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## **“Love doesn’t understand retirement”**

Lola recounts for us the story of her “retirement”: “years truly filled with joy and action, youth and hope. I have always been convinced that each moment in life enriches us for the next.”

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Lola was born in Carmonita, Badajoz, Spain 71 years ago. She is the oldest of five siblings. Her parents – Atanasia and Francisco – owned a

store where they sold everything imaginable. From a very young age, the whole family helped out in the trade. Their small town didn't have a bank, so her father became the representative of three banks in Badajoz. People came to their home to deposit and withdraw money, to pay the bills for cattle feed and for fertilizer, etc. "In our home we worked a lot and enjoyed being a team. We felt part of something important," Lola says.

At the age of 11, she went to Merida for high school and studied to be a teacher. "After finishing my studies in January I met – through a priest in Merida – some people from Opus Dei who came from Seville. I thought about my possible vocation for a few months and, after praying about it, in May I decided to ask for admission as an Associate. From that time until now my life has been one adventure

after another!” Lola tells her story in her own words below.

## **Education of women in the rural sector**

I found work as teacher in two towns in Extremadura and worked there for several years. In the third year, in 1970, I started working in the Elcható Family Farm School, which was just taking its first steps. It was one of the many family farm schools inspired by Saint Joemaria's teachings all over the world. I have always been quite determined and have never shied away from any challenge. I put myself into my work body and soul.

The adventure of working with women in the rural sector took me to a number of different provinces. We made study trips with the students which opened horizons and helped them to pursue their professional interests. On one of these trips in Catalonia we visited several farms

and met with farmers who explained the different types of cultivation of crops. In Galicia we learned how to fish for lamprey and went to a fish market where the fish were being sold to the public. Everything was part of the women's education and gave them a broad and integrated panorama of the different professions. We had a close and intimate relationship with the families. In fact many of my friendships made back then still continue today.

### **From the classroom to books**

After 15 years working in family farm schools, I returned to Extremadura to be closer to my family. I started working at the Bujaco bookstore in Caceres. Since a young child I had a knack for social relationships and this work opened up another horizon in my life. It was a two-story establishment, where I

looked after the section of literary classics, children's and young people's books, and books on spirituality.

Many people who came to the bookstore were looking for answers to questions in their life, while others asked for advice about an appropriate gift, etc. As a result of these conversations, I made many new friends.

My father's health was deteriorating because of his diabetes and he began dialysis. Faced with this situation, I took early retirement after 15 years of working in the bookstore and I brought my parents to live with me in Cáceres in order to take better care of them. They stayed with me from 2005 until the end of their lives. It was a great joy for me to be able to pay back a bit of their generosity and constant care when we were growing up.

## **A house open to the world**

At this point in my life I asked myself: What do I do now with such a big house? I lived in a duplex, and the upper floor was now empty. But then I had an idea. I went to the office of the vice-rector at the University of Caceres to offer my assistance for the Erasmus program and welcome young foreign students in my home. It was a great decision. Always being close to young people is a spur and a source of hope, no matter how old you are, because their joy and dynamism is contagious.

So I started taking in international students who came to the University to study. In recent years I have had the opportunity to live and make friends with university students from various countries in Europe and Latin America and also from the United States. The young women

spend only a few months with me, but each one takes with her the gift of our friendship and sharing in each other's vision of life. And, of course, a prayer card of Saint Josemaria, to whom they often begin to pray for their own intentions.

Thanks to technology we keep in touch. Some of the students who have spent time with me have taken part in the formational activities offered by Opus Dei back in their own countries. Two of the young women even traveled to Rome to attend the Easter UNIV congress. We keep in contact via Zoom and WhatsApp. What a wonderful experience!

### **A new solidarity project**

In 2013, the Prodean Foundation began working in Caceres. Since I had more time now, I wanted to help out in this volunteer effort. We organized a group and started

volunteering in the children's ward of the San Pedro de Alcántara Hospital, and in a nursing home with more than 300 elderly people.

Over 60 volunteers take part in this program, going on weekends to one of the sites. Many moving anecdotes have arisen that show how, through something apparently simple, you can help much more than you realized. For example, the person in charge of pediatrics at the hospital told me that, since the children began attending the activities in the computer classroom on weekends, they begin the new week on Monday with a completely new attitude.

With the onset of the pandemic, we organized with the volunteers a campaign to collect food for a soup kitchen in Cáceres, which was a complete success.

We have training sessions for the volunteers and they really put

themselves into their work. I am fortunate to be able to keep in touch with young people and see the enthusiasm with which they respond.

So that's the story of my "retirement" up to now, years truly filled with joy and action, youth and hope. I have always been convinced that each moment in life enriches us for the next.

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