

MY IMPRESSIONS OF SPAIN

By Nancy D. Dahl

I am delighted to tell you of my impressions of Spain. I shall start by saying we arrived in Madrid on the 14th of December 1953 after an uneventful trip by air. It was my first foreign station, so you can imagine the anticipation. My husband had already spent several months there prior to the Spanish Agreements so he had already rented a house for us. It was in Chamartin, across the street from the Sevilla Film Studio. I liked it from the start, mainly because it was so elegantly furnished. As you entered the front door, your eye immediately caught the elaborate chandelier hanging in the hall, the winding stairway leading up to the second and third floors was marble. Once inside the drawing room, there was a feeling of the French period with much gold leaf, marble top tables, heavy satin drapes, and thick flowered rugs. The kitchen was in the basement, underneath the dining room. I can hear my husband jokingly say now, in referring to the servants, "our house was run by one dumb waiter and three assistants," because the food was brought up from the kitchen by means of the dumb waiter. I had to have a cook, maid, laundress, and a gardener to run our fourteen room house. The cocinera did nothing but buy and cook the food and keep the kitchen clean. The doncella served the table and kept the upstairs in order while the asistentita did the heavy cleaning and helped the maid polish the silver and brass and the laundry. As for my jardinero, the small garden consisted primarily of rose bushes which took all of his time. I had roses from early May until late fall. The first year in Madrid, our electricity was turned off six days a week from eight in the morning until six in the evening, due to the shortage of hydro-electric power which resulted from a serious drought in Spain. Luckily, our deep-freeze and refrigerator would recharge at night when the electricity was turned on. My asistentita, or laundress, had to do the ironing with old-fashioned flat irons which had to be heated on the coal range. They were formerly bookends for my cook books. Speaking of the stove, it also heated all of the water for bathing. Our baths literally had to be scheduled due to the small capacity of the tank.

I never did get used to the eating hours. Breakfast was at 8:30, lunch at 2:30, and dinner at 10 or 10:30 in the evening. Cocktail parties were at 8:30 and when you were invited to dine with Spanish friends, one hardly ever ate until midnight. Unless we were going out, however, or having friends in, we ate a family dinner at 8:30. The Spanish always have marienda or tea at 7 o'clock to tide them over until dinner time. Our house was terribly expensive to run--the rent, heat in the winter (mainly by coal furnace and fireplace in the drawing room), the electricity, and feeding four servants, their clothes,

