

MOCTEZUMA

"Heritage & Identity"



Editor's Introduction

Portrait of HP: Moctezuma

"Heritage & Identity".

I'm still of two minds about whether to share this text publicly. There are certain family stories that, they say, are best kept secret. At their centre, the thought that accompanied my childhood, never shared even with my closest friends. I am biting my nails while watching, with my mind's eye, my father's reaction to this confession.

But instead of seeking redemption, I am sharing this thought in the act of acceptance and celebration of my heritage, and as a consequence, my identity. So, here it is: when I was a primary school child...

...

This 19th Issue of Portrait of HP: Moctezuma is framed under our Hispanic Latino Heritage Month. Despite all the hesitation, hereby I share the story of five generations of which I am but one link in a larger chain.

Every human has 16 great-great-grandparents, and some of us may one day be part of the 16 stories that live on in our great-great-grandchildren's lives.

This volume squeezes a 150-years family history into a brief narrative about a branch of my family tree. It begins with Gregorio, who was Gael's - my son - great-great-grandfather. Gregorio was a Huichol* violinist born into an indigenous community in north Mexico. And the story comes to the present day with Gael, a British child of Polish and Mexican descent, who chose to play double bass.

Nowadays we often seek—and sometimes expect—immediate change and instant results. As if we insisted on experiencing rewards here and now, in our own lifetimes. As if we forgot that "this too shall pass". That we are marked by the past, while shaping the future. This 19th Issue of Portrait of HP reflects on the importance of actions that transcend generations. As Neil Sawyer said: "It is up to us to plant trees whose shade we will never know, but which will benefit future generations."**

*Huichol: One of the many (approximately 68) indigenous cultures in contemporary Mexico, mostly living in the Sierra Madre Occidental region, (including parts of the states of Nayarit, Jalisco, Zacatecas, and Durango). The Huichol people have prevailed since pre-Hispanic times for thousands of years and are respected for their spiritual traditions, material artefacts, and rich artistic expressions, (including yarn paintings and beadwork), as well as their profound relationship with nature and rituals dedicated to deities such as the god of maize and the spirit of peyote.

**The original quote can be attributed to Rabindranath Tagore, a renowned Indian poet and philosopher. It is often translated as: "The one who plants trees, knowing that he will never sit in their shade, has at least started to understand the meaning of life."

It goes without saying that being aware of Gregorio's lifetime cultural loss –his traditions, his language– feels somewhat tragic to me. Yet that awareness also brings to the forefront the importance of memory, its preservation, and the transmission of heritage. While it may be sad to see certain customs fade, it is also beautiful to bear witness to new possibilities, hopes and privileges enjoyed by his descendants. Yet what do we do with this inheritance in 2024?

So, to resume where we started.

...When I was a primary school child, I didn't like my surname* –in fact, I felt ashamed of it due to its immediate, literal connection to the Mexica (Aztec) people. I should note that no one has ever bullied me about it– quite the opposite, many were impressed that it belonged to an actual Aztec emperor. It has taken me four decades to fully recognise the value of my heritage, my ancestors, and my worldview. Today, I can say with pride: I am Moctezuma.

Rodrigo Moctezuma

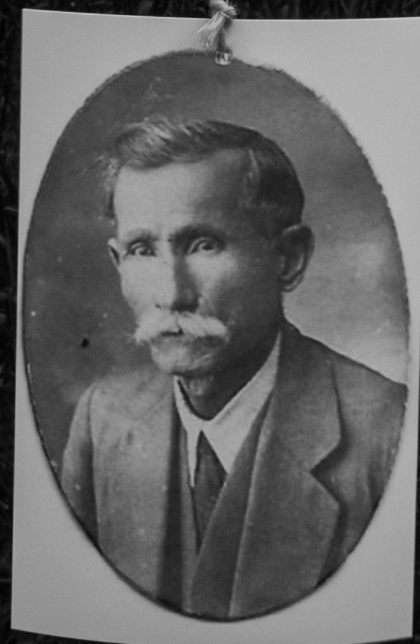
Portrait of HP Project Lead

Chair, HP Global Hispanic/Latino BRG

EMEA Commercial Theatre Category Manager

*Moctezuma: The name "Moctezuma" is most famously associated with two Aztec emperors, Moctezuma I (reigned 1440-1469) and Moctezuma II (reigned 1502-1520), both of whom played significant roles in the history of the Aztec Empire. Moctezuma I expanded the empire through military conquests, while Moctezuma II was the ruler at the time of the Spanish arrival, witnessing the collapse of the empire under Hernán Cortés.

