



Video Story Transcript

LOOKING FOR PAPITO

By: Storyteller Antonio Sacre

<http://www.antoniosacre.com/>

Link to YouTube Video:

https://youtu.be/9xL_sr6eF30

Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

Hi, my name is Antonio Sacre and this is an excerpt from a longer story called Looking for Papito. Spanish ...When my father left Cuba he didn't speak any English at all ... and when he came to the United States he met a woman who didn't speak any Spanish at all ... and the two got married. And they had me. That meant I grew up speaking Spanish with my father and English with my mother.

Now I was born it was just me -- and life was perfect and on my very first birthday my mom and dad gave me twin baby brothers. My mom was up to her ears. My dad said, "Three boys in one year that's the man that I am you know!"

We were a handful for my parents of course, and so my dad did what very many other Cuban men would do in the same situation he called his mother. Spanish. My Cuban grandmother came to live with us. We were growing up in Delaware at that time. And so, in my house our first language -- my two brothers and I -- was Spanish. So, we

spoke Spanish with my dad, Spanish with my grandmother and of course we learnt English from my mom and we all learnt each other's languages.

Now, it's typical in Cuban families for the first-born male to have the nickname - Papito ... and I was given that nickname by my grandmother Papito. It means little man ... little boy. But in my family, it reminded her of my grandfather who died right after they came from Cuba and so it was honor to have his name. And when we got out of diapers my grandmother moved back to little Havana in Miami Florida.

Now my first day of kindergarten I was five years old. I was so excited to go to school to get out of the house with those two other boys and my mom was sad and my dad was happy -- "my boy was going to school you know".

I get to this school and I see all those kids and I am nervous and excited and I looked at them and I spoke in my first language I said ... Spanish ... And the kids looked at me and said -- what? -- Spanish ... And my teacher ... she was very sweet ... and she said, "Honey nobody speaks Spanish here we only speak English".

"Oh, that's OK I speak English too."

"Hi everyone, my name is Papito." And one boy in the back said "Pa-Papido sounds like Dorido!" "No, no its Papito" "No, no its Dorido!"

Now he is just a five year old having fun with the nickname that he never heard before, but obviously I didn't like it so much. I went home and spoke to my dad. Now if you don't speak Spanish don't worry I will translate what I said but this is what I said ... Spanish ... and my dad said ... Spanish... I told my dad I didn't want the Cuban nickname that my grandmother gave me I didn't care it was part of the family I wanted to be called a more American sounding name I wanted to be called Tony. My dad said okay.

A couple of days after he dropped me off at school and he said "Adios Papit..aa, Tony adios" "OK Papa, Adios"

And one of those kids is in the playground ... he was maybe third or fourth grader -- he looked like a giant ... he came up to me and he said, "What was that language you were speaking?" "Spanish." "Sounds stupid." "Are you stupid?"

I didn't know what to say and I went home I did what I lot of other kids do from immigrant families I said ... Spanish ... I never want to speak Spanish again" ... Spanish ... "No from now on -- only English." And when my father spoke to me in Spanish I answered back to him in English. And after a while he spoke to me in Spanish. I pretended like I didn't understand until he only spoke to me in English and little by little my first language was slipping away.

And when I turned eight my parents got divorced... there is a long story behind that part of ... with their cultural background and part of the way it just the way it worked. And so, my dad moved out and I didn't have anyone to speak Spanish with anymore.

But it didn't matter to me everyone at school spoke English. Everything on TV was in English. Movies were in English. My grandmother was in Miami and maybe I'd see a couple of times a year maximum. And the older I got by the time I got into the high school it didn't matter to me that I didn't know any Spanish.

Now in my first day of history class...American history in high school ... I will never forget the teacher was reading roll call. He said, "Antonio Bernardo Sacre who's that?" "Ah...that's me but...my name is Tony" "What kind of a name is this?" "Well its Cuban" and the whole class turned and looked at me and I said "I am not Cuban. I am American. I was born here. My father, he's Cuban" he said, "Oh yeah...where is your mother from?" "Well she is an Irish American" what kind of a combination is that?" and the whole class laughed -- he was just, you know being funny. It was okay.

Now, at lunch there was a kid who came up to me and said "You are a Cuban and Irish huh? I guess that it makes you a spic -- mick - or maybe a "mick-spic". And soon in my school that's the nickname that I got even

though I had long ago stopped speaking Spanish, even though I felt and looked as white looking as everyone in that high school, that's what I became known as --- I was the "other" in my high school.

Now, what was happening at the time was there is the movie "Scarface" had come out and there is the stereotype that all Cubans were drug dealers and bad and was just this odd thing was happening.

Lucky for me my grandmother wanted to see me this summer after my first year of high school. And my brother was there that whole summer and when I got in to her house (in Miami) and she saw me she threw her arms around me with a beautiful hug. I was so happy to see her and she started speaking and I couldn't understand her.

And she said ... Spanish ... she's screaming at me yelling at me and my brother said "What's the matter? You can't speak ... you gotta talk Spanish with your grandmother." The whole family is in a big consternation yelling at me and my grandmother said ...Spanish ... "You need to learn how to speak Spanish." So every day she would sit me down and drill words into me tell me stories about my dad.

And every night ... not every night... but every now and then my brother and I would go out to these big Cuban dance parties. He knew the salsa and dances. He could dance with all these girls I would be dancing by myself. Whenever we walked down the street the old Cuban men would say to my brother.... Spanish ... "You speak Spanish perfect what's the matter with your brother? He needs to learn Spanish you know!"

And soon in that little Havana neighborhood in my family I was called ... "El gringo de la Familia" ...the Gringo of the family...they were calling me names and my family -- the gringo of the family. And so it was odd for me because I don't fit in with my family. I don't fit in my high school. I didn't know what was going on you know and by the end of the summer.

I was jealous of my brother because his Spanish is perfect he looks more Cuban if there's such a thing. I couldn't understand my uncles when they are telling jokes with my grandmother, and I said in my halting Spanish "I don't feel very Cuban in this family" and she said, "You are never gonna be fully Cuban or American" she said "You are Cuban American." And she said you have to speak Spanish with me because I am too old to learn English and you have to speak English in this country.

And at that point I realized that it was worse to be called gringo in my family than to be called names in the school I didn't really care about. And so I tried the best I could that summer to accept the gain as much of that language as I could. And sat with my grandmother while she told stories of the family she told me jokes -- some silly, some a little racy, some beautiful little stories.

Some of the jokes became basis of the stories that I tell now all these years later. One is just a little joke -- a "barking mouse". There is a cat who chases a family of mice and the mother barks at the cat and the cat runs away and she says, "You see kids it pays to speak another language."

And I think about my grandmother every time I think about that little silly beautiful message about the importance of speaking another language.

And I went back to my school proud to be the school's only Cuban Irish American. There's one of my friends who calls me -- a "Leprachano". And so now I embrace both parts of it. And I still am not fully Cuban in little Havana --- and I am still not fully whatever American means or ... whatever the words you would say... but I am somewhere in between the both. And I know now, in all my travels around the country, there are many, many other people just like me and we have lots to learn from both sides. And that is just the part I wanted to do.