

Odyssey Resumed

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This book is dedicated to my wife Lucille whose unconditional love and support has made this publication possible:

I dedicate to you this book with passion and delight.

Joyously do I intone in verse, and in soft notes do I sing,

Of our happy love, the rich and intense story:

In loving you, Lucille, I truly found my glory.

PROLOGUE

It has fallen upon me to lay open the beginning of a writing that is nothing less than the second echelon, and pray to God it will not be the last, of the exciting story of its author's fascinating life. In this effort, I want to be brief, and that... frankly, is always difficult when one knows the soul of the artisan of that impressive account.

Dear reader: no matter how down to earth you may consider yourself, when you read this book, *Odyssey Resumed*, you will feel, perhaps, like me: a stylized keel of a ship that cuts the waves of the sea of life. Upon it, lies the towering figure of an agile and swift brigantine mariner that slips away. Its bearing is the command of the steady, firm and self-willed hand of an intrepid, but opportune, traveler named Roger. Its sails will be blown by the courage of his brave heart, and its sailing, unshakable and secure, will follow the right course of a soul that firmly believes in God and trusts in men and their destiny. Its rudder will be ready to elude dangerous reefs, but will not hesitate, even for an instant, to change direction with a stroke of the helm, to show that in life as in the sea, “no one!”, and the echo of the ocean will repeat “no one!!!”, can plot against man and his freedom.

Upon reading this book slowly, and knowing the author, I have felt like a ship boy who, stationed at the anchor beam, waits in anticipation, with anxiety and interest, to see what lies ahead when going beyond the horizon. Absorbed in thought with the captain's tales, he longs to find in the mysterious destination a new adventure to experience... And this is what will take place in each of the chapters of this work.

Perhaps you will, dear reader, entertain the same feelings when reading this book, especially if you have read *Odyssey to Opportunity*, its predecessor. In its content you will find the appealing and simple message of a man who, separated from his beautiful homeland El Bierzo, Spain, assimilated to a great nation, the United States of America, has become fulfilled, excelling, suffering, rejoicing. In a word, growing as a man and thanking God for giving him the opportunity to know and live a life difficult to repeat, with many marvelous sensations and a unique experience.

When you analyze the account in *Odyssey Resumed*, you will observe that each step of his life is a constant encounter with man, God and culture, a continuous feeling as a human being who fights against adversity and the selfishness of the environment.

You will admire the fortitude of an indomitable spirit who had to defy very hard trials. The narration, however, sweetens them in such a way that, upon reading them, you fancy being in a classroom where a veteran professor narrates the facts, teaching you a beautiful and sublime lesson and imbuing you with a sense of supreme tranquillity.

In the book, he will describe the landscape, the people, the environment, the society and the economy of the places visited with impressive precision and realism. He will depict each panoramic view with harmony and beauty, adding to it a rhythm and a rhyme, becoming of an orchestra director and a poet in love.

But wait! He writes about the people, about their freedom, their standard of living, their social welfare and their human evolution. It is then, and only then, that he opens his missionary soul, his profound faith in God, his internal desire to improve the environment in order to make people happy, thus showing his vocation as an educator. Then you will see in Roger R. Fernández an exceptional “berciano” (a person from the Bierzo), human and charitable. He is in love with the world and mankind, fights for his future and tries hard to reach that equality that for some remains utopian, but which for him is the motor and the essence of life itself.

You will know a man in love, capable of composing the most sublime song dedicated to his mother, the most marvelous verses extolling his native land, the most affectionate poem in honor of his father, and that tremendously human ode exalting his village, its people and its surroundings.

At the end, you will be able to admire a delicate poem dedicated to his wife, his “Filipino Pearl”. It is precisely there where you will comprehend the profound feeling of a man whose stunning capacity to love has neither limit nor boundary. You will detect his strength, powerful and soft at once, that blows in a constant and sweet fashion, caressing as the warm wind of the West.

Allow me, dear reader, to conclude this foreword with some marine verses with which Alberto Vázquez Figuroa ends his book acclaiming León Bocanegra. He finishes with a love song that his lover dedicates to the protagonist. I believe that is sufficiently expressive, and it goes thus:

My beloved:

Time is to love

What the sail is to the wind.

If it blows softly it will make it go far.

If it blows abruptly it will end up breaking it.

Celeste.-

Dear reader: read softly *Odyssey Resumed* and you will enjoy serenely the experience of a man who has found in life the best opportunity, simply by living it.

Héctor Blanco Terán

Bembibre, Spain 1999

AN AUTHOR IS ENCOURAGED

February 6, 1997. On this day, the book *Odyssey to Opportunity* was introduced to El Bierzo, in the House of Culture of Ponferrada, capital of the region. Unfortunately, that same day, the two teams with the most heated rivalry in the Spanish Football League (Real Madrid and Barça of Barcelona) were contending for the King’s Cup. Naturally, that reduced considerably attendance at the presentation. The press left after a half-hour initial interview with the author, but amply published and broadcast the event, including pictures of the author addressing the audience in their report.