Note: Contrary to a common misunderstanding, the correct spelling is "Moctezuma," not "Montezuma." There is no historical figure named "Montezuma" from Mexico or Peru, which is often a result of mispronunciations in English.



Gregorio

Born into a Huichol indigenous community, Gregorio was a self-taught violinist; one of those musicians who feel music deeply and who become its vessel. During the Mexican Revolution*, he was drafted not as a soldier, but as a violinist to lift the troops' spirits.** Having learnt this fragment of his story only recently, it has struck me that there is a parallel in how I see my photography as a tool to inspire those around me.

After the revolution, Gregorio settled in Torreón with his wife Elvira. Years later, the family migrated to Mexico City.

*The Mexican Revolution began in 1910 and lasted roughly a decade, with its main phase ending in 1920. It was a complex and transformative period in Mexican history, involving a series of social, political, and military conflicts. Sparked by opposition to the long dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, it led to the rise of various revolutionary leaders like Emiliano Zapata, Francisco Villa, and Venustiano Carranza, and eventually resulted in significant political and land reforms, shaping modern Mexico.

**The 'Leva' was a compulsory conscription system where peaceful civilians, particularly men, were compelled to join the military ranks. It was especially prevalent during times of war or conflict, such as the Mexican Revolution, to bolster troop numbers. Those recruited often had little choice and were sometimes used in non-combatant roles, like musicians or labourers, as well as soldiers. This form of recruitment reflects the harsh realities of the era, where personal freedoms were limited by the demands of national crises.



We close our eyes and, for just a moment,
we let our guard down.

We stop speaking to our grandparents.

Slowly, our tree begins to wither.

The family memory fades away.

