LATINO LAST NAMES & SURNAMES....& PRONOUNCIATION...WHAT'S RIGHT?

By Domingo Ivan Casañas
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For many of the Latino’s that have arrived in this great land. They have faced some major hurdles one being getting their name done correctly at the social security office or at the department of motor vehicles. You must understand that in Latin America countries the mother’s maiden name, which used to of course be her fathers last name is added at the end of the new married name of the man she marries. Are you confused already? Let me explain, unlike here in the United States where if Richard Jones marries Mary Smith and now you have the Jones family. In Latin America countries it does not work in this matter.

You see a woman keeps her maiden name after marriage but drops her mother’s family name and replaces it with the two-letter de (which means of) plus she now adds her husband’s family name. For instance if Jorge Perez Rodriguez marries Alicia Flores Fernandez then in most scenarios Alicia would now be Alicia Flores de Perez. Now, what will happen when Alicia has Jorge’s child. Most likely the child would end up with a name such as Raul Perez Flores.
This is why it becomes so difficult to explain all of this to the proper authorities and some Hispanics in this country have ended up with the legal documents with their mother’s maiden name as their last name instead of their father’s last name. Some eventually make the corrections while others don’t want to end up in long lines and making their explanations in public.

We have noticed this with past Presidents of Latin America Countries. Like former President of Mexico, Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado was always called President de la Madrid; and late premier of Chile, Salvador Allende Gossens, is referred to as Premier Allende.

You might, think wow that is pretty neat the lady keeps the maiden name; you might even think about it as more power to woman rights. But, you are wrong. You see it all stems from surnames of the father always not the mother. In reality what has just happened is the following, once you are born into a Spanish-speaking family the baby will be given a first name followed by two surnames, the first being the father’s family name (or, more precisely, the surname he gained from his father) followed by the mother’s family name (or, again more precisely, the surname the mother gained from her father).

Here, in the United States Latino couples that have been here a long time, particularly if they speak English, are more likely to give their children the father’s name, following the dominant U.S. pattern. But everyone has a choice. Some choices for those Latino’s that get confused in all of this are to put the mothers maiden name as the middle name of the child. Even, under my protest this is what happened to my own children when their mother put her foot down on doing it in this matter. And I had such pretty middle names picked out for them. Oh well, this are things we do to keep peace in a family.

Another important matter regarding our Latino names is that many have allowed the pronunciation to go by the waste side. I have been determined to have my last named always with the ~ tilde over the n and have taught people how to pronounce it. However many do not, there are athletes, and movie stars that as an example might have their name spelled Pena and not have the ~ (tilde) over the n. I am of the firm belief that one should correct people when it comes to such a personal matter. For instance my son since Kindergarten has had his name pronounced as Daveed...not David. His name is spelled D a v i d however, I gave him his name as D a v e e d and he knows and everyone knows that it is pronounced Daveed...When someone says David my Daveed will correct them and let them know it is Daveed....A name is personal, it is yours forever.

So know you have learned a little bit more about names and that is why some of us have such long names like; Domingo Ivan Casañas de Rodriguez y Laza.