Roger had already made a presentation of his autobiography in an environment rather cordial and informal, to a great number of friends and acquaintances in Los Barrios and in Fuentesnuevas. Radio Onda Bierzo extensively broadcast the latter throughout the weekend. Roger takes this opportunity to express wholehearted thanks to “Margó” who organized, in one day, the friendly event in Los Barrios, and Mary Crespo and Emilia Martínez, president and member, respectively of the Cultural Association Charanga Queimada, who carried out the elaborate but similarly amicable get-together in Fuentesnuevas.

In spite of the success of these two occasions, it was only on February 6, in the House of Culture in Ponferrada that the author, encouraged by Councilman of Culture Manuel Rodríguez, decided to write a sequel to his book. This was not the first time, however, that Roger was asked to continue writing his autobiography. Several months earlier, Héctor Blanco Terán, a poet from Bembibre and author of this work’s foreword, had already urged him not to allow his “odyssey” to finish there and to share it with his readers. “Do not let your odyssey end there and do not let it be only yours”, he wrote to Roger on April 6, 1996.

“*Odyssey to Opportunity*” presented

Héctor Blanco Terán was the Master of Ceremonies at the presentation of the book in the House of Culture of Ponferrada. He advised the audience that it became difficult to introduce the work in question “for one can fall into the temptation to comment on it and describe it without wishing it, for its theme, fresh and human, invites one to relate its content. In it, the author shows a firm will, developed during a long life, and guaranteed by a morally and intellectually profound knowledge and, of course, a firm and powerful desire to take honestly the best out of life”. And Héctor continued: “The charming

simplicity of its sincere and human narrative makes of his work a second opportunity, so that the reader may assume life as something beautiful". He concluded his personal participation with a short poem that he himself described as "simple":

The book shows in its inside
Of the author the soul,
With will, with ardor,
With vocation, with calm...
There is a feeling and illusion
Which strong principles guarantee,
A sensitive heart
Clean mind without prejudices.
The problems of life,
Instead of an adversity,
For him become a joy
They are an opportunity.
=Read the book for yourselves,
Take joy in its intimacy.

In the presentation of the book, Roger explained to the audience the genesis of his autobiography. According to him, at the beginning of the 1940's, his family did not look with pleasure to the new winds of change, but he had to live such transformation with memory and with hope. Thus, when his family moved from Los Barrios de Salas to Fuentesnuevas, he started his odyssey to opportunity, which concretized its continuity when he took the train in Ponferrada to study with the Marists, first in Túy, then in Grugliasco, Italy, and much later in Poughkeepsie, New York, United States.

In those days, that "berciano" left his beloved "small country" in search of a much wider world versed in other languages. He was thus eluding a possible, but real tragedy in his life: to have a dream and not being able to make it a reality. It seemed as if "neither chains, nor risks, nor distances could hinder the triumph of a child's fantasy of personal achievement". Nowadays, after a rather tortuous and at times dramatic trajectory, one of those cultural surroundings has rewarded his total dedication without reserve to the teaching of youth in its international coordinates. In this endeavor, and others of intercultural character, he has crossed many borders and gone through many customs.

Who would have told him those years of world conflict that he himself would some day promote projects of intercultural cooperation when world reciprocity would be destined to be the norm and not the exception? Who would have thought that in those beginnings of his odyssey to opportunity he would some day receive one of the gifts he most highly values: to contribute, somehow, to the attainment of world cooperation, comprehension and friendship? He believes he has done so while heading programs, which embody the study of diverse cultures with the simultaneous acquisition of linguistic fluency.

Similarly, who would have foretold those youthful days in El Bierzo and a rather enchanted friendship with two or three beauties from Fuentesnuevas that he would marry a woman from Cebu, Philippines, place where Magellan landed in 1521 and planted that huge cross, symbol of his religion, of his beliefs? He calls her "filipina berciana" for her surname is Paradela, name of several villages from El Bierzo region.

El Bierzo is most affectionate for Roger. It has something magic and charming that penetrates his heart and accompanies him everywhere. What's more, to return to his native region seems to provide him with true youth. Many remark to him that he appears much younger than he really is. He replies that each time he returns to El Bierzo he rejuvenates ten years, and he adds with a smile: "If I follow this rhythm soon I will enter in heaven the same age as when I came to earth..."