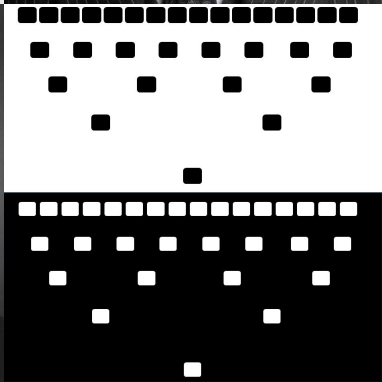
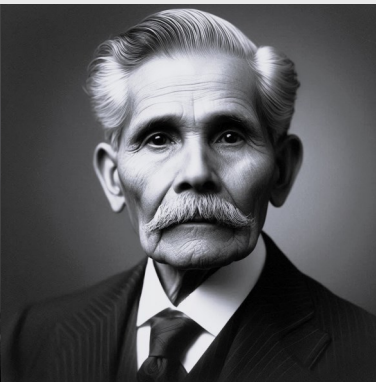
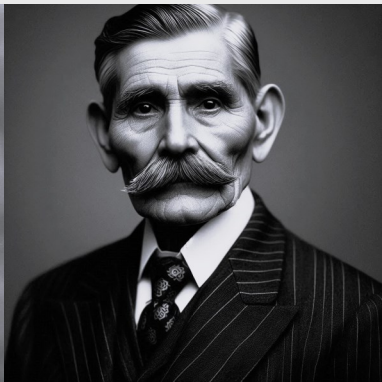
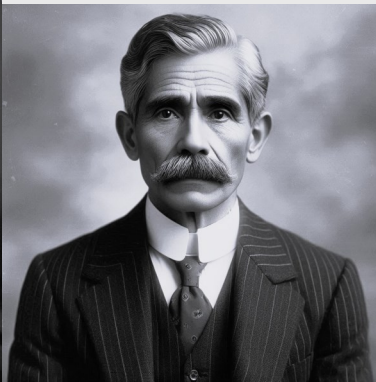
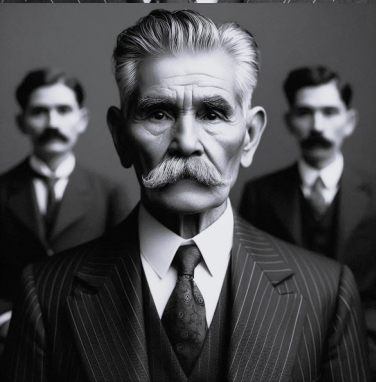
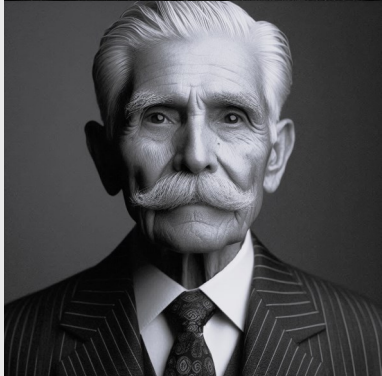
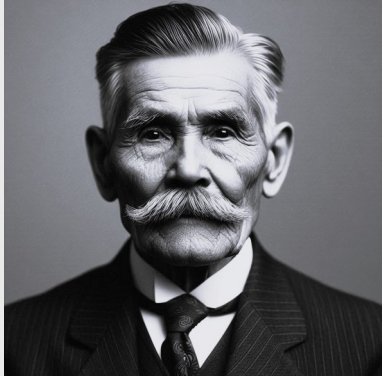
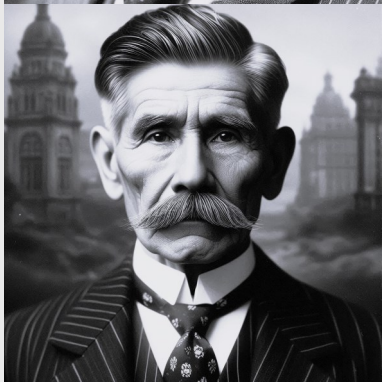
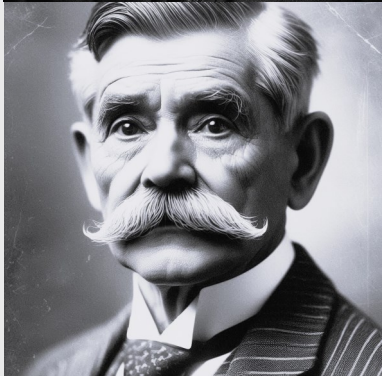
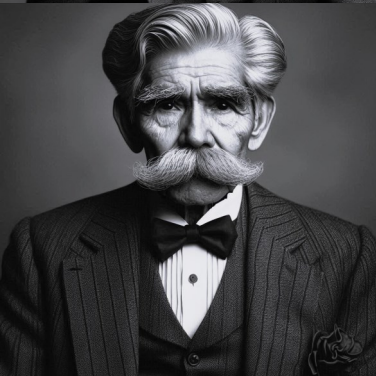
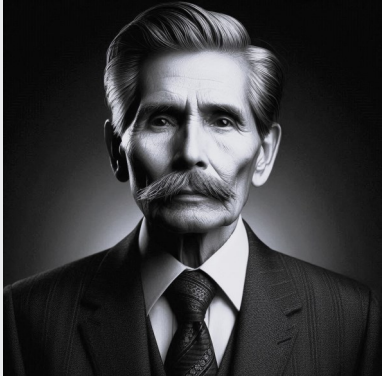
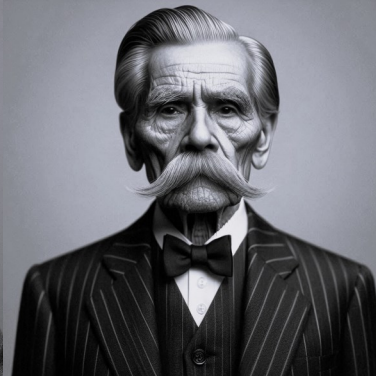


Our family holds a single photograph of Gregorio, the great-great-grandfather, likely one of the few ever taken. This image, despite moving our imagination, reveals only a glimpse of who he was at that moment.

