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FLAMENCO

‘A Half Life’

By

Michael Moroch
‘Miguel de Lucientes’

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Dedications

**To my son Michael, that he may know the joy of music throughout his life, my wife
Johanna my mom Marian,**

**Pete Seeger, Nancy, Ron, Carlos Montoya, Sabicas, Miguel de Cordoba, Arete,
Lana, Joan, Marlene, Ellen, Phyllis, Susan, John, my wife Johanna, Toni, Silvia,**

And finally, to all those who have listened to me play

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Introduction

Flamenco 'A Half Life', is a collection of memories, vignettes, observations and experiences from my forty-five year involvement with flamenco guitar as well as flamenco's impact upon my life. The title is reflective of my realization that I always remained halfway involved in the flamenco world, never really jumping in with both feet. Why it has taken me so many years to finally address my flamenco passion is probably due to my own laziness, procrastination and feeling that such personal experiences are difficult to share.

Vanity, as I approach age sixty-eight, is probably the major factor for writing along with the desire to provide my teenage son with a legacy of my flamenco life. I additionally seek to leave some statement of my existence, rather than just a past patchwork of miscellaneous photo's cd/video clips, etc. I have recently joined the modern world via a website, usually refer to as my '*vanity*' site, and you-tube. I can now wake up, click on my sites and verify that I'm still in the game. To my surprise, the site has initiated re-connection with several people from my past, thus reviving old memories.

My flamenco life is divided into predominately three periods: residing in Madrid and Tangiers, Morocco 1970 to 1976; the next ten years performing in the New York City area including a return visit to Spain; and from 1999 to the present representing my return to performing after a long hiatus.

I miss my son Michael's involvement with flamenco. When he was twelve and thirteen, he would join me in club dates, accompanying me and playing with the bossa nova group that usually opened the shows. He is very adept and impressive on the guitar, albeit not flamenco, but acoustic and electric styles, computerized music and investigating a career in the music industry.

I thank John Abeigon for pushing me to play again and I greatly embraced my return to performing.

Why Flamenco

I grew up with limited resources within a single parent home, which is a nice way of saying we were quite poor. Somehow I developed a deep interest in classical music, especially Chopin. My mother, struggling the best she could, arranged for accordion lessons. I learned to play entirely by ear, and eventually stopped lessons. I began listening to music on the radio, Hi-Fidelity was just being introduced and I became a part of the late 50's early 60's music scene during high school. I worked briefly in New York at a steamship line and as fate would have it, enrolled in a teacher's college. I really wasn't excited about college but I did keep up and enjoyed science, especially physics.

During my M.A plus educational life, I failed one course, Ecology. As fate would have it, if you believe in the, 'as one-door closes another opens' philosophy, Ecology did it for me! I enrolled in a summer makeup course 'American Folk Music'. In that brief class, my life changed as I heard music that really moved me and discovered the life and times of Pete Seeger, who greatly influenced my future outlook and thinking. I began playing five string banjo, (several hours per day) six and twelve string guitars and other related folk instruments; auto harp, dulcimer, fiddle.

During the remaining three years of college, I earned a science teacher certification, while just getting by in classes. I started a folk music club with two friends, and began performing in Greenwich Village coffee houses and other venues in the tri- state area. I also traveled to Boston and Philadelphia to perform, and became very involved in the anti-war and draft resistance movements. I became one of the 'Pete Seeger Juniors' and loved performing. I played at some of the smaller stages at the 1967 Newport Folk Festival, mostly based on my banjo skills. I was not quite sure as to post graduation work, but it was not teaching science.

While attending a college graduation party I discovered an album of Carlos Montoya, 'Flamenco guitar'. So I put in on and after one or two numbers everybody voted it off, but it grabbed me!! Was that really one man playing? What emotion and power from the guitar! I kept trying to have it re-played, but was met with considerable resistance. Think about it, Dylan, Baez, Judy Collins the Rolling Stones, Beatles versus Carlos Montoya! They gave me the album and I left. Over the next week I purchased other Montoya albums and also those of Manitas de Plata and anything flamenco I could find. I purchased a flamenco guitar from a pawnshop for fifty bucks. So, for about a year, I floundered picking up what I could from Greenwich Village and listening.

I entered Peace Corp training upon graduation. They invited sixty trainees and informed us only thirty will be selected, so as to encourage competition. I was not a rah- rah guy, and was also developing a folder somewhere, with my anti-war and draft resistance activities. I enjoyed my eleven weeks in Texas and was finally *deselected*, as I later found out, not so much due to my performance, but due to my draft record, which was active. Additionally, as fate once again smiled on me, I met my future wife Nancy in training, so it wasn't all for naught

Upon returning home, I bummed around, drove a milk truck, played in folk cafes in Greenwich Village and colleges as well as a brief trip to Europe. Based upon money needs, I began working as a full time substitute teacher.

I noticed an ad for flamenco lessons from Harry Berlow in the Village Voice. Harry was a friend of Montoya and had written an instruction book along with a fairly well known Spanish singer and guitar player Anita Sheer. Harry taught me a great deal, unfortunately, much of the material was from Montoya and did not follow the basic patterns, but I respected Harry as he did help me and also introduced me to the playing of the flamenco guitarist Sabicas. Sabicas was little known outside the flamenco community. Carlos Montoya was clearly the Flamenco Ambassador to the world and along with Manitas de Plata and his gypsy family, dominated the public image of flamenco. Sabicas, though it took me time to realize, was the real deal and his playing was simply overwhelming.

I did reconnect with Nancy after she returned from the Peace Corp. We lived together, eventually married and moved to Spain in 1970.

I was hooked on this music and even began less involvement with the banjo and other folk instruments, although again, as fate would step in, folk music became a major factor for remaining in Spain and obtaining a job at the American School.

Many Flamenco guitarist as well as singers and dancers, took professional names, or nicknames, while others just went by their given name. Most professional names were founded from their hometowns or regions, some from traits or habits and if the performer became very successful, the professional name would eventually over shadow their real name. I decided the need for a professional name, another example of vanity over substance, and after some thought, chose "Miguel de Lucientes". Michael from Lucientes.

Calle Lucientes was the street in Madrid, where my long time teacher Miguel Martinez Mesa (Miguel de Cordoba) lived. He liked and laughed at this idea. In reality, it was better than using the convoluted names made up by foreign guitarist, as I could explain my Spanish non-de plume as a gesture of respect to my teacher.