In his autobiography, Roger has strung together the most forceful and stimulating memories of his life, a rather episodic one and, in some way, adventurous, picaresque. In all his life, his native soil has become the very rich and extraordinary burrow from where, like a torrent, have sprung forth those religious and human forces that have helped him to overcome the great difficulties and injustices along the twisted highways which at times he had to travel. In an anecdotal and pleasant narrative, he lays out observations and reminiscences that intend to entertain the reader and to create an atmosphere of global cultural learning. Each experience, each story brings with it, besides the humor, a lesson designed to teach and to drive dull care away and, in its more weighty and serious features, to edify and trace new ways. It is a reflection of the contemporary cultural climate of "confession", not of fiction, which encourages to ventilate what previously had been cautiously reduced to silence.

As in Cervantes' Don Quixote, in his Odyssey to Opportunity Roger has his windmill. It is certainly not like the windmills with long arms, from which Cervantes created dreadful and disorderly giants. Roger's windmill is definitely not a dreadful giant, but rather "a radiant symbol, perhaps, a constant laborer" as the one described by the Cuban poet Oreste Perdomo in

his expressive poem “Mi molino de viento” (“My windmill”). Truly, in his *Odyssey to Opportunity*, Roger is not Samson as the Israeli giant, but his windmill has witnessed, in his own person, a suffering but dreaming childhood, a cloistered but hopeful youth, an adulthood shaken by tragedy but rewarded by faith and constancy. Definitely, the giant in Roger’s autobiography is not the dreadful giant that Cervantes imagined centuries ago. It is that “tireless journeyman who, in days of storms, of tropical hurricanes, of destructive cyclones”, has humbly resisted the violent societies that have encircled his existence.

In his youth, Dante found himself in a dark forest where the correct route was lost. So too, many young people of today find themselves in that same forest. With natural native lights and a flood of human and divine assistance Roger has felt compelled to rectify it. His educational and cultural preparation embodies principles, which can yield very valid ideas for the solution of the problems that bear upon many of them who are at once fascinated and bored by comfort and enslaved by the lack of tenacity and constancy. These are, suggested Roger, the virtues they need to attain high cultural ideals rather than social, political or gratifying ends.

At the conclusion of the presentation, several questions arose. Some typographical errors in the 1995 edition of *Odyssey to Opportunity*, printed in Salamanca, came to light. Roger related for the public the events that led to the publication of the book. He records them here, now, for the reader. He had arrived in Salamanca, where the book was published, to revise the galleys, both in English and in Spanish. A very early morning, when the editor Alfredo Miguel de Pablo was taking him to the bus station, Roger handed him the corrected galleys. The editor took them to the printing house. It is not known if the office misplaced them or if it made the changes and inadvertently printed the original disc without the corrections. The fact is that the book was published without the author’s alterations. Fortunately, those printing failings do not take away, in general, the interest in the reading. There is, however, an error for which he is solely responsible and for which he assumes total responsibility. When writing about his stop in Breda, Holland, he alludes to the painter of “La Rendición de Breda” (the Surrender of Breda) of Velázquez and attributes it to Goya. This is a huge mistake, which the author has never understood how it occurred and for which he, sincerely and with humility, asks his readers for forgiveness.

A guerrilla leader controversy

In the audience there was a young man from Los Barrios de Salas, Roger’s place of birth. He asked a series of very intelligent questions. One of those questions referred to Manuel Girón, a guerrilla fighter who commanded numerous skirmishers in the region after the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939. He was killed in 1951 in the mountains near Ponferrada. Since then, he has become for some the object of admiration as a “guerrillero carismático” who merits recognition and praise, and for others an “aventurero criminal” who deserves nothing but scorn and condemnation.

For the English reader to understand the meaning and the importance of the question about Manuel Girón, a historical synopsis and perspective is necessary at this time. At the end of the Spanish Civil War in Spain, when General Francisco Franco became the leader of the country, three types of opponents to his regime appeared in the national scene. The great majority of them accepted their defeat and went on leading decent and productive lives of self-denial and sacrifice. A few others, refusing to accept the new regime governing Spain, went into hiding without engaging in fighting and without harming anybody. They were called “rojos” (red ones) because of their leftist views. One such “rojo” was José Losada already described in *Odyssey to Opportunity*. Still, a third left-leaning group opposed to Franco armed themselves and roamed through the hills continuing the fighting in the hope to attract world attention and material tactical support and eventually bringing the Franco regime to its knees. They were called “maquis” and caused some bloodshed and fear through the region. Such a “maqui”, leader of the guerrilla force in El Bierzo was Manuel Girón, born in Los Barrios de Salas, just like the individual who asked the question and Roger who wrote the book.

