

MAJORCA...A REMINISCENCE

Frances Roberts 8/17/14

Once upon a time, many years ago, my husband and I decided that, since we were loyal Californians, we should explore the origins of the state icons that make up the mission circuit founded by Father Junipero Serra. Since we were film makers, we resolved to make the story into a film for TV.

Our aim was to discover what background Father Serra had that inspired him, and so we went off to Majorca, the Mediterranean island where he was born. A friend who was a journalist now living on the island assured us that the place was rife with Serra sites of interest and arranged for us to find lodgings in a *pensione* in the capital, Palma.

The first person our friend introduced to us was Dinah Moore Bowden, a handsome aristocratic woman in her 70s, who was the heiress to the Moore-McCormick shipping fortune, and was deeply into Serra history. She was the person responsible for creating the Serra Museum which preserved his tiny birthplace home intact, and was planning a small adjacent museum building. She treated us to a fine lunch at the restaurant that she had built to accommodate any tourists coming to the small town of Petra in central Majorca where he was born. It was close to the Petra church where he became a priest and served until at age 36 he went on his mission to America.

The best detail I remember about the Serra house was a rope with two plates on it hanging from the ceiling. The first plate had a hole in the middle of it, with the rope threaded tightly through it. The second was directly underneath the first, and was for storing bread loaves. It was a clever solution to keep rats from getting access to the bread!

There were many other places of interest on the island and we tried to explore them all. One was Valdemosa, the place where George Sand and Chopin stayed for a bit, until the landlord tired of the constant piano noise. Another was a cave, with a highway-sized entrance going underground to an enormous theatre inside. In front of the arena was a subterranean river. When the audience was seated, the lights were turned off, and suddenly one heard Mendelssohn's "Fingal's Cave" music, as small boats lighted all around the gunwales, came along the river carrying violinists, violists, cellists and some wind instrumentalists. They played a lovely concert of classical "cave" music in that magical setting.

On our final night at the little hotel, we packed up our belongings ready to fly home in the morning. We took last fond looks at the city spread below our third floor bedroom balcony. Ready for bed in my pink lace negligee and

beribboned matching peignoir, I went to our bathroom on the back side of the building and got out toothbrush and toothpaste. Suddenly, in the tiny window beside the sink a man's face appeared. In a feeble attempt to sound like a local, I screamed "Que pasa? Que pasa?" (hoping to say, "What's going on?") The young man who was outside hanging on to the downspout—apparently on his way to climb over the roof and get access to rob rooms via the balconies on the other side—smiled broadly at me, and jumped the 12-foot distance to the second floor roof below. He then jauntily blew me a kiss, bowed low, climbed down to the ground and disappeared into the night.

Upset to the max, I ran to the stairway and down to the lobby where the Majorquin owner was behind the desk. I knew he spoke no English, only Spanish, and here again my Spanish failed me, for I could only stammer "Un hombre! Un hombre!" but for the life of me couldn't remember the words for "in the window!"

Faced with a crazy long-haired brunette in frilly pink nightwear calling for "A man! A man!", he drew himself up proudly to his full height, stuck out his chest as far as possible, and replied, "Soy hombre!" ("Im a man!")

I could only turn and run back upstairs to share the laughter with my husband. He had only to say "Me hombre" ever after to set us giggling.

Copyright© 2014 Frances Roberts. All rights reserved.