A very contemporary question: what if we could recreate our memories with AI? Could an algorithm ever capture the essence of a person, or does it simply create an illusion, preaching about some sort of collective average of a human of certain characteristics? How would this interpretation change the way we see our past?

Would a digitally AI-created image – perhaps more vivid, more “adapted” to the memory we would like to hold – grip the same value as the one taken at that specific point in time? If Gregorio had dressed up for the photo, presenting his most “formal” self, have we then lost a chance to glimpse who he actually was? In this sense, how reliable are any of the images we keep from our family history?

How do past family photos shape our identities over our lifetimes? Could an AI reconstruction distort that narrative, or would it provide clarity to a story that lacks visual representation? What is more important: the truth as it was, or the story we choose to tell?





Doña Mague

Doña Mague, my paternal grandma, was born in Torreón, north Mexico. As a child she migrated with her family to Mexico City, where she discovered her love for music. She always dreamed of becoming a piano teacher but found a different path in life when she met what she called her true love –an educator from the Mexican state of Guerrero-.

As her youngest grandchild, I used to bring her music boxes from my travels, knowing how much she adored them. When her strength began to wane and she could no longer wind the delicate mechanisms, I would do it for her. Together, we'd listen to the melodies while she sang like a happy songbird, her spirit lifted by the music.

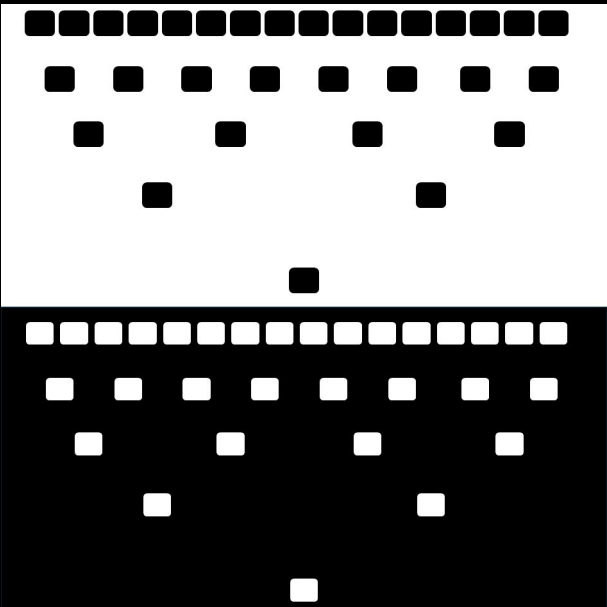
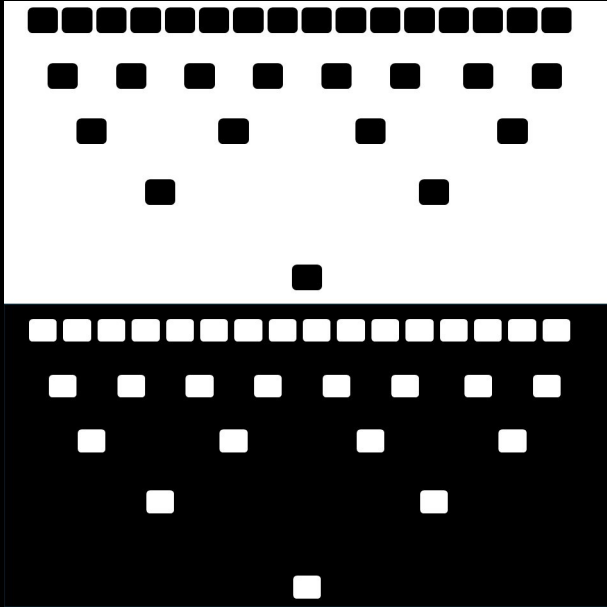
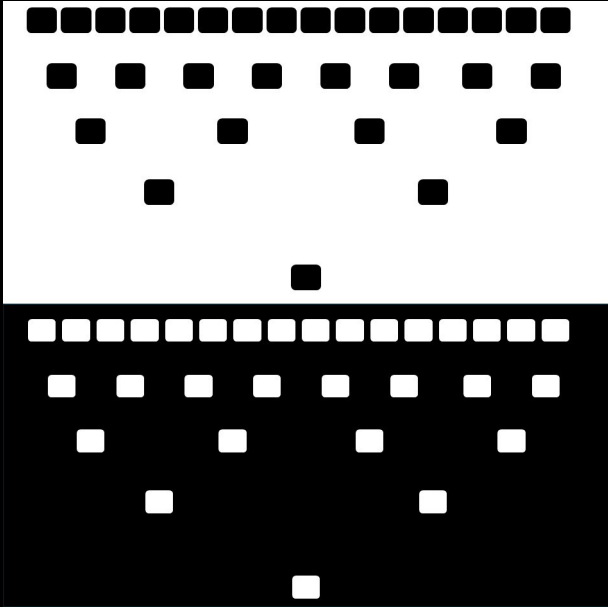
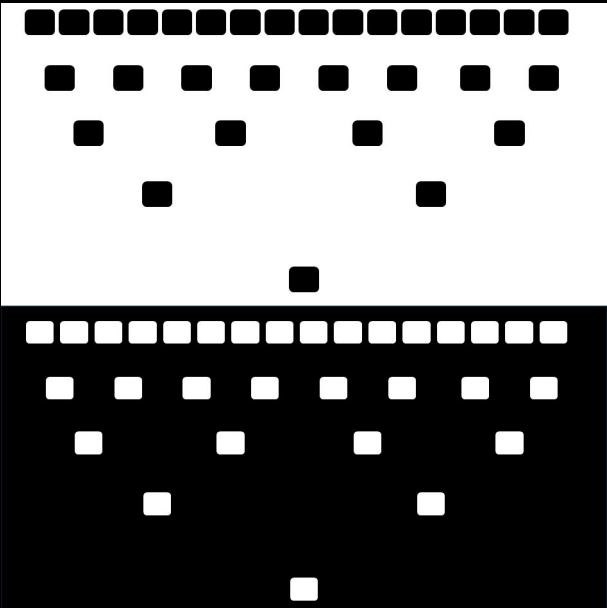
Eyes *