At the time of the presentation of Roger’s autobiography in Ponferrada there was a very hot controversy about Girón being debated in public through the press. Pointing out to the questioner that he is not a historian but rather a professor who recalls his childhood, Roger answered the question frankly and directly. He made, however, his more detailed reply public ten months later in an article that the weekly regional newspaper “Bierzo 7” published in its section on culture at the end of October 1997. Such article is reproduced here because the historical events to which it refers have decisively impacted Roger’s entire life. In addition, several readers have expressed disappointment in the lack of Girón’s mention in *Odyssey to Opportunity*, particularly so since the author inserted in the book the tragic end of José Losada’s case. The letter Roger sent to the Ponferrada weekly reads like this:

Dear Editor of Bierzo 7:

During the flight back to Los Angeles from my most recent visit to El Bierzo the previous month of September I read the book *The Agony of the Lyon* by Carlos G. Reigosa. From the moment that I finished reading it to the present I have spent long whiles debating the advantages and disadvantages of commenting upon that work of great thematic success and huge historic interest, in particular, locally. Its pleasant and entertaining reading has left me in a state of mixed emotions, as it may have been the case, I suppose, for other readers.

Certainly, the book can lay claim to a very engaging prose and to a style that is simple, light and pleasant, which shows great writing ability and dexterity on the part of the author. In my judgment, Reigosa has shown great effort as an investigator. I

believe that his extensive interviews with sympathizers of Girón prove to be revealing, fascinating and, for me personally, very moving, particularly those he carried out with my friend Esteban Losada González with whom I used to play and at times served Mass when we were young. I also believe that the author would have been more successful in convincing the reader if he had interviewed in more detail some other people who knew Girón closely and do not project the heroic and generous figure that the book presents to the reader. Many in Los Barrios, for instance, had a very low opinion of him and opposed him, not for his political ideas but rather for what he was and what he used to do. With or without reason, we children were advised not to go to his house. There were several men in Los Barrios who were of the same political leanings as Girón, my father among them. Nonetheless, people from both political camps respected them because they were honorable and decent men and supported them against the mayor, who, in my view, had evil intentions, was ill advised and totally out of control. Similarly, Reigosa exhibits himself quite partial, in my opinion, when he intimates that the “maquis” caused havoc everywhere inspired by a noble cause, while the “guardias civiles” (civil guard) did it with a sense of political persecution, not out of the civic duty that their occupational responsibilities required of them.

Certainly, this book awakens in me emotions that are in a way contradictory. On the one hand, I feel proud to originate from the same village of a man who has shown courage and is presently recognized in the whole territory and beyond. On the other hand, I feel the burden of shame and confusion that, in my view, results from lack of common sense on the part of Manuel Girón and his fighting companions. They took to the hills to continue a useless civil conflict which carried with it superfluous shedding of blood and subjected to constant acts of coercive brute force a terrorized population that longed for peace and tranquillity which public security forces had to protect.

It is not my intention to judge either Girón’s psyche, nor that of the other “maquis”. They may have had their reasons. For sure, there would have been reprisals on the part of some rancorous politicians, for political vendetta has a very long history which is very difficult to conquer and, even more so, to eradicate... That was precisely the reason why my family had to move from Los Barrios to Fuentesnuevas in 1944. But those reprisals, no matter how harsh and abusive they would have turned out to be, would not have caused the level of suffering and the loss of properties and lives that the mere existence of those “maquis” brought to the Bierzo in those days.

Not all the people from the right unloaded their rancor and grudges against their enemies. Many of them were honorable men who would help people from the left to evade the wrath of some disoriented people from the right. In fact, some of them carried out heroic deeds, risking their lives to protect their friends in the other side.

It is also true that not all the defeated citizens from the left wanted to prolong the conflict. The great majority of them accepted with dignity the anguish of defeat and lived a productive life of self-denial without causing harm to anyone. From my point of view, they deserve more merit and are more worthy of admiration than Girón and the other “maquis” who decided to continue fighting for a lost cause, thus complicating the existence of many of their sympathizers. They are, I believe, the true heroes of the left.

Perhaps I am wrong (“Who knows, Lord?”). But I believe that my family, victim of the vengeful harassment from the mean leaders of Los Barrios of those days, would today still be in that village of a noble historic past, the industrious, relatively well-to-do and happy family, just as before the appearance of the “maquis”.

