

## Musings about the poet, writing, life... (4)

Yes, well, Madrid. Another lifetime, another language, another direction, unexpected surprises. Of course unexpected, what am I saying. Surprises ARE unexpected. Full of surprises then.

What we don't think of when all follows 'normal' patterns is how much we fly by autopilot. You know where to shop, you know what to buy where, you know where to drive to, which metro to use, the bus to take. You know the value of your money, where you pay more, you know what stuff is called. You know how to ask for it unless you just roll down the supermarket shelves and plonk things into your cart. And then you may have a problem: everything looks different, many brands are local... and I had just finished my apprenticeship in all things English.

I started independent Madrid life in a flat somewhat removed from the centre of Madrid. But it's a manageable town. I had my car, I often deliberately got lost so I would have to find my way back and, in this way, learned the town's layout.

At the time I thought I'd have to survive for about three years and then return to London because there I'd find a job, be with the kids in our house until they'd take off, sort out the leftovers of my marriage and settle. That meant I didn't have to learn more than survival Spanish, my flat would be good for the time I'd stay, and I'd remain a long-term tourist. More or less.

Most of the time life doesn't play by your rules. London became a pipe dream. I agreed to a divorce. My house a memory. I found a job in a then amazing company. My future second husband found me, I guess. I missed my children, but they were both over 20 by then and had to tackle their own lives, and their lives were anchored in London, not in Madrid. We saw each other in both places.

I discovered Madrid, I learned to love my beautiful Spain, its rich culture, proud past, ancient earth, and a language spoken by more than 570 million people. There were authors and poets to read, Flamenco to savour, music to enjoy. Having an ice-cold beer on a warm summer night on one of Madrid's terraces is almost as wonderful a memory as having an ice-cold beer on a cold December day on one of Madrid's terraces wrapped in a thick winter coat, sunglasses against the intense glare of a sharp Castilian winter sun.

And there are Barcelona, Sevilla, Malaga, Mojacar, Valencia, Santander, San Sebastian, Granada and the Alpujarras, la *Sierra Povre*, Chinchón (the list is endless, of course). And it's where we finally settled in our own little house, about five kilometres from Chinchón, where you'd always find a table to have an ice-cold beer in one of the oldest and most beautiful plazas of Spain.



The Registrar of Chinchón married us, and from Chinchón one got easily to Aranjuez (not only the impressig palace and the famous Gardens of Aranjuez, but also the tax office).

For 11 years, I worked in a start-up multinational (company language UK English) where Spanish was only spoken intensively in the Accounts Department and by the 'informaticos'. So good Spanish could be kept at bay, and part of the credentials for my work was the fact that I spoke (almost) native English.

Now I was writing copy for brochures, ads and a variety of PR material in English, and English remained fresh and accessible through speaking it daily with colleagues/friends from 40 different countries. That, however, brings its own calamity: the greatest danger to English, I think, is the fact that it has virtually become the world's Esperanto. Everyone speaks it, but with their own language's quirks. The Russian version of English, the Spanish version of English, the French version of English... you get the drift. English used badly as a form of personal and business communication. I wonder how long English can withstand the onslaught.

When I retired I wrote for myself again. Prose and poetry, and I slowly felt comfortable in my life, my house, the closeness to London (and my kids and my UK friends), happy with amazing friends in Madrid. I settled. Then came the economic crash.

The sensible thing to do was to move to my husband's native country, Peru. To his home town, Lima.