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Genetic Reunions

Paola Lizares



I came back from my trip to the Philippines about two weeks ago. In retrospect, I now have a clearer vision of what this trip meant to me.

It was my first trip to my country of origin in ten years. It was my husband's first trip to the Philippines in his life, so it was the first time I introduced him to my mother's mother and her family. And it was the first time I met most of my father's relatives.

My parents separated when I was only two. Afterwards, I met my father just a couple of times, once when I was nine and once when I was nineteen. That time, when I was nineteen, he introduced me to two of my uncles and to four of my cousins. Six years later, when I was twenty-five, he passed away. But, thanks to the Internet, I was able to keep in touch with both uncles and to "meet" my father's second wife. In this recent trip to the Philippines, I met her in person. Funny coincidence: her name is the same as my mother's, and her father's name is the same as my mother's father's name.

So, almost a month ago, for the very first time in my life, I met my stepmother, the rest of my father's siblings and siblings-in-law, my cousins,

the children of a cousin, my father's cousins, the children of his cousins, his friends, and his dog. Of course, the sentence I heard most frequently during this trip was "You look like your dad." Yes, I do look like him. And I look like the rest of the family, too. It's something in the eyes, people say.

Have you ever met a relative for the first time in your adulthood? It could be the relative of a biological parent, as in my case, or it could be the relatives of a relative who emigrated long ago, as in the case of my stepfather's family.

In the mid-nineties, I traveled with my mother and stepfather to Argentina. There, in Roque Pérez, a small town in the middle of the Humid Pampa, live the descendants of his granduncle, who ran away from the Basque Country at the beginning of the 20th century because he couldn't stand his new stepmother. Aunt Alina and her siblings look just like my stepfather's aunts at home in Tolosa and San Sebastián. Yet they are cowboys. They live in a rural environment, wear different clothes, and speak a different kind of Spanish.

We wouldn't have known about our relatives in South America if it hadn't been for a Zaragozaan priest with an interest in genealogy who took the initiative to trace back their roots and bring the two branches back in touch.

There is another passionate story in my stepfather's family, fit for an Isabel Allende novel. Long ago, a Basque woman went to Mexico on her own (a feat for that time), had an affair with a married man (yes, married!), and reared her son all by herself in the Basque Country (scandal!). This son, Uncle Josetxo, had one daughter and four sons. Years after the married man and his wife passed away, one of Uncle Josetxo's sons went to Mexico on business and was brave enough to knock on the door of the house of his half-family. They welcomed him with open arms.

What about you? Have you ever met a long-lost relative?