As you can see, dear Editor, I was delighted reading that book. It made me think about my personal experience. I hope that all of us “bercianos” will be able to live in harmonious brotherhood, forgiving past errors and resolved to avoid them forever in the future, following the appropriate slogan: “Borrón y cuenta nueva...” (Erase the past and start anew)

Publicity of “Odyssey to Opportunity”

Since the publication of his autobiography, Roger has grown much more intimately close to his refined Bierzo and its hard-working and heroic people. They, in turn, are getting to know him better and seem to be more interested in his work, which at the present includes several poems. Local newspapers, radio and television stations have contributed very positively to build the rather good image, which this previously unknown author now enjoys in his native land. Without underappreciating in anyway the very effective contribution of the different radio broadcasting stations and the various local newspapers, Roger wants to express his gratitude especially to Onda Bierzo where Yolanda Ordás has interviewed him on several occasions. He extends his appreciation as well to “Bierzo 7”, which in its edition of the 30 of November 1995 published Sonia Bardón’s extensive interview of him in the section “¿Quién es?” (Who is it?). Similarly, that same weekly newspaper published, on April 25 1996 in “Última Plana” (Last Page), an article by Ángel Arienza titled “Two Books for a Book Fair”. He wrote:

The book fair is one of the best things that happen in Ponferrada and it is a great pleasure to see how the offerings increase each year. Allow me to recommend to you to invest your time in two books, read without pretending to be a literary critic.

The first is Roger R. Fernández’ Odyssey to Opportunity. It is the autobiography of a common “berciano” who, like so many others migrated (perhaps due to misery and political tripping) more than thirty years ago. After having worked at everything and traveled half of the world, he has settled in the United States where he is a college professor. Roger gives us quite a lesson of point of honor in the third person and as a Phoenix he has been reborn out of each difficulty. His vital experience could be the envy of many poets. He has been in the South Africa of compromise and resistance, as well as in the two Cubas, until he arrived to his America of opportunities. The most important thing is that it is related from humility, without rancor and with sincerity, for he does not need laurels pursuant to the work he has completed disinterestedly. The easiest thing

would have been to write a book of “adjusting of accounts” towards those who tripped his family in this stew pot of ours. Someone who relates even the hardest part of his life (how his wife abandoned him for another woman) does not leave anything in the inkwell. Besides, validating Gracián once again: that which is good, if brief, twice as good.

The reading of that article moved Roger emotionally. He did not wish to risk expressing publicly his joy, however, for fear that the readers would think the reporter and him were friends or at least acquaintances. They did in fact meet, though, but approximately one year later while Roger was in the offices of “Bierzo 7” waiting to renew his yearly subscription to that newspaper. After greeting each other, Roger finally thanked him for the article. Ángel revealed then that he had bought the book in Salamanca, where it was being sold in six bookstores.

It would be of interest to the reader to know that in that famous University City, cradle of the Spanish language, the press, radio and television also communicated to the public the publication of *Odyssey to Opportunity*. The three papers with the greatest circulation, “La Gaceta”, “El Adelanto” and “La Tribuna” printed extensive interviews with the author. Similarly, radio Onda Cero of Salamanca and Salamanca Television interviewed Roger extensively as well and broadcast the interviews live. Surely in Salamanca as well as in Ponferrada, Roger enjoyed great publicity in his endeavor to make his work known.

Such was not the case, up to the present, in the United States. *Odyssey to Opportunity* and its Spanish version *Odisea hacia la oportunidad* are being sold in eight colleges, but the author has not made the effort required to reach the level of publicity attained either in Ponferrada or in Salamanca. At Los Angeles City College where Roger has been teaching since 1965, his autobiography is selling, of course, rather well. Its newspaper “The Collegian” printed a rather positive review of the book from the point of view of minority students in the United States.

The great number of oral and written commentaries that Roger has received from many readers of that American country and others like the Philippines, France, Brazil, South Africa and Scotland have been, from very diverse perspectives, positive and encouraging.

However, the most eloquent testimonial in praise of the book reached Roger in a very pleasant and surprising way. At the end of April 1997, Ponferrada hosted its annual “Feria del Libro” (Book Fair). Roger attended the fair. He benefited a great deal and made some new friends. A secondary school in Fuentesnuevas invited him to speak to the students assembled in the gymnasium. In the audience there was a teenage girl who went to the fair next day, approached Roger and addressed herself to him thus:

“I was at your conference yesterday. You know “mi abuelita” (my grandmother)”.

“Who is your grandmother?”, Roger asked her.

“Her name is Marcelina...”

After coming to realize whom the girl was referring to, he answered:

“Yes, I know her. How is she?”

“She is very well”, she replied. “But I want to present her with a very special gift”.

The girl then showed Roger a Spanish copy of *Odyssey to Opportunity* and went on to say:

“Can you autograph it for her?”

“With great pleasure. Give her my best regards”, continued Roger.

“I will do so”, she concluded.

It was approximately 12 noon when that short exchange took place. At about 9:30 that evening, when Roger returned to his sister’s house following the afternoon session, he was given the message that a lady wanted to talk to him. His brother-in-law Marcelino accompanied him to the lady’s house. She was María del Carmen Santos, the mother of the girl who had bought the book for her grandmother. In less than nine hours she had read *Odyssey to Opportunity* and had greatly enjoyed reading it. “I love to read and I read many books”, she said somewhat excited. “This is the book that I have most enjoyed”, she concluded rather nervously. Apparently when her daughter, Sheila, arrived home with the book for her grandmother, the mother took hold of it and did not lay it down until she finished reading it in its entirety.