Nancy

Peace Corp training was scheduled at Southwest Texas State College, San Marcos, Texas. President Lyndon Johnson was an alumnus. The program was focused on sending volunteers to develop sports program in Costa Rica. I believe that I would have been a good volunteer, but accepted that I would probably be 'de-selected' at the eleven-week break, which did occur. Two years later, I was performing in the Village and two volunteers from the New York City area found my name in the Village Voice and came to the club. We exchanged numbers and they also gave me Nancy's. She was living in Chicago, and after several phone calls I went to visit. After a few visits, Nancy came to live with me. We married about a year later and left for Spain. We figured we had enough money for about one year. Our first apartment was in the older section on Calle Olivar, near the plaza, Lavapiés. This was a very old section. It was in an old courtyard like apartment complex with the toilets in the courtyard section of each floor. Some of the apartments had internal toilets, but most did not. We were paying thirty-five dollars a month. Some of the people in the building told us that they thought the landlord was cheating us, as they were paying about five to ten dollars, and most had been there since the war. The law for raising rents was very pro-tenant. Once a floor was rented, the landlord had virtually no recourse but to raise maybe a half percent per year. Although clearly discriminatory against landlords, it did provide housing for people that were living on very limited incomes. Social skills had to be learned. Mostly the other tenants found us amusing and probably wondered why we were living there. There was a laundry protocol, whereas each floor hung laundry at different times so as not to drip on the floor below laundry, using public bathing facilities, as we only had a sink in the apartment, dealing with purchasing small amounts of food as our refrigerator was small and sleeping on a foam mattress. This was a furnished apartment! It takes about a month or two for the local community to realize you live there and are not just a lost tourist. Overall, I found Spaniards to be quite tolerant of foreigners.

We moved from Calle Olivar to a much nicer, older apartment on Calle Churruga, near the Glorieta Bilbao. Located in the Glorieta was the Café Commercial. Hemingway used the Commercial in his story, 'A Clean Well Lighted Place'.

Nancy had obtained a job teaching English as a second Language and I was making some money from playing. I then obtained a job at the American School of Madrid and we bought a car. Things were good, but due to some personal issues we ended up separating. I found a nice small top floor apartment, with a large balcony on Calle General Mola and Nancy found a smaller apartment. Nancy left in 1974 and I lost touch with her for several years.

I simply would not have made it in Spain without her, especially that first year, and I will always be in her debt for our time in Spain, and all we experienced.

Our last contact was around 1986 and I recently reconnected with her. I am glad that she has a family and her life seems to have been a good journey.

American Cultural Program

After our first year in Spain we were experiencing some money problems. Nancy obtained a job teaching English as a Second Language at an engineering school.

I went to the U.S. Embassy hoping to find work playing American folk music. I was fortunate in that there were monies for such a proposal. They scheduled a concert at the embassy. The program went very well. With this success, the embassy began sending me to colleges and other venues all over Spain, on your tax dollars. I traveled first class and was always put up in the best hotels, even in the small towns. Overall this was a wonderful experience. After a year, the monies dried up and I was out of work.

During this time, I had the opportunity to meet with students across the country and developed a better understand of life within a military dictatorship under General Franco. Some incidents, related to military government control were:

At times, I would observe state trucks at the corner newsstand confiscating papers or magazines. This meant that I had to race to the next location and purchase the International Herald Tribune or Time magazine as they probably wrote something negative about Spain. Sometimes it was the local paper.

There was a poetry contest in Barcelona and first prize was given in the honor of a Catalan (Barcelona region) leader who opposed Franco. The people on the prize jury were arrested.

A modern adoption of the Garcia Lorca play 'Yerma', the first production in about fifteen years was allowed. Basically, it is the story of a man who does not want children thus leaving his wife in the position of a barren woman without the social status of children. She kills him in the end. In the middle of the performance, the lights came on, and the police told everyone they had to leave. Government agents in the audience had deemed the production inappropriate.

A writer sent his book for evaluation and permission to be published. They rejected a scene, relating to a woman going to bed. She did not say her prayers.

In my own experience, I created a play list for my performances at the embassy's request, but I generally did not follow the list as the students were heavily into Dylan and other current artists. I was in the Barcelona area and in the middle of my performance a student came up to stage and told me there was a censor in the audience and I had to sing the program as listed, which I did. A few days later the embassy called me and read me the riot act and said play the program!

Simply put, all media and performances were carefully monitored and controlled. Playboy magazines were illegal, which became a boon to me later.

One of my fond memories, playing for the embassy, was in the small town of Oviedo, along the northern coast of Spain. I was walking along and found a man carving a coffin top. I stopped and watched. In our conversation he said that he was from Malaga but moved north as he was alone and had family in Oviedo. I asked him about flamenco, and he laughed. He said that flamenco only existed in the south. The next day, I went back with my guitar and played. He was amazed that a foreigner was playing flamenco.

I did get to meet many embassy types and it was both quite fascinating and infuriating as to how our government worked. I also met many other Americans living abroad and eventually one of those contacts enabled me to obtain the teaching position at the American School of Madrid. The teaching position greatly changed our life, as a good steady income allowed for a greater opportunity to travel, take lessons and an overall upgrade of our living condition. I had tried to obtain work at the American Air Base at Torrejon, about half an hour drive outside of Madrid. The thought of base privileges, and the opportunity to travel the world going from American base to base seemed very exciting. Unfortunately, seeing that I was living in Madrid and been out of the country for several years, I was considered having gone 'native'. They would rather ship an American teacher and family to the base rather than hire me.

Unfortunately Nancy and I split up and that threw me into quite a long depression.

Miguel Martinez Mesa- 'Miguel de Cordoba'

Miguel was my first teacher and over time, became a friend and finally someone with whom I would share what I had learned from other teachers and my travels. He played at one of the most popular flamenco tablaos, 'Torres Bermejas'. He had been playing there about fifteen years, being part of the large opening numbers and then for other acts.

He was a good steady performer. His playing style was from the 1950's, with updated material learned from other guitarists who performed at Torres, or visiting artists.

He was a very quiet person, very respectful and a good patient teacher. He began playing later in life, after the civil war. He never spoke about the war other than that it started and there was nothing to do. He was about sixteen years old and working as a carpenter's apprentice. He was recommended from the Ramirez shop as a good teacher for learning the compas (accented rhythms) and structure for the dance. He always stressed compas.

He was married with two small children. Over time I became overwhelmed at how little the guitarist were paid and how he made ends meet. His wife's sister and parents also lived with them so, between all the salaries, I guess they got by. He had many 45rpm records of the tablao show that were sold at Torres. I then found out that he did not have a record player. We purchased him an inexpensive one for our first Madrid Christmas. He was very concerned about such an expensive gift, but we let him know that it was ok. Over the next few months, I would loan him some of the many recordings I was buying and I know he enjoyed them.

At the mention of Carlos Montoya and Manitas de Plata, he just laughed and commented that nobody considered them flamencos because they played out of time, mixed rhythms and performed as individual artists. He was especially harsh on Manitas, as French Gypsies were not considered Flamenco. Concerning Sabicas, he was very reverent. He noted that Sabicas was one of the greatest. After watching the many guitarist in the tablaos, listening to the recordings that were not available outside of Spain, realizing that much of what I played was incorrect and finally having to change my right hand position, I was about ready to quit. I had never heard of Paco de Lucia, Serranito, Manolo Sanlucar, Paco Cepero, Juan Maya and numerous others. They were just incredible, along with so many other second tier players.

