

Life is full of wonder



“¡Hay que ver el arte que hay en España!”

These were the words uttered by my 86-year-old mother after watching the performance of a short passionate piece of music on YouTube last week. The piece was performed by Lucero Tena, one of the finest castanet players in the world. The expression translates to *“What great art there is in Spain!”*, truly momentous words for a person who has been suffering from dementia, severe hearing loss, and nearly passed away from Covid-19 in October. She was hospitalized for two months with Covid-19 pneumonia and is

still presently recovering at home. Life is full of wonder.

As many of you know, in June 2019, Alfonso and I left Houston and moved to Seville, Spain, to take care of my mom and my intellectually disabled brother, while starting a boutique travel agency that focuses on Andalusia. These new circumstances have given me the opportunity to, not only, take care of my mom, but also to rebuild a bond with her, one that I hadn't had since I was a young girl. Life is a mystery and unpredictable; who would have said that I would be living with my mom again? Being part of her recovery has granted me some unexpected insights such as the one I mentioned above. Classical music has always been an appreciated part of my mom's family and ancestors: symphonies, chamber music, operas, zarzuelas, and operettas, among others. For numerous years, mom was a singing member of the *Asociación Coral de Sevilla*. Music and songs were her passionate hobby; they were an integral part of her social and entertaining life. So when she voiced those words with such feeling, I knew we were on the right path.

Besides striking my mother, the new coronavirus also hit several family members including L. Alfonso and myself. All this kept me from sending updates for the *ARRUF International Ambassador's Notebook* section. I am back now, so let me also share some positive things.

Lockdown in Spain was from March to June. In August, then, L. Alfonso and I “escaped” in our car for a long sunny weekend to travel to the beautiful Sierra Morena mountain range in the northern border of Andalusia. We visited small villages, lakes, and forests in the provinces of Cordoba, Seville, and Huelva, where we were delighted with amazing views, flocks of wild birds, discovery walks, and palaces and convents converted into luxury

hotels. We had most of the places to ourselves, enjoying long street walks and fabulous meals with great local beer and wine. Needless to say, we kept all health protocols: masks, social distancing, and staying mainly outdoors. Presently, actual traveling is at a minimum all over the world for obvious reasons. Nonetheless, there are opportunities for local visiting and exploring while ensuring safety, and we are planning to do some of it again one of these weekends.

Let me bring you back to that piece of music that caught my mother's attention. It was a YouTube video of the interlude of *La Boda de Luis Alonso* (*The Wedding of Luis Alonso*) composed in 1897 by Gerónimo Giménez for a *Zarzuela* <<a Spanish lyric-dramatic genre that alternates between spoken and sung scenes, the latter incorporating operatic and popular songs, as well as dance>>. Why do I want to share this music with you? Because just as it stroke a beautiful cord in my mother's psyche, this is the kind of music that inspires you to expand your horizons, to imagine your trips, to feel alive. Please take seven minutes of your time and enjoy it: <https://youtu.be/nf9ypRpbZMA>

In that spirit, we want to encourage you all to squeeze the best out of every moment; some of these moments are found in ARRUF interest groups where you can discuss and laugh while sharing your life experiences. By the way, L. Alfonso and I have been given the honor to lead ARRUF Travel Interest group. The Travel Interest group brings you the opportunity to "visit", learn about, and experience awesome locations around the world having as your "tour guide" one or more of your fellow ARRUF members. The next Zoom meeting will be on March 11 at 1 pm Houston time. More information will be posted soon on this website and via emails, so stay tuned. We'd love to have you as one of our "tour guides" for future travels; do not hesitate to contact me to talk more about how to be part of this fun and interesting experience.

I am looking forward and excited to share more ARRUF time with all of you again.

Stay safe, stay well.

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