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## **Leaving home...to return to my home**

When I was 18, I used to dream about marrying my prince charming. We would have two children, and I would work as a foreign correspondent for a famous magazine. But my little novel turned out a bit differently than I expected....

02/28/2012

My name is Ana María Gálmez. I did wed my prince charming; it was love at first sight. After thirty years together he still takes my breath

away. And we did have children—not two (as I had imagined), but seven. I studied journalism, but didn't become a foreign correspondent. I ended up working in the field of communication strategy, and when I was beginning to sense that it was now my turn to become the “boss,” my life suddenly changed dramatically.

After almost half a century in Chile, with older children and some on the point of getting married, I became an “expatriate” in Spain. I left behind in Chile wonderful friends, my parents, brothers and sisters and several daughters, cutting short my own career in order to accompany my husband in his new professional challenge and, in a way, to start over.

I crossed “the puddle,” as people here like to say, thinking my new life would be much like the one I was leaving behind in Chile. But in a

short time I found myself immersed, soul and body, in work that I had often liked to theorize about but rarely practice: homemaking.

## **A home that is warm and welcoming**

During these first three years in Madrid, I've had to fight my inner "demons" and convince myself that it was the right choice (no one forced it on me), to take up this work that God now seemed to be asking of me: a life one hundred percent devoted to my family and hidden from the world.

At first it wasn't easy. Like so many women of my generation I had a subconscious fear that a home—as Betty Friedan, founder of the "Now" movement, used to say—is "a comfortable concentration camp." That's a slogan many of us women have grown up with as we fled the kitchen and the cleaning closet like sheep from a wolf.

But these past few years have taught me the importance of a warm and welcoming home. And to bring about this warmth of a home, where everyone can relax and recover their strength (husband, children, friends), someone has to make sure it's a reality. Today more than ever, I'm convinced that this is the job of us mothers.

## **A bright and cheerful home**

As a supernumerary in Opus Dei for the past three decades, I've found some words of St. Josemaría very helpful: "When I think about Christian homes, I like to imagine them as bright and cheerful, just like the Holy Family's home." These recent years have helped me to combine practice with theory, so I can help my new friends to find God in the kitchen, when caring for their children, when accompanying an elderly parent, in the endless daily

struggle to get the children from one place to another.... This warmth of a home has drawn many people to seek shelter, consolation and affection there, in a world where the greatest poverty now is to be alone.

In my case, dedication to these domestic tasks has helped me to quickly become integrated into my new country. Like any good “Latina,” I love to invite people to my house. Whether it’s preparing a meal, organizing mothers from my son’s school to come over for coffee, passing on a Chilean recipe, or hosting volunteer work, little by little I’ve made many new friends.

My skills as a writer have grown a bit rusty recently, but my “talent” for communication has helped me give classes on subjects that I know backwards and forwards: the challenges professional women face,

educating one's children, human virtues and the new technologies.

I'm convinced that everything we undergo in life is always meant to help us grow. By undergoing this process of growth we can then assist others in a similar situation. An illness, a financial setback, the death of a loved one, or in my case moving to another country, when accepted as God's will everything takes on a new value and dimension.

### **A refuge where others find shelter**

We have a small notebook at home where our guests, if they want, can write down a few words. For the great majority (and by now, that's quite a few), what they record is often the same: their gratitude for the chance to share in our family life, in the affection and joy, and of course, in some good home cooking. When I read these comments, I like to think that my family resembles

those of the first Christians who spread the faith to others through the example of their ordinary daily activities. The best way to sum up these past few years is: wherever one is, one can always love God and serve others. And what is this if not the definition of happiness?

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