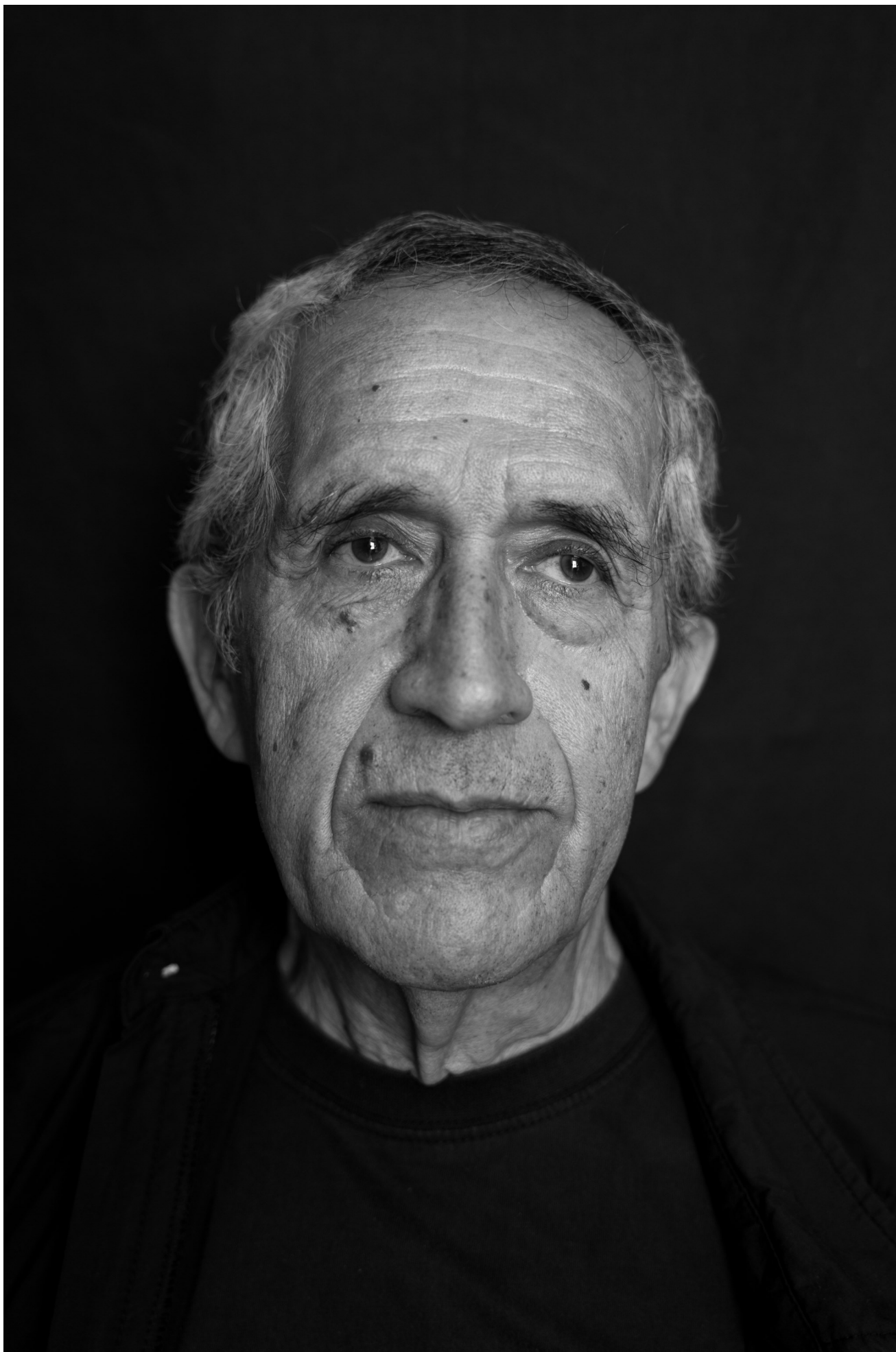
My mother says I have
The eyes of my great-grandmother.
I remember her eyes
As she cleaned corn.
I often saw her cry,
Cry when she cooked,
When she sang,
When she made coffee.