As I began re-learning, Miguel was very good about keeping me involved in all the rhythms, whereas other teachers would focus upon one rhythm until they exhausted all they knew. I also wrote down everything instead of using memory. Other friends did not, and by the next lesson, were relearning material. I used a system of writing in notion from the 5-string banjo whereas you use a number and exponent.

Some teachers were not happy with my ability to take several falsetas (melodies) in one lesson. Other students would spend two or three lesson on one falseta.

A few teachers wanted more money for lessons because I learned so much from each lesson. Miguel was also good at letting me know if there were any special guitarist at Torres or playing at another tablao.

Miguel had the opportunity to move to Arizona, via a very wealthy American who was on business in Spain and studying with him. He wanted Miguel to play in a restaurant. Miguel finally agreed, mainly as an opportunity for his children. Unfortunately, he had to leave alone, as the paperwork for his children and wife was not processed as easily. Miguel lasted about one month. He had always been taken care of by his wife for everything, spoke no English and was living with his sponsor in the hills of Tucson. He finally broke down and came back. He was quite dejected, but overall, I never thought as a family, they were prepared for such a life change.

When I left Spain, he was very gracious and said that he envied all I had learned.

We kept in touch on and off, but he was not a great writer. I sent him some tapes of my playing in shows. After about two years we just lost touch.

I returned in 1986 and had not seen him in almost nine years. I went to their apartment, but he was out and it took his wife Pepa a minute or two to remember me. They had another child who was about seven. I told her I would see him at Torres or stop by another day.

I was staying with an old friend Dolores and planned to be there three weeks. That night I went to Torres and after the show, he hugged me and said; 'what are you doing out so late, it's dangerous!' I was slightly drunk and it was about midnight, which was early based upon my previous lifestyle in Madrid. He asked me if I noticed I was the only one walking around. I had not, but it was true. Spain had changed considerable after Franco died and prostitution, muggings and overall criminal behavior had greatly increased. Miguel said he was mugged a few months before for money.

When I returned to Dolores' flat, she was up and waiting. She also stressed that I had to be careful. This was very disappointing, but in reality it appeared true. I went back to Miguel's house and started to arrange lessons. At first he would take no money, but I insisted. I was playing pretty well at that time and Miguel had learned a great deal more of the modern sound of Paco de Lucia. I noted that the Torres' flamenco show was small. He said tourism was down, several tablaos were out of business, and they kept the show small for cost. Miguel noted that only on weekends did they have full seating, mostly from tour busses, but the weekdays were sparse. He also had very few students and none stayed more than a month. He did not look well. His wife told me he was having trouble with his liver. He was not a drinker as far as I knew. Miguel was about sixty-three or so, but looked much older and fatigued.

Miguel's playing had slowed, but he could certainly keep up with the show. He was glad his sons had steady work, one working in a jewelry shop and the other in Cortes Ingles, a large Macy's type store. He never wanted them to be in the flamenco world.

He was impressed with the Ramirez Classica I purchased. He was stunned by the price and felt they cheated me. A day or so later, when I visited, he was besides himself as he had gone to the Conde guitar shop and, even with his professional discount, he was shocked at the cost of the guitars. He said he could never afford another guitar.

When I left for the states, I insisted on giving him some additional money for the lessons. He finally accepted my sealed letter. I left and knew he would be upset about the amount, but also accepting of the money.

Over the three weeks it was apparent that things were very tight and he was worried about his health and his young daughter. We exchanged two letters and then I never heard from him again.

I cherish the few photos I have of him, especially one of Miguel with Cameron del la Isla and Paco Cepero.

I often felt he was a better friend to me than I was to him. Miguel had endured a life of flamenco with both feet in.

Marian's Visit

My mother and I faced life together since I was thirteen. Divorce was a horrific choice for her, but my dad's drinking was more than she could take. Over time she told me that the choice was for me to have a calmer life, than for her. When in the hospital prior to passing, she again asked, 'did I do the right thing', to which, as I always answered, 'absolutely, it was better just the two of us'. My dad died when I was nineteen.

My mother's idea of a trip was going to visit relatives all living within forty-five minutes of each other. She embraced my living with and then marriage to Nancy. I know it was hard and frightening for her when we announced we were moving to Spain. Now that I have a child I understand better the worry that comes with love.

As always, she wished us well. In 1972 she announced that she would come visit. This was such a monumental event in her life. We received mail every other day with the flight number, time of arrival, questioning how much should she bring, etc. Well she did arrive and I don't remember her ever being so excited. We had moved to Calle Churruca so she had her own room with a small balcony. She loved Spain! We took her to restaurants and then on a trip to Valencia and Murcia. This was all so overwhelming but joyous. I really never saw her so happy. She was so impressed at being by the 'Mediterranean Sea'. I guess she always had dreams to travel.

One Sunday morning, although the shops were closed some merchants might keep their steel roll down doors half open, my mother returned from her walk around the block with a fresh chicken! We could not figure out how she bought it! I don't think we could have gotten a chicken on Sunday morning. She liked to take a walk and slowly felt comfortable expanding her walking area. She always carried a note from us, in Spanish, with our address and phone number just in case.

We took her to the bullfights and at one of my concerts, when people were coming backstage to meet me, a proper Spanish man, very gently kissed her hand. She left the happiest I ever saw her.

Next year she announced she was going to visit again. This time, she sent one letter, basic information, and was on her way. Mom was now a world traveler. All her life she reminisced about the trips and looked at the photos.

After she died, while going through her papers, I found a photo of me waking up in Tangiers wearing one of those frilly Moroccan shirts. I would like to know why that photo was so special? Maybe the thought of 'Tangiers, Morocco' was just so exotic.

Marian passed, holding my hand while having tea, having felt her life was full, happy and at peace that I had a wife and son.

Tangiers Morocco

During June of 1973, the American School of Madrid sponsored an educational conference and teachers from various countries attended. I met Joan at the conference. She worked at the American School of Tangiers, and over the next week we developed a relationship and I went back to Tangiers with her for the summer. In addition to teaching, she was a fine artist and sculptor. She was a free spirit and had been in Tangiers for a few years. She lived on the Boulevard du Paris in a small, nice flat in a three-story apartment building. To this day my memories of the apartment and the neighborhood are still quite vivid. I don't think I really understood how 'foreign' Tangiers really was until I left. Tangiers was quite different from the other cities in Morocco as it had been the headquarters for foreign governments in North Africa during World War II, as well as after the war, so there always was a large contingent of foreigners in the city. Islamic rules were more lax. Tangiers was also a major tourist stop, as it was just across from Spain. On a clear day, which did not occur that often, you could see The Rock of Gibraltar. At that time, a great hostility existed between Spain and England as to who had the rights to 'The Rock'. England had been there for many years, especially during World War II, as well as having long standing occupancy and influence in southern Spain revolving around English involvement in the sherry and brandy industry.

