

A short story from this collection.



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1.1) A Fascination With Family Tales

A short story by Hugo Aurelio Toro



Father's family – Ester and Jose Toro Corral plus children (Hugo, top left) - 1944.



Mother's family – Luisa and Sergio Mouat Moya plus children (Carmen, top middle) - 1956.

Without question, being able to look back three generations to your great-grandparents is a wonderful thing. The boy is ever grateful that he was able to meet his great-grandmother. She wore strong Spanish features on her face and was in her third age. She was dressed in black, was petite, slightly hunched over, and had a deep stare for naughty children.

Migration took his ancestors to Chile post-colonial days, seeking a stable and peaceful land. The boy's two families can trace their heritage back to the late 1700s to Spain, Scotland, and Italy. One hundred years later, in the late 1800s, the families are established in the capital Santiago. This city is inhabited by peace loving people who farm on fertile lands, are enterprising in business, and value highly family and education. The Andes Mountain range looks over them and provides security.

The boy, from an early age, listened attentively to family tales around the dining table. When other children could not wait to get away, he was interested in the stories that are told and how they came to life. The happy stories, the thought-provoking ones, and the sad recollections, were given with gravitas by the elders, and there was a sense of profound respect and analysis.

His parents, Carmen and Hugo were a good match and in love. They married in January 1960 and had four children that decade.

The eldest boy Hugo took his father's first name, as is tradition. When the boy came across their wedding album, with child eyes he marvelled at the black and white wedding photos. His mother in her white wedding dress and veil, was frozen in time as she stepped out of the rear of the black car and smiled at the camera. Was that smile for him? The child claimed it regardless.

Carmen often told the story of when she started dating Hugo. She was eighteen years old, and he was not much older.

They were young students at a technical college in Santiago Chile, in the late 1950s. She was studying dressmaking, and he was learning to tailor. Carmen was a competent dress maker using her skills to dress her siblings. Hugo boasted to being able to hand stitch a full men's suit. He dressed himself in smart new clothes.

Carmen recalled that a group of young ladies gathered by the first story classroom window. They were curious about the well-dressed handsome young man waiting in the courtyard below.

‘Who is he waiting for?’ they whispered. Carmen, glanced over their shoulders and saw that it was her boyfriend Hugo waiting for her.

She kept it to herself, but it pleased her that her classmates found him handsome.

The couple treasured extended family, which was a valuable example for the next generation. Carmen maintained a close relationship with her parents, brothers, and sisters. She is the eldest of five children and had a leadership role. She assisted with their education. Hugo is the youngest of eleven children, and he was coddled by his older siblings and his mother. He embarks on a building apprenticeship with his older brothers, serving him better than tailoring in the long term.

On Mother's Side

In 1906, great-grandparents Andres Mouat Berrios and Edelmira Moya Ramirez were married and raised a family.

The Scottish and Spanish heritage mix couple lived on a property in the Quinta Normal area in Santiago. The story goes, that great-grandmother who was eighteen at the time, seemed unready for marriage. She hid in the chicken shack for days to avoid her husband.

The couple went on to have eight children. Times were hard and five children survived beyond the great depression, the eldest of these siblings being Sergio Mouat Moya (Carmen's father).

The property owned by Andres and Edelmira was subdivided, and the males in the family, built homes there and raised their families. As a result, the four boys (Sergio, Cesar, Raul, and Mario) lived side by side. The daughter, Lucia, moved to another part of the city with her husband Lican. He was in the mining industry and was a brilliant illustrator. They had five children of their own.

In the 1930s and 1940s, Edelmira's grandchildren arrived.

Son Cesar lived in the furthest property. He raised one daughter there. On the second property, possibly the original homestead (a two-story timber home with a historic appearance) lived Edelmira and son Raul. In the third house lived the youngest son Mario, and his wife Alicia. They were both gentle and kind people who adopted a child. On the last house, Sergio and wife Luisa raised five children.

In the 1960s, great-grandchildren arrived.

Hugo, David, Paulina, and cousins Mireya and Cecilia explored the family homes with great gusto. Magical moments were discovered within the walls of grandparents Sergio and Luisa's home. The extended family showed an abundance of love towards the new children. There are many more great-grandchildren, and they arrived in the next decade.