Once, I asked her,
"Why do you cry so much, Ma?"
And she answered,
Without stopping her tears,
"Because we carry rivers within us,
And sometimes they flow out.
Your rivers haven't grown yet,
But they will, soon enough."

Now I understand.
Now I have rivers inside me,
And in my eyes.

*This poem by Nadia López García can be found in *Círculo de Poesía*, which is a well-known Latin-American platform dedicated to showcasing contemporary poetry and literature. It reflects deep emotional and cultural themes, resonating with readers on various levels. For further exploration of her work and insights into her poetic style, you can visit the *Círculo de Poesía* website. The work can also be physically found in the permanent exhibition ["La naturaleza a través de la poesía indígena"](#) at Viveros de Coyoacán, in Mexico City. This exhibition highlights indigenous poetic expression and its profound connection with nature, offering a sensory and reflective experience for visitors.





Georgel

Born in Mexico City –a true chilango–, Georgel describes his childhood as simple but joyful, building toys with limited resources and seeking adventures with his siblings. The youngest of three boys, he was the first in the family to complete a university degree, becoming an agricultural engineer after five years of boarding militarised education, to then continue with the Master's in economy.

Passionate about the countryside and maintaining strong connections with farmers, Georgel's career took him into banking, where he sought greater prosperity for his family. Today, he keeps working full time as a 78-year-old agricultural scientist. It warms my heart to see him helping others –that's just who he is– and also when he plays his acoustic guitar.



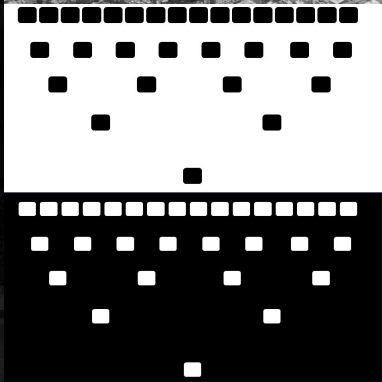
I Wish to Follow in his Footsteps...*

I hold dear the memory of visiting together the place where his heart beats faster: the University of Chapingo. There, he taught me countless things, offered endless gifts, but the unforgettable one that stayed with me is that love and care are shown through actions that benefit others. He taught me that true generosity from the heart is carried out, quite literally, in the service of life and the growth of others.

