

About “Weaving the Past: Journey of Discovery”

Our present-day world seems to move at the speed of lightning: governments overturned via masses brought together by social media; corruption revealed by citizen journalists seizing each new day’s digital headlines; connections between relatives, friends, and enemies that move through time and space with almost no effort. With each passing day, it becomes more and more difficult to connect with the past of only two or three generations ago. And yet, the memory and influence of those who came before us lingers, demonstrating both the powerful example of their struggle and how important it is that we better understand and preserve their memory.

For filmmaker Walter Dominguez, preserving the memory of his beloved grandfather, Emilio Hernandez (known as “Tata”) was the initial impulse behind the remarkable documentary “Weaving the Past: Journey of Discovery.” As a young man, Dominguez knew Tata as one of the most beloved figures in the rural California town of Santa Paula, an idyllic town to this day still populated by orange groves, family farms, and proud citizens of modest means. For decades, Tata was the local Methodist pastor, a kind and benevolent soul still remembered with reverence forty years after his passing in 1973. As older residents of Santa Paula witness in “Weaving the Past,” Tata was the wisest and most generous example of charity and loving kindness that a community could ask for – even to the extent that some remember him performing miracles. Tata often spoke of his more recent past: how he was mentored by a kindly Methodist minister after falling into hard times and alcoholism in his mid- twenties; his two loving marriages, his children, grandchildren, church members and the communities he served. Members of his congregations give interviews in which we come to see that Tata was one of the Mexican Methodist Church’s most visible and prolific spiritual leaders, opening and expanding dozens of missions and churches, and dedicating himself to their communities in his half-century of service.

But in the early 2000s, with his own father’s health failing, Dominguez begins to wonder about the many years that Tata kept secret – the first quarter century of his life. Surely, there must be something in Tata’s childhood that could help explain his amazing adult life. After first interviewing Tata’s widow – herself now in her 90s and nearing the end of life – Dominguez interviews his mother Maria Viola - the last surviving child of Tata’s. He learns from her of a photograph that Tata on his deathbed gave to her to keep and cherish, saying that the young man in the photo was the most important person in his early life. That’s just the first clue that will lead Dominguez on an amazing odyssey through the southwestern United States and Mexico as he pieces together the almost-invisible threads that weave the fabric of his grandfather’s extraordinary life.

Born in poverty and beaten by a ruthless stepfather, young Emilio ran away, walking for miles on foot to a large, wealthy hacienda where he was taken in to help out with the livestock and unofficially made a member of the family. It is here, before the age of ten, that Emilio meets Práxedes Guerrero, a few years older, who will become his role model, mentor, and beloved friend – the subject of the photograph that starts Dominguez’ journey so many years later. Prax is also one of the key figures in the growing peasant revolutionary movement against the brutal

Mexican dictator Porfirio Díaz, and because of Prax's noble example of altruism and bravery, Emilio joins him in becoming an active participant in organizing armed revolt in Mexico.

Each new piece of information that Dominguez uncovers about Tata's life only seems to lead to new questions: what became of Praxedis' sister, who was Emilio's childhood crush and the subject of love letters that were exchanged until the end of their lives? What part did Tata play in the violent struggle against the unbearably corrupt and oppressive Mexican government – a struggle that also put him at odds with American officials who were sympathetic towards keeping Diaz in power? And what of the family that he ran away from as a child and barely spoke of as an adult – the beloved mother and sister all but lost to history?

Produced by Dominguez' wife, Shelley Morrison (an actress best known for her role as "Rosario" on the long-running sitcom *"Will and Grace"*), *"Weaving the Past"* is truly a family affair, a love letter from one generation to another. Fascinating interview clips are interwoven with compelling archival photos and footage, and balanced with painstakingly rendered re-enactments of past events – with many members of Dominguez' extended family actually playing the parts of their ancestors – *"Weaving the Past"* powerfully brings to life the hardships, victories, and tragedies that marked the early life of "Tata" - Emilio N. Hernandez, a runaway peasant boy who became an unlikely revolutionary, then a broken man, and finally a pillar of strength for his adopted community and nation. Over the course of the eleven years of production, Dominguez' own father and Tata's widow, and others interviewed in the film – passed away, making the rendering of this family's story all the more pressing and relevant.

"Weaving the Past: Journey of Discovery" is written, directed, and produced by Walter Dominguez, with Shelley Morrison serving as executive producer. The film's editors are Maria Honrado and Spencer Averick, who also edited the 2012 Sundance film festival hit *"Middle of Nowhere."*

Currently, Dominguez and Morrison are working on the documentary *"Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles,"* a history series for public television about the remarkable and explosive growth of Los Angeles in its first century as an American place from 1850 to 1950, and the multi-ethnic people who built this city into a world-famous metropolis.

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