I began exploring the city, which was quite small and trying to understand the medina section with its endless narrow streets that often lead you back to where you started. There were many antique shops that offered items from all over the world. The wide variety of wares seems to have been created by the movement of foreign personnel not taking all their possessions with them when they moved or were reassigned. I was stunned to find a 1930's Gibson Granada flat top bluegrass banjo. This was the 'Holy Grail' for collectors. The owner wanted four hundred dollars. He knew what he had. I found that there were bargains, but for the most part, if it was the real deal, it cost. The beauty of the stores, were their eclectic collections and the condition of items. I was on a very limited budget, so I could look and dream, although I almost spent one hundred dollar on a set of tarot cards. They were very thin ivory, with woven tapestry for the card designs. They were just gorgeous.

As time passed I became aware of the great poverty that existed. There were some small walled areas with the water source being a fountain in the center. Sometimes I'd take a short cut through the area. Joan often warned me to be careful where I walked, but I was young, fearless and stupid. Not far from us was a large area, about the size of three New York City blocks where people lived in ramshackle housing, of corrugated materials, wood, metal or what ever they could obtain. I had never observed such living conditions. Even the gypsy camps outside Madrid were far better. There was no sanitation and I wonder how they existed. Across the street from us was a family that made rugs. The rug stretched out in the open lot and they worked on it daily keeping it covered with plastic when they stopped. This was their occupation.

Joan warned me not to give money to beggars if they came to the door. Give some fruit or food. The beggars, mostly young children, would haunt the tour groups visiting the medina. There always was one tourist who would take a handful of Moroccan money and throw it back over his head, then gleefully take pictures of the kids fighting over the money. One day I was hanging out at a shop where the owner spoke some English and Spanish. He liked learning English names for his wares. Some tourist came over and were looking to buy the small clay drums that looked like bong drums. The owner would be glad to get four dollars for the size they were looking at, but he started out at about twenty dollars. The lady reminded her husband to offer half of what they ask and don't budge. So they did and they haggled and haggled. They then asked me why I was there. I said that I lived in Tangiers and that they should hold firm on the ten-dollar offer. Finally the owner gave up, as they began to leave, and sold them the drums for ten dollars. After they left, he said, 'they always offer half'. He wanted to know what I had said to them. I told him and he laughed. He suggested it would be profitable for me to hang around and 'advise' customers. He probably was right.

The food market was also interesting, in that there was limited refrigeration, so things were killed daily and sold early. The markets were also a meeting place and social source for many of the people in the area. Sometimes I would get this very 'American' feeling, meaning I'd like some decent wine or beer. The stuff they sold in Morocco was really poor; keeping in mind it was a muslim country. I would go to Lilly's English Pub, which served good food and beer. It was a small place and Lilly was probably in her sixties, but not someone to mess with. The cafes were wonderful with their mint tea; strong coffees and old French type construction. They also were a great place to people watch. I'd occasionally have coffee in some of the smaller spots in the medina, but somehow I felt a bit uncomfortable being the only foreigner.

The beach was large and not what I expected. The wind could be quite brutal, blowing the sand around and the temperature varied daily.

They had walled solariums where you could rent a fancy cot. I tried this as I was writing the great American novel at that time. There was a small boy who stood around in a white suit, red fez cap and brought drinks or whatever else you needed.

The glass beads fascinated me. Many people referred to them as Gullamine beads. Some were very new and very colorful with designs and other were worn down and looked like stones. They were trade beads used in lieu of monies. Some of the beads I have probably go back hundreds of years. A major jewelry substance was amber. Morocco had large deposits and the beads could be bought in the raw state or various levels of polishing and size. I purchased my mother a nice string of amber beads, but unfortunately, while she was in a jewelry store the jeweler commented on the beads. He told my mother they were worth at least two hundred fifty dollars. I paid about fifty. My mother wrote me that she could not wear them because they were too expensive. Such was my mother.

Another oddity of Tangiers was the rug business. Figuring out the rug business was as complicated as trying to figure out the Jai-Alai betting system in Madrid's Fronton. Probably just as crooked. Many rugs were used for specific rituals or holidays so they may be one hundred years old and still look new. They would then be stored for the rest of the year. Other rugs were hung on the walls, thus preserving them from foot traffic. The quality and design also had a great deal to do with value. Then there were the 'antiques' made for the tourists. The merchants were masters at aging and faking rugs and other items, especially the old flintlock pistols. One thing I noticed was that for the tourist trade, the smaller rugs cost more because you could take them with you. I never got past basic rug 101 but recommend dealing with one of the more reputable shops, also greater cost. Rug buyers often hired professionals to assist in appraisal and purchase. There usually was kick back somewhere.

I found the Moroccan people to be accepting and yet skeptical of foreigners. Someone told me that the average yearly income was about one hundred dollars.

Joan and I took a day trip to a small village about an hour away. Mid-day we were the only people on the street amid the walled areas. One café was open, and basically people just stayed in their homes. It was quite eerie.

I took the ferry to Gibraltar. I must say it was somewhat nostalgic to really be there after seeing so many photos and those Prudential Insurance ads. I think that 'The Rock' has probably been commercialized as much as the Eiffel tower. I was not expecting to find a small English town with police 'Bobbies'. Once off the boat, you were in England! Great pubs and shops, everybody spoke English.

Overall I'm still not sure why I have such very vivid memories of Tangiers, more so than other places I lived.

Joan returned to the states, residing in upper New York State, and has pursued her passion and become a thriving artist and sculptor.

Teatro Calderon

The Calderon was a very popular theater presenting major performers as well as pop artists within a venue similar to the old American vaudeville shows. You could sit in the balcony for about a dollar and see two hours of various performers; juggling, singing, dancing of all types, comics etc, and then the headliners would perform. It really was quite wonderful.

I was playing in some odd little club and a Spaniard came over and told me he sang flamenco. We did a few songs together that seemed to work out. My accompanying of singers was never all that good but we seemed to hit it off. His performing name was Tomas de Moron. Actually he was from Alcala de HERNARES, a small town north of Madrid, and worked as a glazer.

He was looking for an accompanist and the chance really grabbed me. We did some rehearsing and tried to play in little places that would allow. We just were background music in reality.

One day he came over very excited, as he had landed us a job, for one night, at the Calderon. I was ecstatic. We were to perform two numbers. We rehearsed a Fandango and Soleares, and settled on Bulerias for an encore. We were not paid.

On the night of the show, we were fourth on the bill following a comic who didn't go over too well. The crowd at these shows, especially for the less known acts, was not very understanding and vocally let their displeasure know with cat calls or comments. They did clean up their act for the headliners. Thankfully I'd never observed them throwing food. We were both quite nervous. I had realized, after a few rehearsals, that Tomas had some tonal issues and was not that good a singer, but he was all I had going for me. I hoped we could at least get through the Fandango, which is technically an easy rhythm to accompany.

