a blessing for the older party and at least a fountain of tranquility for the younger one.

Regarding that union, you might notice that I didn't mention 'happiness' for the younger partner. This, of course, was due to the circumstances in which both partners found themselves in. But one thing that I am absolutely sure of, is that when their children began to be born, those children brought something to that couple that they were not expecting in their lifetime. For one thing, the younger daughter of my father was already 21 years old, Tomasa. And never in his wildest dreams did he ever think that he would someday have sons in the future.

Regarding my mother, she was still a young and pretty woman, and now it seems that her future had been adversely affected for her due to the 'revuelta'. When destiny brought to her the family that resulted from that union, it necessarily brought to her something that she had considered gone.

When we were growing up, (I must have been 9, Miguel seven, and Gabriel 5) I remember my father saying to my mother;

"Hey you, dress up the children because I want to take them to the bridge."

I never remember my parents calling themselves by their first names. It was always-- 'hey you'.

When my father promised to take us to the bridge, we would get all excited. This bridge was in reality a bridge that crossed a very wide river that was not very far from our town, and it was the place that we most wanted to go to. When my mother dressed us up, the 'dress up' always consisted of washing our faces and our ears, which left us unrecognizable not only because we were clean, but also because of the redness that our faces had received from the scrubbing!!! I remember my mother saying to my father;

"Are you not going to change your shirt?" And my father would answer with:

"I will put on another shirt, but you are not going to leave my face like these poor children!!!"

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I remember that every time my father would take us to the bridge, we very rarely got to that bridge!! I would not be exaggerating when I tell you that not one single person would go by without talking to my father about something that we did not understand. And at the end, those encounters always ended with the same question:

'How did you do it? How did you end up with such beautiful children?'

Further up the road, another person would say to my father;

'What a happy person you must be. If only god would give me something like that.'

Still further up the road, when my father would encounter one of his own friends, and his friend would ask him the same questions, my father would let go of things that grown men would say to each other about the opposite sex. He would show off and say something like:

"Only men with their 'balls' in their proper place. Like I i have mine!"

All of this was repeated over and over and over until we we would get near the bridge.

The translation of all of this was simply proudness and happiness in its purest form. It is beautiful to imagine this old man of seventy- some years, with children of that age and the complexion that we were, and still showing the redness of our faces from the scrubbing that our mother had given us. When somebody asked him if we were his grandsons, the old man would say to them;

"My balls!!! Those are my children!!!"

Regarding my mother, there is no necessity to say any more or any less. But in a different form, the same thing would happen when she would take us out as would happen with my father. But still, very often, she showed that the 'tragedy' that she went through in her youth, didn't let her enjoy the happiness that my father always showed during our growing years.

I remember that some days she would be very preoccupied with something that only she knew about. It could have been the above described incident of her youth, or it

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very well could have been seeing her children so young and their father an old man of seventy-some years of age. I can imagine that only a woman could understand and analyze such a situation. Several years went by before she began to show some acceptance of what life had brought her

I recall that the time she seemed to be the happiest was when I was about 15 years of age. That year my sister Lupe, got married, so that left my mother as the only 'woman of the house'. The girls that had always been our childhood playmates started to turn into 'women'. These girls started to turn our house into their hang-out, and they would ask my mother;

"Why don't you help me get one of your son's attention towards me?" My mother apparently enjoyed that game immensely. She would tell them;

"If you will help me with the house work, I will see to it that my sons pay attention to you"

Evidently the girls would believe her because some of them would go to extremes to help her clean the house!!!"

Before my sister got married, you could find trash in all the corners of the house. But after she left, all the trash was gone too!!! When we would come home, my mother would tell us how much fun she had with the neighbors. Naturally all of that was just a game that soon would pass. But my mother was very happy about the whole thing.

And so it was until three years later when I departed to California. What happened after that, I will tell you in one of my next letters.

Hijos, regarding my families side, I am afraid this is all that I can tell you. As for your mother's side, she doesn't seem to know much about it, except for the names of her grandparents and a few other relations.

It seems that we won't be able to get what you would like, therefore, I suggest to you that when you wish to get these facts, just make me a questionnaire of what you would like to know of her family, and perhaps we will get what you would like to know about her ancestors.

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And now I would like to thank you for the pictures that you sent me. That son of yours is always smiling, never shows any indisposition, and only seems to have good humor. He seems to be very big for his age. I hope you send some of those pictures to your brothers and sister. That is all for now.

I hope what i wrote to you here will be what you asked for, as I mentioned in the beginning, it takes a person with experience in editing and writing so that things would be accommodated in the proper way so that the things you propose to do with these words would result in something useful for you.

Perhaps one of these days one of you guys will re-do this, and do it right.

Until my next letter, we send you our greetings and the best that your parents could possibly send to you.

We love you
Rafael y Consuelo