(...)

No doubt light demands the existence of darkness, yet the very darkness makes the stars shine more intensely in the sky. Today, I know that we will never truly say goodbye, for when this wonderful and blessed story ends, we will meet again in heaven for all eternity... until then, I know with all certainty that I will always follow in my father's footsteps.

*Org. Spanish: *Quería seguir sus pasos...* by Georgel Moctezuma Araoz, my brother and the eldest son of Georgel Moctezuma López. This text formed part of the collective book “¿Quién es Georgel?” to commemorate my dad's 70th birthday. This piece sends a heartfelt tribute to familial love, growth, and the passage of wisdom over generations.



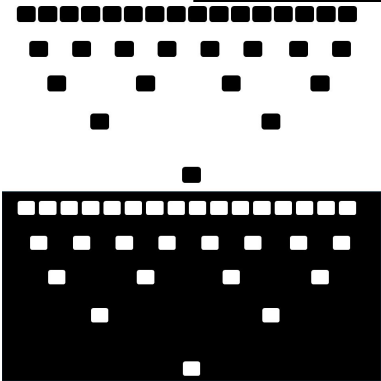




Gael

Born in Manchester, UK, Gael identifies as a Mancunian while also embracing his Polish and Mexican heritage. Fluent in three languages and holding three nationalities, his opportunities and wellbeing are markedly different from those of his great-great-grandfather Gregorio, reflecting the transformative journey of the family across generations.

Like his ancestors, Gael is keen on music and plays the double bass, currently studying at the prestigious Royal Northern College of Music. With his infectious smile, he enjoys a happy, simple childhood full of self-made toys, nature and railways, while the future is waiting for him to unfold.





The World I Was Born Into.*

Suddenly I woke up

And I found something I want to say

With something I want to say

Suddenly I woke up

I want you to truly know

That if one day I'm missing

That if one day I'm not here anymore

That you know what my only truth was

Nothing ever has made me as happy

As when you arrived into this world

And I saw you for the very first time

Carrying you between my arms and my nose

So, on that day I realised that

I would rather let a plane fall first on me

Before anything else comes near you

And could hurt you

The Fear is almost paralysing

But I found something that keeps me going

In this redemption

It's your love, my only and absolute salvation

And here I go

Wanting to understand

That this is

The world I was born into

.