They introduced Tomas and me as 'Miguel de Lucientes', but noted I was American. I played the guitar introduction well, and then Tomas began. He was nervous and had some early tone issues, and by the last verse the audience was grumbling. When we finished the Fandango, there was some mild applause and some calls of guitarista! guitarista! The Soleares has several breaks between the verses, which gave me a chance to play some old style and technically safe runs. As the piece progressed they started applauding my playing and quiet while Tomas sang. We finished to some mild applause and left. There was no encore. How vain to have expected an encore!

Unfortunately I realized, as the evening progressed, that the applause for my playing was a knock of Tomas' poor singing. During the remainder of the evening, whenever an act was not doing well or the audience was displeased they started yelling 'traigan el guitarista Americano' (bring back the American guitarist), to laughter from the audience. Such was my new fame. I was better than someone who was pretty bad. We were not even reviewed in the paper the next day. I never saw Miguel laugh so hard, as when I told him the story of the Calderon.

Tomas became very upset and finally told me he had never sung in a 'teatro' or for so many people. I suggested that he take some lessons but he was poor. He had one or two flamenco albums. I bought him three or four and he accepted them graciously. It was a chance for him to hear some other singers. He had a room with his relatives. I visited once and met some of them and they were quite astonished at my playing. We went to a small bar where Tomas has some friends and played for them. He was quite proud. Alcala de Henaes was a very small town.

Tomas knew I was a teacher and, on the Spanish economy, lived well, but I always sensed a pride in him of not accepting too much from me. He was impressed that I owned a car.

We stopped playing, as he didn't want to continue. After a few months, I ran into him and I took him for a drink at Torres, then offering to take in the show, but he refused. He had a real love for flamenco, his family didn't, and I felt sad for him. There was something about an ex-girlfriend that also haunted him but I never really understood that issue. He finally packed up and returned to live with relatives near Seville. I never saw him again

Gypsy Shoe Shine Boy

Sometime in the late 1800's and early 1900's, flamenco began to undergo the development of a Spanish style flamenco, differing from that of the Gypsies. The Spanish style was more formal in the singing, dancing and guitar playing. This development included greater techniques for singers, dancers and guitarists. Artists now possessed a greater command of all the flamenco cantes (songs), dance rhythms, and guitarists were utilizing classical techniques and developing the guitar into a solo voice rather than just accompanying. If you experienced a gypsy tablao and then a Spanish style show, you would understand the differences. The gypsies were great at improvisation, altering new ideas to fit their styles, extremes of emotion and generally playing as if they were always at a festival. Entire families, from ages three and four to those in their eighties, may well be performing.

There was this gypsy kid, about fourteen years old, named Juan Jose, who played the guitar and shined shoes behind the Puerta del Sol in Madrid. The rest of his family was begging or just hanging out. One day while listening to him, he basically was a strummer, he noted my fingernails, and asked if I played. So I played a few things for him and his eyes lit up. Every now and then I'd stop by and show him some new things.

One day he was playing a really great flamenco sounding run and I was impressed. I asked him where he learned and he looked at me strangely and said, 'de ti' (from you) As he played I realized that it was a variation of a more complicated run I played and probably had shown him, but his version sounded so much better. He found the heart of the melody with a continued accenting that really made me wonder.

After this, I started listening more to the gypsy guitar styles and experimenting with some of the ideas I played. This may have been one of my better guitar 'lessons' Whenever I ran into him, he wanted something, which I would gladly give, especially if it was related to Paco de Lucia. The gypsies admired Paco, not so much for his solo work, as for his accompanying style with the singer Cameron del la Isla who they adored.

There was a Flamenco show in the small bullring near Vista Alegre. This venue was new to me as I had only been in Spain about one year. We had great seats, fourth row center, because the first three rows were all gypsies! On the bill was Fosforito, a very famous and formable professional representing the newer singing styles. I had a few of his albums. He sang for every rhythm, not specializing and he was the main headliner. Also singing was Naranjito de Triana, a second tier singer who was very adored by the hardcore flamencos and gypsies. He had a voice like a cannon. There were other acts as openers and no solo guitar.

The show was late, as usual, and Fosforito came out to applause. I forget who accompanied him on guitar, but after his first number, which was well received, the gypsies started yelling, corbata! corbata! (necktie). They were relentless. They did not like ties and he eventually, to shut them up, took off his tie to their cheering. He sang well and after he finished, was well received

Pedro Becan, a very strong guitarist from the south, accompanied Naranjito. Becan played in the gypsy style, but with great technique. They were so good the gypsies were going crazy and I must admit, his singing was much more powerful than Fosforito and Becan was just fabulous. The guitar breaks between verses were stirring. Then there was a long break with nothing and the gypsies and others started yelling.

Cameron, after ten minutes, came out to wild applause. The guitarist was Ramon de Algeciras, Paco de Lucia older brother. Ramon was a fine guitarist and could play the accompaniments Paco used for Cameron.

Paco and Cameron changed the relationship of singer and guitarist that previously existed and in many ways, they became the benchmark for the change to the modern style. Simply put they created an entire new era. Cameron had a very unique voice and Paco had the super technique to follow the many changes Cameron's voice possessed and played very modern and technical introductions and falsetas between verses.

Cameron sang three numbers to wild applause, actually I like Naranjito better, and then left the stage. The majority of the audience was there for Cameron. It took about five minutes of yelling to get him back to do another number and then he left. They then put on some other second tier acts.

Cameron had a long history of various problems and went into a decline. Personally I prefer his work, later in life with the guitarist Tomatito. Tomatito, a superb young guitarist who played in a style between gypsy and Paco de Lucia, proved a great match for Cameron. Cameron and Tomatito won several prizes for their work.

I think over the years I have developed a much greater respect for guitarist like Tomatito, Juan Maya and Moraito Chico. The gypsies had it right.

The Club Flamenco

I was always willing to play most anywhere and there were a few bars that allowed musicians. There also were plazas but the police would generally chase you. There was a bar called the 'Lacon', really a bar from northwest Spain. They had a basement where people could drink and hangout. I would play there if I could or just hang out. One night I was playing some solo and a few gypsies came in and were generally horsing around. They asked me to come over and play. I started playing a Bulerias but was having trouble with the singer. They kept trying to help me but I realized they were just jerking me around so in my best Spanish I suggested that the singer might not be a gypsy, as he did not know the entry for Bulerias. Now I'm not sure if they fully understood me, or were going to get pissed, but they suddenly started questioning the singer as to whether he was a gypsy or not, questioning his family line and then started to laugh. He then said toca! (play). Of course now he entered at the right places and all was well. They all laughed and bought me a drink. One of them asked to borrow my guitar, and he played that basic gypsy style. Then he asked me about a technique I used and I showed him some other odds and ends. I noticed that, while they were there, nobody gave me a hard time, as you really didn't want to piss them off.

