

That Special Someone

Intercultural marriage is on the rise, not only in North America but in other parts of the world as well. An intercultural couple consists of two people who have different cultural backgrounds. They may come from different countries or from different regions in the same country. They may have different religions, or they may come from different ethnic groups. These couples may have found true love, but they often face difficult and unique challenges. The divorce rate among partners in intercultural marriages seems high, but such marriages can work under the right circumstances, as we will see by examining the case of one intercultural couple.

Both Hector Garcia and Jessica Chapman were born in the United States, but their backgrounds are 180 degrees apart. Hector's parents came to the United States from Mexico decades ago. They settled in California, and by the time Hector was born, they had earned their American citizenship. Hector had



to work to be able to afford college. Jessica, in contrast, grew up in a wealthy Caucasian family in New England. Her parents paid for her college expenses, so she didn't have to work. Hector and Jessica met in biology lab in their senior year of college, and it was a case of love at first sight. After they graduated, Hector asked Jessica to marry him. Hector says, "I used to think I would marry a Hispanic woman whose background was similar to mine. But the minute I met Jessica, I knew she was the one for me." Jessica felt the same and accepted Hector's proposal, and for a while everything went smoothly.

Pretty soon, though, problems arose. Jessica explains: "I thought our relationship was going to stay the same as it had always been. I didn't think we would ever argue about anything. But Hector wanted to buy a house, and he refused to accept any help from my parents. He was working long hours, and I didn't think he was paying enough attention to me. It occurred to me that work had become his top priority. Furthermore, I didn't feel comfortable with Hector's family. We would go to gatherings at his family's house most weekends. Everyone would be talking at once, and I would feel shut out. Eventually, I got so frustrated that I was ready to leave him. Fortunately, I had a heart-to-heart talk with a close friend who was also in an intercultural marriage. She advised me to think about what motivated Hector and to try to understand the culture and values of his extended family. I realized that because he had grown up in a family without much money and had married a woman from a wealthier background, it was important for Hector to do things on his own. That's why he didn't want to rely on help from my father. I realized that I'd been wrong about several things. His family weren't trying to shut me out at their gatherings; they were just a typical Mexican family who liked to talk! I also realized I hadn't been giving Hector's family a fair chance. Since then, his mother and I have become really good friends, and Hector's and my relationship has improved greatly."

This is a case of an intercultural marriage that has worked. One key point emerges¹ from Hector and Jessica's story: Partners in an intercultural marriage should try to understand and acknowledge the cultural values of their spouses and their extended families. If they do, they may well be able to sustain their relationship with that special someone.

AFTER YOU READ

A VOCABULARY Match the words in **bold** with their meanings.

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| ___ 1. They may come from different ethnic groups. | a. in addition |
| ___ 2. They often face difficult and unique challenges. | b. depend |
| ___ 3. Eventually , I got so frustrated I was ready to leave him. | c. continue |
| ___ 4. Furthermore , I didn't feel comfortable with Hector's family. | d. main goal |
| ___ 5. Hector didn't want to rely on Jessica's father. | e. the only one of its kind |
| ___ 6. It seemed that work had become his top priority . | f. recognize as valuable |
| ___ 7. They must acknowledge the cultural values of their spouses. | g. racial or national |
| ___ 8. They may sustain their relationship with that special someone. | h. at a later time |

B COMPREHENSION Read the statements. Check (✓) *True* or *False*. Correct the false statements.

- | | True | False |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Hector and Jessica had similar backgrounds. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 2. Jessica had to pay for college herself. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 3. Jessica didn't expect that she and Hector would have arguments. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 4. Hector thought he would marry a woman of his own background. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 5. Hector came from a wealthy family. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 6. Jessica and her mother-in-law now have a friendly relationship. | ☐ | ☐ |