

## Outlook

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# A father's death . . . a son's search for answers

By HECTOR DE LEON

**R**ECENTLY, while I was visiting with Nestor Rodriguez, a sociology professor at the University of Houston, Rodriguez mentioned that his staff had just completed a research study that addressed several issues associated with quality of life and longevity, including data on the life expectancy of Hispanic men.

I did not carefully read the study, but as I left his office I began to think about the average number of years that Hispanic men live. The topic resonated within me for several reasons. First, I am a Hispanic male. Second, the conversation with professor Rodriguez reminded me that by the time I was born, both my maternal and paternal grandfathers had died. More importantly, the conversation registered in my mind because my father lost his fight with liver cancer at the end of last year. He was 70 years old. Thus, despite my reasonably good health, I began to wonder whether at age 35, I am already at the halfway point of my inevitable fate.

To try to temper my emotions surrounding my father's death as well as provide an understanding to an issue that is commonly avoided in Hispanic households, I was compelled to examine the subject.

I learned that, according to a U.S. Census Population Profile, the life expectancy of a minority person is 69 years. Surprisingly, I discovered that Hispanics are not specifically mentioned in this longevity report but are included in the "other races" column.

Hispanics were not categorized as minorities by the Census until fairly recently. They were considered white and, historically as well as statistically, ignored.

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Regardless, the evidence provided indicates that the life expectancy of a Hispanic male is roughly 66 years.

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, life expectancy is defined

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as "the average number of years a person would live given the age-specific mortality rates of a specific year or period." For example, when this nation was founded, life expectancy at birth was 35 years. That number increased to perhaps 42 years by the mid-1800s. A person born around 1900 could expect to live 47 years. By 1950, life expectancy at birth had jumped to 68 years, partially because living conditions had improved, but also because of the decrease of death among the young, particularly infants.

Currently, the life expectancy of whites

is 76 years. If you are in your 30s, regardless of whether you are white, black or brown, your parents were probably born in the first 50 years of the 20th century — the period when the most dramatic increase in life expectancy occurred.

The other factor that is relevant to comprehending the significant increase in longevity is called mortality conditions. These are the improvements that have been made in medicine, nutrition, personal behavior and our overall living environment.

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The longevity statistics did not lessen my father's suffering, or any person who is going through a similar horrible ordeal. Nor do they diminish the excruciating emotional pain their siblings, spouses, children and grandchildren experience while watching the family's tower of strength wither away.

Still, in an incomprehensible way, the Census figures do provide some comfort by putting this agonizing calamity into perspective. They reveal that Hispanic males such as my father, who lived long enough to nurture and guide their children into adulthood, lived statistically complete lives. Moreover, they reveal that my father not only lived a statistically full life, but that he exceeded his life expectancy by four years.

Being aware of life-expectancy statistics doesn't make the life-and-death issue any easier to accept. However, the quantifications do help us come to terms with our mortality and the inevitable fact that for all of God's children there exists an alpha and an omega. I miss you, *Papi*.

## The Internet should connect, not divide, Texans

By BRETT PERLMAN

**O**UR state's telecommunications network is undergoing a quiet revolution. This will be as fundamental to the Texas economy as the interstate highway system was in the last century.

As many have said, the "Internet changes everything." More and more businesses are participating in e-commerce. Consumers want high-speed Internet services so they can listen to music and watch

It would be a shame if phone companies don't deploy