With readers of such caliber and disposition, what author does not get inspired with hope?

DEEP-ROOTED NOSTALGIA

As the reader must have noticed, the publicity of his autobiography occupied part of Roger’s life, but he had to dedicate his time, mainly, to other aspects of his new reality. Even though his future must be seen through the prism of the past, he is not going to stumble, however, into cultural shocks as brusque as previously nor into tales as picaresque as before. Nowadays, daring, dangerous and risky adventures, as well as the audacious, perilous and intrepid challenges, if they exist, are few. The

world is very small. Various cultures, no matter how different and contradictory they may seem, no longer have borders and are much more accessible to global curiosity. Furthermore, in this modern society of television, jets and Internet, mental as well as corporal displacement are almost common norms in countries where freedom and economic means inspire people's behavior and activity.

As a consequence, the narration in this new book will not be as humorous or as festive, since it no longer incites the young and impulsive years of the central character. Neither will it assume an intimate and private tone. It will continue, however, its personal vein. Autobiographical tales grow with vitality in this modern society, where they act as a cathartic, a purging for the author as well as for readers, who seem to show greater appetite for stories that help them to comprehend better the difficulties in their own lives.

Thus, this sequel to *Odyssey to Opportunity* will focus on perspectives of a more judicious and reflexive reality. It will continue to string together a series of inspiring experiences at a more mature, informative and ample level in the new human relations that have recently sprung in his life. It will cast, nevertheless, a nostalgic glance towards the past, "tumultuous must from rich grape", and a hope in his new future horizons, "generous wine of his maturity". In reality, then, *Odyssey Resumed* amounts to a summary or epitome of experiences and personal life episodes, writing-pad or a journal of travels and a history of a cultural pilgrimage without the religious emphasis that such concept implies.

Several readers of *Odyssey to Opportunity* have asked Roger about the present situation of his children. Here is a brief update of each one of them in order of chronological birth:

Gregory, the oldest, is the owner of a very successful business. He and his wife, April, have two good soccer-player boys and an always-smiling daughter, Kailey.

Roger Kent has not appeared yet. Nobody seems to know anything about his life or about his whereabouts. This is a sorrow that the author will have to endure silently while praying that he soon will return to his paternal house.

Robert Rey, Kent's twin, has almost fully recovered from his condition. After much effort, determination and sacrifice he has very successfully finished his studies. He now works full time for an international company of great prestige.

María Suni is now teaching at an elementary school in San Diego, California. She and her lawyer-husband Chris have two beautiful and very happy daughters: Morgan and Brooke.

Carlos obtained his Master's from the University of New York in Madrid, Spain. He is now pursuing his doctorate at UCLA where he is a Teaching Assistant. He also teaches two courses of Spanish at Los Angeles City College where his father has taught since 1965.

Manuel is continuing his studies towards his Bachelor's degree and works as a teaching assistant at an elementary school in Los Angeles where he also coaches football, soccer and basketball.

Chad is a very busy skate board professional athlete. Sponsored by the company World Industries he travels around the world and is enjoying his youth. He has some skateboards with his name on. Moreover, he is a designer of sport shoes that sell very well. He is financially successful and, more important, he has learned how to save. He intends to return to his studies as soon as his schedule permits.

New worries

So, the last five years of Roger's earthly journey have not been years of a quiet and tranquil life, with children and grandchildren to visit and many duties of serious responsibility to fulfill. As the reader of *Odyssey to Opportunity* may remember, in March 1987 he had been elected Chair of the Department of Foreign Languages and Humanities of Los Angeles City College, almost one month after his marriage to Lucille Paradela. That election was carried out to complete the final year of his predecessor's term, Dr. Carmelita Thomas, who had been appointed to a higher position in the Los Angeles Community College District. He was reelected thrice for three-year terms.

Lucille's administrative experience and help contributed to Roger's successful adjustment to his new responsibilities as Chair. Under his leadership, positive changes took place that produced considerable accelerated growth in the department. Not only did he want to demonstrate his own capacity to lead, but he also found in his spouse constant and encouraging inspiration and valuable and unsurpassable advice.

However, not everything was roses and glory. The flowers had their robust and penetrating thorns with the source of their sap in the very faculty of the department. An unmanageable professor created obstacles, which were almost insurmountable to a continuous and effective teaching process. He complicated the situation by publicly and aggressively claiming for himself absolute academic freedom. He insisted on using for his first-year Spanish class a textbook different from the one adopted by the department, contrary to the "one only text" policy for the first and second semesters of any language, which the department had been carrying out since its approval several years earlier. Finally, collective academic freedom prevailed over the individual, but bad publicity and a long process of arbitration caused Roger many headaches. Only Lucille's unwavering support, the close and unconditional cooperation of the faculty and his own inner strength prevented him from resigning an office he had sought and obtained with determination and dedication. In the end, though, the central administration

transferred the professor in question to another college of the district where other problems emerged around him, but of another nature.