The Club Flamenco was a pretty raunchy bar with 'artists' who performed more out of vanity than skill. It was a place for men to pick up woman, along with being a drug haunt. Occasionally they would showcase some second tier performers, who were down and out or couldn't perform anyplace else. The club paid very poorly. The club was small, the bar was inexpensive for hanging out and you could catch some up and coming performers. On most of the nights it was women of varying ages doing bump and grind Rumbas that for the most part crossed the line for the Franco era morality code.

One day when I was over Miguel's house, I heard him and his wife arguing about the Club Flamenco, but they were speaking so fast that I only understood that she did not want him telling me something.

After she left Miguel told me that the owner of the Club Flamenco was looking for some opening guitar. He repeatedly reminded me of what a bad bar it was and the trouble that they have with the police. He said he told the owner about me but he said the owner only laughed. But the chance to play in a club was very exciting.

I went over to the club flamenco and, if you ever saw the scene in the movie 'Blazing Saddles' when the new black sheriff came to town, well that's how I felt when I walked in with my guitar. At 6'5", lanky and brown hair, I don't think I was what they had in mind.

They let me audition, I guessed probably as a joke or just curiosity, but I did rip through some solo work. I clearly played far better than they expected, but the answer was no.

So I played my trump card. I would play for free. If they were not happy, then I'd go. Now they were offering about \$2.00 per night so what was I giving up?

They said ok and I played the first night for about ten people who could not care if I was there or not. I then played another set of rumbas for the 'dancers'.

So they said come back the next night. On my second night one of the older dancers, probably in her late 40's and quite a vamp, asked if I'd play Malaguena. Of course I did and near the end she took off her top to tassels. Now this was clearly not allowable, but I was playing in a club.

On my third night as I sat at the bar after my last set, the police raided. I was scared as I had a work visa and would not be treated as a tourist. I was sitting with my guitar and Spanish green card in hand when a detective came over and in that wonderful British accent English many of the Spaniards spoke asked me, what I was doing there? I explained my plight as a guitarist and I wanted to play. One of the waiters, a police undercover, came over and told him that I played well. So there I am playing while the police were closing the place down. He gave me his card and told me to use it if I had a problem. He finally said go home and laughed. I never ran so fast and the next day there was a small piece in the paper about the raid noting drugs and prostitution. The club was open in a few days, without me. Again Miguel had a very good laugh.

Tablao Flamenco

Flamenco Tablao's (shows) developed in the mid 1800's. There is an advertisement from Seville, announcing a Flamenco Tablao dated from the mid 1850's.

The mystery around the origins, influences and development of flamenco remains, as does our attempts to try and unravel the transformation of a rural musical form, into a world reknown musical form. There are many theories and attempts to classify and decipher flamenco development, but much of our information is based upon oral tradition and memories of artists who lived and performed flamenco from the 1880-1930's. Written history is sparse as well as recordings and photographs of the early years. Flamenco oriented material was produced in limited quantities. 'Arte y Artistas Flamencos', by Fernando el de Triana, published in 1935, is one of the main references for artists from the late 1800's through the publication date. My copy notes that it is only 'one of a hundred' copies produced. A recent You-Tube site has guitarists Ramon Montoya and Manolo de Huelva accompanying a singer from the 1926-30 period! Great Stuff!!

The non-Spaniard image of flamenco has also been fabricated since the fifties and sixties by tourism, media needs, professional performances and our personal experiences. Within this idealized image there is limited inclusion of the small town and rural people who live and incorporate flamenco as a part of their lives. It is within the small local community participation that one sees and experiences the real impact of flamenco, not only as a musical form but also as a part of life.

Flamenco, for better or worse, has been incorporating non-flamenco influences over the past forty years. The guitar has fused with bossa nova and jazz, but unfortunately, in some instances, becoming overpowered by the fusion. Paco de Lucia is the major artist associated with fusing flamenco with other mediums, but he always maintains that 'flamenco feel'. I recently was told about a new teacher in southern Spain. After listening to him, I was left with the impression of hearing a bossa nova guitarist trying to sound flamenco.

The singers are exploring new tempos and accompaniments to old forms. I rarely ever have an argument with my dance partner Toni, but one real ugly moment was over a new piece she wanted to sing in the style of a 'modern Sevillanas'. For the life of me, I could not, in any rationale, view this as a Sevillanas. It was sung in the style of Bossa Nova or a slow Rumba, with some Sevillanas flourishes. The chord structure also was complex and non-Sevillanas. After my initial apprehensions, it has become one of our regular numbers, and so it goes.

Within flamenco dance, there now exists a fusion of jazz, modern, hip-hop, you name it! Watch the great dancer Joaquin Cortes. He is one of flamencos finest dancers within the flamenco medium, yet he continues to expand his shows fusing with other styles. In a recent New York concert, he danced with strobe lights and blaring music. Many dancers routinely perform in street clothes or non-traditional outfits.

Not my cup of tea.

One can argue that Flamenco has always been an art form that borrows, incorporates and is undergoing change. Perhaps the fusion of the last twenty years is inevitable as the performers are seeking new means of expression within their medium. Additionally, making a living within traditional flamenco is not that easy. Competition breeds change. Unfortunately, I believe at some point, the art form becomes lost.

I am a traditionalist, but try to keep abreast of new ideas. In my thinking, Sabicas and Manolo Sanlucar, seem to have exhausted the limits of playing within the traditional structure. Paco de Lucia and Serranito, followed by Tomatito, Vicente Amigo and Rafael Riqueni, have moved flamenco guitar into newer creative and fusion directions.

The tablaos in Madrid presented the finest professional flamenco in Spain. My apologies to the flamencos in Seville, Moron, Jerez, Barcelona and the gypsy cave of Granada. Tourists who visit Granada and Seville often get caught up in the gypsy cave performances, which are designed to give people what they want and are big business for the owners. Most of the great flamenco artists were part of, or have performed within the Madrid flamenco society. In Madrid they became part of a large professional flamenco community as well as realized steady work and pay. Younger performers also came to Madrid or Barcelona seeking fortune and fame.

In the 1970's, there were approximately fifteen Tablaos in Madrid. I would have classified them in three categories: professional artists performing in a purist style; very good to good flamenco performances; average to poor tourist traps.

One of the major factors affecting a tablao was their ability to serve tour bus parties or large groups. The most famous of the serious shows were La Zambra and the Corral de la Moreria. Both were small, narrow settings catering to discriminating aficionados.

Miguel played in Torres Bermejas, one of the largest settings. Torres also offered a large stage that allowed a 180-degree view. The entire interior was tiled and gave the illusion of a Moorish palace. Torres also could accommodate two to three tours at a time. In the summer, when tourism was at its height, they would sometimes do four shows.