On Father's Side

Grandmother Ester Morales Miranda lived a long life surrounded by her children and grandchildren. She was a round lady who enjoyed hugs from her grandchildren.

In her youth in 1918, Ester Morales Miranda married a Chilean sailor Jose Toro Corral, and they had a large family of eleven children all together. Jose had a strong Spanish heritage in his family tree. Ester's mother Maria Miranda migrated from Sicily adding Italian heritage to the family.

The 1930s Great Depression was tough on the young couple Ester and Jose. Half the children died from illness and other tragedies. Jose himself died middle-aged from stomach cancer, at home in the care of Ester.

Jose imparted on his children a strong political background. They were descendants of the earliest colonial governing family, the Toro. With the passing of the sailor in 1944, the older boys took responsibility for the needs and survival of the family.

The six surviving siblings and mother Ester are remarkably close, well into their adult years, and they enjoyed nothing more than getting together to reminisce around the dining table in the company of family members. Eldest sibling, Teofila Toro Morales showed great leadership throughout her life. The men in the family respected her a great deal. Her countenance became serious as she told the tragic story of when she was a child.

She revealed that she once had an older sister named Justina. There was silence at the dining table, and everyone tuned into her words. A tragic story unfolded from the early 1930s post the great depression.

The two girls were home babysitting while the parents were out in search of work and food. There was a knock at the door, and they went to see who was there. A scuffle broke out with someone trying to break into the house. It was a brazen thief who knew the children were alone. The two girls put their shared weight behind the partially open door.

The intruder thrust a knife forward past the narrow door opening. It struck one of the girls in the chest. They continued to keep him at the door until he was unsuccessful and ran off. The injured older girl collapsed to the ground. She died at the entry of the house in her sisters' arms.

Silence was held for moments while the family members at the table were processing the tragic and violent attack. Hugo junior (Ester's grandson) is sitting silently at the table, and he is glued to every word and wants to hear more from the elders.

A Good Memory For Tales

Hugo junior had a sharp memory for details and found himself storing his own personal tales and early childhood stories.

When he and baby brother are three and four years of age, familiar yet shifty people enter their lives. A babysitter was hired to look after them while parents were at work. She was a fun young lady, and they had terrific fun dancing together in the lounge room to all the hits on the radio. The babysitter taught them The Twist by Chubby Checker and introduced them to the magic of The Beatles.

One day, her brothers who were mature boys, came by the house when she was looking after the children. The fellows were friendly, and the boys liked them instantly.

The parents came home in the evening, and they saw the house emptied of all money and valuables including clothes. They were in shock at the invasion, yet extremely relieved that the boys were unharmed. In excited child voices, they let the parents know that nice men had visited, and that they left with stuff. The parents reported the robbery at the local police station.

Reassured in the main, the parents asked nothing further of their boys. What would the over imaginative children know anyway? Had it been asked if indeed the men were related to the babysitter, the answer would have been, '*yes, they are her brothers.*' The boys were not asked, so that information was not provided.

The boys continued to be attached to their babysitter and even visited her and her brothers, at their home. They lived three blocks away, an easy walk for the children.

Extended family

Grandmother Ester (on father's side) often looked after the boys. They were terribly fond of this loving lady and enjoyed the visits to her place immensely. After the passing of Grandfather Jose quite young, she held a tight and loving family unit. When the grandchildren arrived, her mature boys and eldest daughter had already left home.

It was more common to meet at aunty Teofila's house instead. In the 1960s she found herself a single mother. Her and her son Dagoberto, who had suffered from polio when he was a baby,

were abandoned by the father. Her highly ethical brothers confronted the fellow in the street, but he was determined to leave.

Dagoberto's bright personality and intelligence outshone any disability that he had. He was the eldest cousin, and all the children were fond of him. Aunty Teofila owned a modest single level townhouse in a large estate. She lived in that house with her son and a lady carer.

Aunty Teofila's generosity was a lesson to the grandchildren. She told the story of meeting a homeless teenage girl. She offered her board and food in exchange for the care of her son. Her offer was gladly accepted and that was the beginning of a lifelong friendship. In time, this young carer is viewed like an adopted daughter.

