

Always a mother to us, always an individual in her own right

Gilberto M. Hinojosa

I am not sure mother would like this column. She was too concerned with "lo que diran" — "what they will say." She had difficulty accepting praise — or criticism. She was humble and proud. She was loving and demanding. In short, Concepción González Hinojosa was a complex human being.

On my desk, I have a picture of the two of us with my arms around her. Her tender expression greets me every day as I step into my office.

Trying circumstances in her family's history — the Mexican Revolution and the Great Depression — called for her and her sisters to deny their individuality and pull together for survival.

In many ways, mother's life was at the same time blessed and quite tragic. She grew up in a very stable and loving extended-family household in the little town of Marín, Nuevo León. It was a household with deep roots of faith.

And deep roots of learning, as well. As a little girl, she valued books, writing, and public discourse. She excelled in school but was not allowed to continue her education. Upon completing the sixth grade, she was nonetheless invited to teach in the local grade school.

Her brilliance and her beauty caught the attention of a state school inspector. It was love at first sight for both. But he died suddenly, days before their wedding. This tragedy hurt mother profoundly.

In the 1920s, mother and one her sisters were invited to teach in one of the barrio Spanish-language "escuelitas" in San Benito. Years later, some of mother's former students came back to visit. They greeted her warmly and thanked her for the great education they had received. But they also recalled the occasional ear pulling and spankings.

Even while at home raising her family, mother never gave up being a teacher. In fact, when my brother and I got home after school, mother would dictate a passage in Spanish that we had to write out with correct spelling and with perfect penmanship (handwriting that resembled hers).

That same kind of control could not, of course, extend into our adult lives. And later, both my brother and I disappointed her deeply in various ways. Yet despite this, we

could always count on her love. Going back and getting her warm *abrazo* (hug) is something neither of us will ever forget. Her laughter as we kidded her about her foibles still rings in my ears. And I can also see her smile at the dinner table after allowing us to outwit her at Chinese checkers.

Mother also took time to review her life and contemplate the next step — eternity. She often expressed her lifelong disappointment at not getting more education. She sorted out her relationship with my father, whom she loved deeply but differently from her first love. While very religious, she experienced a crisis of faith and had need for forgiveness.

Sadly, some things remained unresolved. I trust she is now at peace with herself and with God. I know her love endures.

On Mother's Day we rightly pay tribute to our mothers' dedication, love and warmth — the "motherly" characteristics. But mothers are complex people, and their individuality also deserves recognition and acceptance