Given all of the above, Torres also presented a very good to excellent show. Based upon the money they realized, they could afford to pay for top performers. The opening act was generally three to four guitarists, multiple singers and several dancers. Obviously, this was quite impressive and spectacular. The smaller tablaos were best later in the evening and often visiting artists would perform. The first time I heard the great singer Manolo Caracol, was not at his tablao, but singing at the Corral as a gift to an audience member visiting from the south.

Purists often put down the tablao setting as they encouraged participation within smaller jergas (parties) in local bars or settings. Unfortunately foreigners were not a welcome part of that world.

Perhaps this was the main goal of D.E. Pohren's finca in Moron. Although somewhat artificial, it probably offered the best personal interaction with artists and observers. While in Spain, Moron and the older styles were not part of my interests as I was more focused upon the tablao and guitar technicians. Sabicas was reported to comment that it takes twenty years to learn to play guitar, another twenty to master accompanying the singer and another twenty to learn to accompany the dance. He just may have been right.

I certainly have, over the years, altered my views of flamenco and have developed a greater respect for the older style. If I had it all over to do again, I would probably not have focused so strongly upon guitar techniques, worked harder at learning to accompany singers and spent more time in small venues and southern Andalusia.

Amor de Dios

Located on Calle Amor de Dios is a dance studio that probably had a name, but was just referred to as 'Amor'. The dance studio was the major center for much of the flamenco world in Madrid. If you hung around, eventually you would see just about everybody in the Madrid flamenco community. After I left my job teaching, I had time on my hands and basically started spending most of my days there. The dance studios provided space for classes by many top dance instructors and was also used by tablao shows for rehearsal. The grand dame was Mari Magdelana, who had a reputation as a true master of the dance and teacher. One day she needed someone for a beginning class and I offered. After the class she remarked that I had a good sound. She told me I could sit in, but the lead guitarist set the tempos. I began spending as much time as I could at the studio. I finally started playing for her classes, two beginners and a semi-professional class. I played in the first two with a Japanese guitarist, Hirito, who had considerable technique but sounded flat and emotionless, as he was so concerned about playing error free and clean. Over time we became friends, which was a blessing, as I now had an 'in' with the Japanese.

In the semi professional class was a young guitarist, (he was paid), named Tomaso, and a relative of Mari's from Seville looking for work in Madrid. His playing was very good and he could accompany both the dance and singer. My playing was not in his league. He did not like me but Mari had my back, as I would frequently play free for several of her students who could not afford to pay a guitarist. One of my memorable classes with Mari was when she was working on a Siguiriyas (extremely serious compas), and Tomaso had to leave. I spent about an hour backing her up and I must say it really stoked me.

Back to my Japanese connection, the Japanese had been in Madrid for years and had several apartment buildings where they lived. People came and went but all were privy to the knowledge of the others. If you wanted to know something, say the complete work of Paco's latest album, they had it together in about three to four weeks.

I would try and take Hirito out to a Japanese county style restaurant at least once a week. He was an incredible source of technical information but could never get past the mechanics and play freely. I never realized how much I learned from Mari and at Amor until I began playing in America.

Playing Down

During my last year in Spain, I had a considerable amount of money from the severance pay I received after leaving my teaching position. This allowed me to take more lessons and travel. I could also hang out until all hours, not having to worry about getting up for work.

I did realize, and maybe it came subconsciously from my teacher Miguel, how fortunate I was to take lessons and travel. Many of the guitar players I encountered, predominately in smaller cafes or street musicians, probably had learned from family or someone in their area, and had little chance to really develop and improve. Spanish T.V. offered a few flamenco-oriented programs, but in the smaller towns guitar skills were generally passed down. Some places like Jerez or Cadiz, offered fabulous opportunity to learn

I quickly learned that if I played in bars/cafe while traveling, I was best served not to play much beyond the levels of the house guitarist. It would become evident in time that I had a degree of technical skills and knowledge. After awhile, you could see the guitarists watching my hands, so it was a gentle approach to suggest that maybe we could share some techniques and material. Remember, they were the real deal and regardless of what I knew or sounded like, I was an American. Usually, the guitarists jumped at the chance to learn and I often took some nice falsetas or new technique from them.

I remember a small bar in Seville, with a guitarist of questionable skill. Now this interested me, as most of the guitarists in Seville were at least good to excellent. Anyway, I was fooling around during their break and he was being very rude and mocking me, so I just ripped through a Bulerias that left him and the bar patrons a bit stunned. The look on his face said it all. I left, although people asked me to stay, because I was just pissed. Hopefully the guitarist will think twice about criticizing foreign guitarists.

Accompanying Singers and Dancers

Most foreigners tended to gravitate quickly toward accompanying singers for two reasons; limited technique is needed for accompaniment and playing for dancers or solo is very demanding of both technique and understanding the dance segments. See the section titled, 'Teatro Calderon'. Unfortunately, of the three flamenco formats: solo, dance and singing, accompanying the singer is actually the most difficult, not only for foreigners, but also for Spaniards. Although only basic technique is needed, you must also be familiar with the verses and have an understanding of the singer's style and vocal nuances. Of most importance, you must provide those little phrases and background riffs that showcase the singer. Playing too little or too much, just doesn't work. Then of course there are the singers who really are unsure of the rhythm and chord patterns. They sing at the wrong time, have less than true tones and often alter the chord patterns, as they can't sing the correct tones. They generally blame the guitarist.

I was playing in a small café, being somewhat hassled by a singer. After a break, someone sat down next to me and asked me to play for Fandango. As he started to sing, his voice and pace but mostly his tonal accuracy, instantly struck me as well as my ease of accompanying. Afterwards, I was embarrassed to realize the singer was Rafael Romero, a highly regarded singer, especially for Peteneras and Farruca. He was a singer's singer. Rafael then smiled and asked why I was playing at the place. I thanked him and tried to buy him a drink, but I realized he was drinking on the house. He was right, but nobody ever asked me to play in any hard-core flamenco venues. I always will cherish the encounter, and I suspect he made me sound good, so the others would view me with a little more respect.

Very few guitarists ever achieve the mastery of all three formats. Even Sabicas, who defined dance accompaniment and solo guitar, seemed too strong a guitarist in his recordings accompanying singers. The relationship between a guitarist and singer creates a bond over time and thus the guitarist not only understands the background of the singer, but also allows the guitarist to anticipate the singer. This anticipation is often the key to their collaboration. When you hear a singer and guitarist playing in unison, a special magic happens. The moment is referred to as 'Duende', that magic spirit that exists in a moment and then disappears. As for accompanying dancers, the guitarist needs considerable technique so as to follow the dancer, often at break neck speed both rhythmically and for melodic passages. Following the singer for the dance is somewhat easier as the singer is locked into the dance 'compas' as well as focused upon enhancing the dancer

Guitarists have a tendency to speed up, so basically the palmista (hand clapper/singer) maintains the compas. A rule of thumb is that any screw-ups are blamed on the guitarist. Additionally the guitarist needs to know many different styles from the various regions, as well as the idiosyncratic style of some dancers. Outside of the professional world or having the pleasure of performing with the same artists, many a performance is arranged backstage trying to quickly solidify the signaling steps the dancer will use between dance sections. Often the best you get is a few minutes to review, and hopefully you will remember the steps! Of course all of this changes if there are more than one guitarists. All of the above is why I so cherish playing solo.