Grandfather Sergio (on mother's side) had served in the military and as a result valued discipline and punctuality. At dinner time he liked all to be present at the table and on time. There is a deep tradition in all family members eating together.

Grandmother Luisa and children had prepared the evening meal and set the table. Food was served on a large timber table by the kitchen servery window. Grandfather Sergio naturally became impatient with latecomers. His displeasure was clear to see.

Hugo senior was a guest in the house and was always respectful of his father-in-law and had his children seated on time. They were coached on table manners from an early age – *no elbows on the table, no noisy eating, and no leaving the table until told*. Despite the rules, mealtime with family was a joy and served as a valuable lesson for the new generation of grandchildren.

An Early Education

Grandparents were not the only ones to hold a special place in their hearts. Great-uncle Mario and wife Alicia lived next door, and Mario is in fact grandfather's younger brother.

At the age of four, young Hugo developed a great fondness for Mario and Alicia. He was often left in their care. His great-uncle kept big dogs in his yard for added security in a capital city. Bursting into their yard, keen to see Mario and Alicia, the big dogs were startled. Fortunately, they recognised young Hugo, so he was only knocked to the ground and licked.

His great-aunt was a retired schoolteacher who valued lessons ahead of play time. Alicia installed a joy of learning into young Hugo. He loved to sit with her and explore her primary school textbook. He wanted to learn, and he enjoyed the ABC tutelage and the stories waiting to be unlocked from behind each of the chapters featuring an alphabet letter. She successfully taught Hugo to read and write before his first year of school.

He owes a great debt to this lady who passed on a valuable life skill early on. Childminding ended when he was enrolled in his first year of primary school. Initially, mother took him to school and introduced him to his teacher.

Once he was confident with buses, he insisted on going to and from school on his own. This really upset his mother, as she wanted to protect him, but he was equally determined to claim his independence. From the bus window, he watched her wave goodbye at the bus stop, with a look of deep concern on her face.

Since he could already read and write, his first year of school was easy. He seemed an odd fellow to his teacher because she left him unattended as he copied text and pictures from books. His small hand produced running writing and within the lines. Others in his class were struggling with hand drawn shaky capital letters, barely recognisable.

As young Hugo grows, he learned a valuable lesson in risk-taking at his grandparents' house. He was a fearless and strong child. Heights were of no concern to him.

He often climbed onto the backyard pergola to walk along the beams. He did this to reach the grapes that were growing on along the beams in springtime. He could also pick the fruit from the nearby branches of the Loquat tree. The fruit of that tree is like a small apricot, with smooth yellow skin, and sweet flesh surrounding large brown seeds. It was a delicious treat to pick ripened fruit straight off the vine and tree.

On one occasion, while 'tightrope walking' the pergola beams, he slipped and stumbles backwards towards the paved floor. Time slowed down, and he waits for the impact. Halfway down, a vine branch caught the back of his knee, like the hand from his guardian angel reaching out to halt his fall.

He dangled there in mid-air for a moment, knowing that he had been incredibly lucky.

Visiting Great-Grandmother

In the late 1960s, Carmen and Hugo moved their young family away from the capital to Viña del Mar. The separation from their grandparents and extended family was felt by the young children. Yet, due to strong family bonds on both sides of the family, at any opportunity they visit family in the capital city.

On one of these visits, Hugo junior, aged nine, was incredibly pleased to see his great-grandmother, Edelmira again. She was ever fragile and being cared for by her daughter Lucia in their family home. A quick visit by the great grandchildren to her bedroom up the stairs made Edelmira smile, but she is not to be disturbed for too long. She needed her rest.

Lucia and husband Lican, managed a busy home with five mature children and now great-grandmother upstairs, giving life to the large house. It was an elegant and modern two-story home. With five mature children in the house, dinner time was jovial, and fascinating stories flow with ease. On quiet moments, Lican brought out his sketch book and showed the children how to draw with precision, and magic flowed from his ink pen astonishing the children.

The grandchildren felt loved in this caring and vibrant home and were glad to see their great-grandmother.