Much more insufferable for Roger was, at a personal level, however, the false accusation of sexual harassment registered against him by a female professor, apparently for political reasons, a few days before the new elections that the department was to hold in April 1994. This being the third election for his position, Roger had to obtain two-thirds of the vote to be reelected Chair. Probably to deny him the votes of the other female professors and secure them, perhaps, for her own candidacy, this professor recorded a sexual harassment complaint against him. All the other professors of the department expressed their annoyance and anger towards her and openly affirmed their unconditional support for Roger who was reelected in spite of this malicious smear. The college administration immediately launched an investigation as required by law. Needless to say, Roger's reputation soon came out shining, and the accusing professor retired from teaching two or three days before the vote. Without any doubt, what hurt Roger most was the attempt against his moral integrity. The accusation produced laughter of incredulity when the college community found about it, but, unfortunately by law it is recorded in the annals of Sacramento, capital of the state of California. Without any doubt, the absolute and unconditional support of the faculty, as well as Lucille's, greatly lightened the heavy weight of that inconceivable and shameful recklessness.

Notwithstanding those two unforeseen trials, which made his life as the leader of the department somewhat bitter, Roger enjoyed a good reputation among students, faculty and administration. The periods of glee were more numerous and intense than the hardships. Besides, he loved the "little fights" he constantly felt compelled to engage in with the college administration concerning academic positions and the budget. In general, they got along very well and showed respect for each other, for the administration knew that whatever Roger requested was for the good of the students, the department and the College itself, not for his personal benefit. As the reader of *Odyssey to Opportunity* may well remember, under his leadership, the department doubled in number of languages taught, as well as in number of students and faculty. It now required a budget of one million dollars to operate.

Nostalgic trip to El Bierzo

Roger has always dreamed to return to Spain to live peacefully and with dignity in his "patria chica" (small fatherland), El Bierzo. The arrival of his grand children and of ones yet to come... that dream vanished and turned into a source of perennial nostalgia toward his favorite corner on this earth.

In that sense, 1994 was a very indelible year for him. Not only did he finish writing his autobiography in English and Spanish, but he was also able to satisfy many of the fancy whims that the homesickness of his childhood would create for him. In fact, a wave of melancholia overwhelmed him the whole year.

In April, he had the unforgettable opportunity to spend Holy Week in El Bierzo, and to relive in site, particularly Salas de los Barrios, the recollection of memories that have accompanied him in his odyssey throughout the world. The event that moved him most, to the point of bringing tears to his eyes, was the procession and the encounter in the main plaza of the "Virgen Dolorosa" (Virgin of Sorrows) and her son carrying a huge and heavy cross. That, together with the famous sermon of the encounter, always attracts visitors from other villages of the region. There, Roger saw some of his friends from Fuentesnuevas and the daughters of Judge Manuel Valcarce. Having seen him from the balcony they invited him, after the procession, to their elegant patrician home.

This was the first time that Roger had entered that house, which he admired so much as a young child. This was also the first time, in exactly half a century, that he had been present at that indelible procession and entered San Martin's church where he had been baptized and received his first holy communion.

Naturally, in Salas de los Barrios, he participated in the very old tradition still known, with no hatred involved, as "to go out and kill Jews". It consists of going out from house to house and partaking in the tasting of homemade drinks and products of the land. Because of the unfortunate name, this tradition caused Ángel Arienza of "Bierzo 7" to express relief, in 1997, to know that El Bierzo is not California where "it would have been abolished as politically incorrect".

All in all, this was a visit to his birthplace where Roger prayed with the required devotion of the moment, cried with irresistible emotion on remembering fond moments of the past and reflected on his comfortable present. Thus reads his interior monologue:

In California, one can certainly live very well in spite of the earthquakes that frequently challenge and defy our environmental comfort. Even so, the monotony of a relatively convenient existence is a constant source of continuous innovation. That is why California always heads, almost without exception, any change in living fashion.

On the other hand, perhaps in El Bierzo one cannot live as well, in general. But in that really privileged region the power of customs and the pleasure of living compliment one another to perpetuate a good, healthy and simple life.

To know how to live is an art, and in El Bierzo they know how to live. For that reason, at the moment of truth, if I could choose, I would keep the idyllic rural Bierzo of deeply rooted, merry customs, and would leave for others that innovator, the California of big urban centers which, because of their complexity, constantly complicate communal peace..."