And I want to thank

To my father and my mother now that I have them here

For bringing me here and for caring for me

I love you for making me who I was and who I am

And I don't know how it will be

This world that I will leave you with

I hope to avoid a mistake

And to teach you something good

The Fear is almost paralysing

But I found something that keeps me going

And now that I didn't ask

You justifies my existence when you look at me

And here I go

Wanting to understand

That this is

The world I was born into

And here I go

Wanting to understand

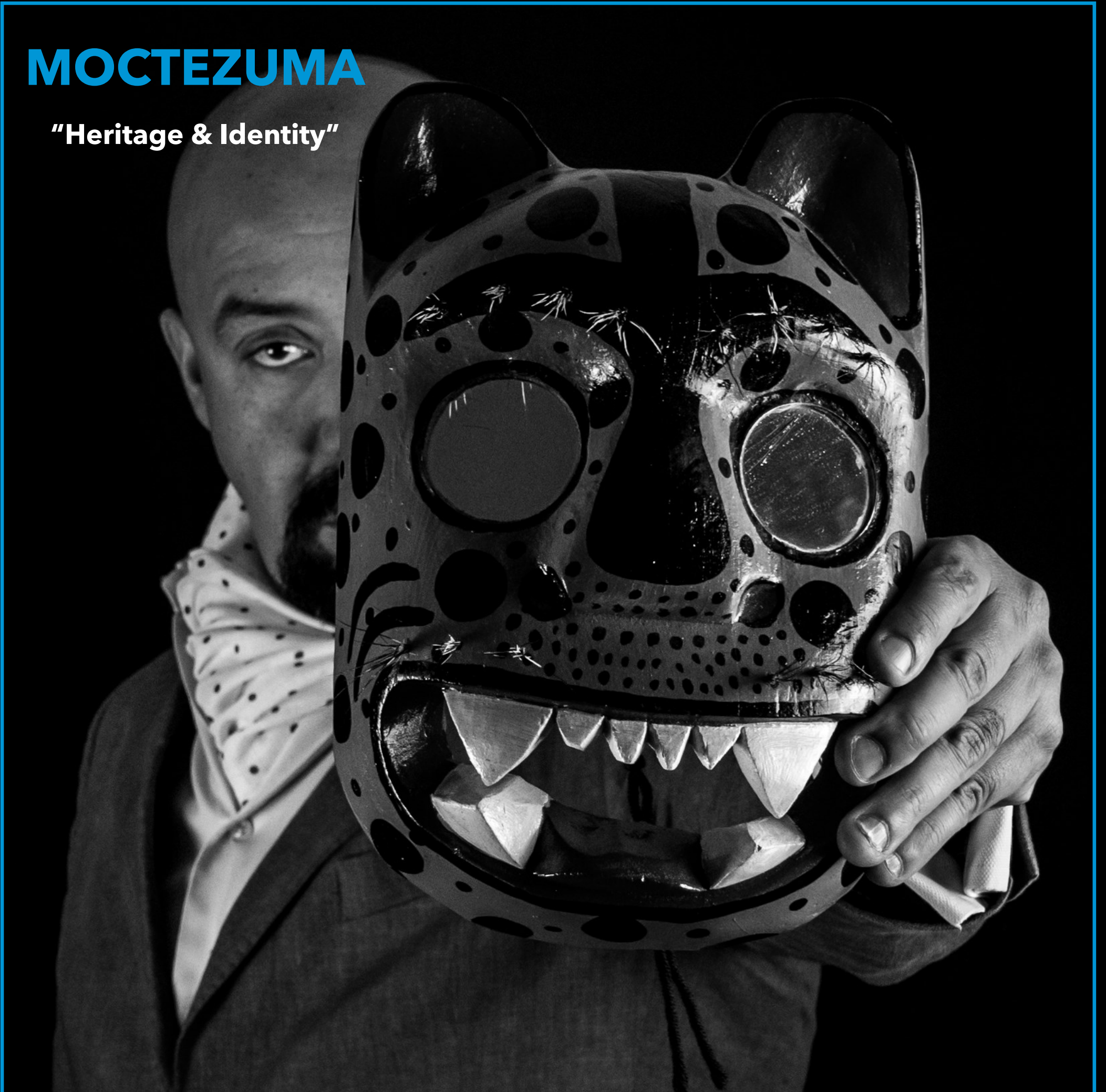
That this is

The world I was born into.

*The song (org. Spanish) "El mundo en que nací" by Café Tacuba, written by Emmanuel Del Real Díaz, Jose Rangel Arroyo, and Enrique Rangel Arroyo, narrates a confession from a father to a son. It reflects on themes of family, love, and the journey of life, expressing deep gratitude towards one's parents, weaving a narrative of hope and the desire to impart wisdom to future generations. [Listen the song.](#)

MOCTEZUMA

"Heritage & Identity"





Issue 1

Mila Smith



Issue 2

Elizabeth Adely



Issue 3

Mander Thiara



Issue 4

JumpIN Festival



Issue 5

Charlotte Purdy



Issue 6

Women in technology



Issue 7

From BCN with Love. Part 1



Issue 8

From BCN with Love. Part 2



Issue 9

Naomi Patel



Issue 10

Amplify your DE&I impact



Issue 11

Hispanic Heritage Month



Issue 12

Peter Sarwan



Issue 13

People Who Inspire



Issue 14

Janice Evans



Issue 15

MEXICO



Issue 16

Jennifer Price



Issue 17

London Pride Parade 24



Issue 18

Jaina Mistry

Rodrigo's text translated from Spanish, reviewed and copy-edited by Gosia Polanska (Mojek).

"Moctezuma: The Corporate Human" is the artistic name of Rodrigo Moctezuma (Roddy).

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