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René Sanz Jr., left, and his father, René Sr. have much to talk about during a meeting at Central City Division 1 after a 29-year separation.

Searching for René: Father, Son Reunited Through Internet

By KIM SIM

(March 3, 2004) For 29 long years, Metro Bus Operator René Sanz Sr. never talked to or saw his only son. René Sanz Jr. lived on only in memories.

That all changed in late February, with the help of the World Wide Web.

René Sr., an operator at Central City Division 1, and René Jr., a Los Angeles lawyer, ended an almost three decade-long separation on Feb. 20, when the two met at the elder Sanz's home in Monterey Park.

"He looks different, but it's him," René Sr. said of his first impression of his son.

Not that he expected his son to look the same. After all, the last time he saw René Jr. was in 1975, when the boy was 7 years old.

René Jr. is now 36, a criminal defense lawyer with an office on Wilshire Boulevard. There's also a daughter-in-law and an 8-month-old granddaughter in the picture.

"It's actually kind of funny," René Jr. said. "As the years have gone by, I thought of looking him up but I didn't know how he would want it, if he would want to continue (the relationship)."

Reaching out for René

Now he knows. It was his father who reached out to find him on the Internet search engine, Google. And in the week after their reunion, the two have met three more times. They also talk on the phone almost every day.

It's as if each is afraid of losing the other again.

René Sr. lost all contact with his son after his ex-wife remarried, three years after the divorce. She moved out of Monterey Park without telling him where she was going and took René Jr. with her.

The younger Sanz moved from city to city — Montebello, Alhambra and Arcadia. Meanwhile, René Sr. went to live in Mexico for 16 years, returning to the United States in 2000.

Once back, René Sr. started searching for his son, looking in phone books and using America Online and Yahoo Internet search engines.

Nothing turned up.

Then along came news reports about a teenager who found out that his own mother had abducted him when he was a child. That discovery was made after the teenager entered his name into the popular Internet search engine, Google.

Gave Google a try

René Sr. decided he would give Google a try, too. It didn't matter that he wasn't very good with computers.

"I tried different ways and I didn't get anywhere," René Sr. said. "Maybe this would be it."

His first few hits on Google, after putting in his son's name, were listings for a lawyer in Los Angeles: Law Offices of René Sanz. René Sanz, Criminal Law Attorney.

Address and phone number, both staring out at him from his home computer screen.

"It was kind of frightening, nerve wracking," René Sr. recalled. "I had been looking for a long time. You had a feeling, what if he doesn't want to talk to me?"

He finally worked up the courage to call and asked the lawyer to confirm his middle name and his mother's name.

'Are you my father?'

Then it was the lawyer's turn to ask a question: "Are you my father?"

The two have since met several times — to talk about what happened, to exchange stories and photographs and to get to know each other all over again.

In one of their more recent get-togethers, René Sr. and René Jr. discovered that they shared a favorite dish, IHOP's avocado bacon omelette.

"That's what I always order," father and son said, almost in unison.

"We spent a long time talking," René Sr. said. "I think the waiter got upset because we took so long."

At first, they didn't know how to address each other, René Sr. said.

But the ice seems to have melted now.

"I couldn't be happier," René Jr. said. "It seems like already we've known each other for a real long time. After we got over the initial shock, now it's time to hang out."