Sister's visit to California

In June of that same year Roger and Lucille were treated with delight by a visit that reminded them also very vividly of the past. One of Roger's sisters, Estherita, and her husband, Marcelino, traveled to California to spend three weeks with them. It was the year of the World Cup in the United States. Some of the games were played in Pasadena, near Glendale, in the outskirts of Los Angeles. Even though Marcelino has always been a soccer fan, they did not go to any soccer games but they watched all the games on television. Nonetheless, they carried out many other activities that satisfy the curiosity of the visitors, for Los Angeles enjoys, more than any other city in the United States, many sites of tourist delight.

Naturally, Lucille and Roger accompanied them to Universal Studios where many pictures that are being seen around the world are made. They toured Bel Air and Beverly Hills, Los Angeles places where many actors and actresses live. They enjoyed, of course, the great recreational park Knott's Berry Farm. Unquestionably, they left time for a day in Disneyland for last. That day, however, coincided with the pursuing of O.J. Simpson through the various freeways of Southern California. He was a suspect in the killing of his wife Nicole Brown and her friend Ron Goldman, and was fleeing from the police. Roger, Lucille and their guests had to take a different route to reach Disneyland, for on some of the freeways the traffic seemed not to advance at all. Everywhere there appeared to be traffic congestion of the worse kind. They were unaware of the reason for such a stand still in the several expressways until they returned home after the dazzling parade of lights, at ten o'clock at night, in the world famous recreational park.

Roger and Lucille took Estherita and Marce to Las Vegas where Marce was the only one who won money playing the machines. They crossed the desert by car. Since it takes about four hours from Los Angeles to Las Vegas, they made some stops, one of them in Barstow, a popular place of rest for travelers to the gambling city.

There, Estherita and her husband received the first lesson in cultural diversity. It was quite hot, a suffocating heat. The four of them went to a fast-food restaurant. Estherita and Marce ordered "café con leche" (coffee with milk). What they received was coffee with milk, American style: a large Styrofoam cup of coffee (three or four times the amount served in Spain) and very little milk. After a great deal of laughter they decided to keep the cup as a souvenir.

For the visitors, the trip to Las Vegas was both jovial and instructive. They could not get over their amazement of that city. They seemed to have been impressed by the noise and the people, but were fascinated above all by the glaring excitement of electrical displays in that showy metropolis in the middle of the desert.

Roger would have liked for his sister and brother-in-law to have experienced the sensation of an earthquake, mild of course, so that they could go back home, to El Bierzo, and be able to tell exactly what it means to live in Southern California. In truth, there was an earthquake, quite strong for sure, in the Los Angeles area, but they were in San Diego that day with their niece María Suni. They found out about the event during the news hour. Unfortunately, however, neither did they feel it nor did they live it.

While in San Diego they visited the famous Zoo and other centers of attraction. Two days afterwards, Roger and Lucille picked them up and continued their way towards Ensenada, Mexico. They crossed the border at Tijuana, some twenty miles south of San Diego. They settled in a truly charming house, overlooking the Pacific and a very clean beach below, which belonged to Luis Carlos, a professor, who taught in the department of which Roger was the Chair, and a very good friend.

They spent two days and one night in that earthly paradise, not far from God's smile. They contemplated with reverence the great natural beauty that surrounded them, admiring the big ships in their approach to Ensenada, or letting themselves dragged by the waves, or soothed at night by the harmonious sounds of the calming waves of an ocean that would smooth with ethereal delights pleasant sleep.

Of course, not everything was excursions and fun and games. Roger had to take care of the yard in front and in the back of the house. One morning, he decided to dedicate some of his time just to do that kind of work, though for him, it is almost always like forced labor. Marce offered to help "in order to finish faster", he said. Evelyn, the next-door neighbor, came out to see the flowers of her garden. Roger introduced his brother-in-law to her. Marce stopped working to listen intently to their short conversation. Addressing herself to him, she told him with a smile: "Thank you for coming to make your brother-in-law work." Believing that after a few days in the freeways of Southern California he had already learned enough English, without waiting for a translation, he took a few steps forward smiling enthusiastically, extended his hand to her and answered: "Good morning to you too". When Roger told him what she had tried to convey to him, he replied in Spanish: "What she said sounded so short in English that I thought it was only a greeting..."

Time goes by inexorably fast, however, and never stops. The three weeks went by rapidly, more so because everything that is good seems to end faster. The visitors were going to spend one week in Miami with the oldest brother Antonio and his charming wife, Nínive. While leaving the house to go to the airport, Estherita tried to hide her tears to no avail. Their stay in California had been a real delight to her. Their departure produced a great void in the house of their Spanish-American brother and their Filipina-Berciana, American sister-in-law. But such is life... That visit of his sister and brother-in-law was for Roger the best gift that year, a present that he still remembers with affection and frequently relives with nostalgia.

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