Glued Nails

Flamenco guitarists need to protect the fingernails on their right hand, and simply put, no nails, no flamenco. Nail protection of the thumb is also extremely vital. Classical guitarist and those using a plastic pick are generally not aware of the need to not only keep longer nails, but to have them coated to give strength when performing the many different right hand strums. This is an occupational necessity. In olden times, people used varnish or hide glues to give strength and support to their nails. The coating on the nails is especially important when playing for dancers, as the guitarist is predominately strumming very hard for rhythmic accent and volume.

Throughout my flamenco half-life, explanation as to why my right hand nails were, long, shiny and clear or having turned a yellowish color from the glues, posed a taxing chore. Once this is explained, people relax about the nails. The nail issue is just something to endure. Generally, when I notice a glance, I just up front assure people they won't 'catch anything' and explain about the guitar.

For a while in Spain, I used the old model glue. The old model glue had a substance that made the glue hard, but they removed the chemical as it was why kids sniffed glue. The new glue did not work as well. I then began using the protection dance accompanists preferred, which was a pinkish powder and liquid used to repair dentures. Some guitarist used other nail protectors, glue on tips, silk with glue, nail polish, tea bag with glue, etc. Additionally, consumption of gelatin and garlic becomes ritualistic. I never got into that phase, but possibly garlic infused Jello would sell in the flamenco market. I have been using Duco house glue and Crazy glue since returning to playing. Modern flamencos guitarists play with more of a classical nail and lighter coatings. This clearly affects their sound. Just listen to Paco de Lucia and then Sabicas. Like it or not I have no options. Flamenco man cannot go out without protection!

‘El Rastro’

The Rastro is a gigantic flea market selling everything imaginable that comes to life every Sunday. I was an avid collector of just about anything I did not own or would never need, such as my collection of woman’s hair curlers, or antique skis with bamboo poles. Go figure. As I planned my departure from Spain, I was confronted with the ‘Rastro’ I had created in my house. There was no way of shipping it home. I had a party and just gave away whatever anybody wanted. This left me with about three quarters of the stuff. I then decided to sell in the Rastro. Nancy and I had tried this somewhat unsuccessfully. I settled on the ‘Gypsy Plaza’, the small plaza at the top of the Rastro as the flea market streets all went down hill to a plaza near the Puerta de Toledo. The plaza, circled by antiques stores, was the center for gypsies selling their watches, jewelry; painting as well as other amazing items they collected. I set myself up only to keep getting chased by the shop owners who told me I could not sell in front of their store. As for the middle of the plaza, that was gypsy territory. A police officer came around and collected a fee for space. Spaces were chalked in and you paid by size. People would chalk off their area. I finally found some space between two shops, about five feet by four feet and tried to claim the area. I did not have any trouble my first Sunday. I played my guitar and sold, at basically any price, mostly to tourists. I remember getting almost twenty dollars from a French tourist for the Sergeant Pepper Songbook. Some of the gypsy kids would come over and listen. For two Sundays I was doing ok. The Gypsies found my playing and me humorous. One of my hot items was Playboy magazine, which was illegal in Spain. I obtained them from the American base at Torrejon as well as buying older ones from air force personnel. As I was selling, one of the Gypsies saw it and said, ‘quanto par mi?’(how much for me?). I just gave it to him, and he scurried off to his friends. This gesture certainly paid off in light of, 'reap what you sow'.

A few Sunday’s later, while still experiencing conflict from storeowners, the shop owner on one side of my small space declared it his property. I was trying to argue that maybe the space belonged to the other store, but I was losing to his rapid Spanish, insults and intensity. I started to pack up when who should come over, but a few gypsies. They backed him off, took some chalk and created my zone. Nobody ever bothered me again in the plaza, and an occasional free Playboy kept me in good graces. Basically nobody wanted to mess with the gypsies.

Another incident with the gypsies was related to items I had purchased cheap from a small village market. I had several old hand held balance scales, sheepskins and copper pots. When the gypsies came around, they always made a round to see what people had, they started to broker with me for the items. I ended up selling and making about fifty percent profit on my investment. When I went over to visit them, they were selling the scales, which cost me two hundred pesetas, for two thousand pesetas! I said nobody would pay that. They laughed and said ‘not from you, but from us’, and sure enough, tourists did. They also put some liquid on the copper pots that made them look much older.

At one point I considered hiring one of the gypsy kids to sit with me so I could jack up my prices. So much for my marketing.

The flea market had it all, but over time I realized that during the war people of all levels needed money and selling or bartering valuables was very common in the Rastro, allowing for those with money to capitalize on the desperation of the general population. Additionally, once outside of Madrid or larger cities, especially in the south, people did not have a real market value for their possessions. A friend purchased two original Domingo Esteso guitars in near mint condition from 1932, both a flamenco and a classical. He paid five hundred dollars for the pair. He sold them to a collector for over two thousand! They probably were worth considerable more.

And then there was my 'cape'. Older Spanish men looked very elegant in their capes and I often thought of getting one. There is a great picture of Picasso in his cape. I would often try capes out in the royal cape store noting that they would have to make a special length for me. Unfortunately it would have cost about \$250, which was more than a months rent. One day, I received a call that my cape was ready. What cape? In the conversation they read me my credit card number, so I went down to see about this cape. Well, apparently while out in the drinking in the tapa world, I must have gone in and bought the cape. So much for the small wines you get with tapas! They do add up, to the cost of a cape. I think I gave the cape to a girl friend, as it just was not my look.

When I returned in 1986, the Rastro had mushroomed considerably, mainly due to the lack of employment and an inflating economy. Apparently there was a lifting of rules concerning people setting up tables and selling items most anywhere, as well as during the week. The Gypsy Plaza remained the same, but prices had soared.

Finally, the Rastro, once it gets rolling, is a shoulder-to-shoulder environment and the number one pickpocket site. Keep wallets and valuables in front pockets or zippered jacket pockets.

Another memory, reflecting the economy, occurred on my first return meal at Botins, the legendary restaurant off the plaza mayor. I noted thick leather straps with metal clasps on the chair backs. My companion told me they were for woman to hook their purses on so as not to have them lifted by someone passing by the tables that are literally on top of each other. After Franco's death, the government moved to more liberal values. Police authority was somewhat diffused and crime soared. I guess it's a case of over control and safety verses openness with crime. I remember a time when older woman could walk around the tapa bars at midnight, their jewelry showing, without fear of trouble. This was mainly because the police had such power and control under Franco.

To many older Spaniards, they really preferred life under Franco.

The Spanish Civil War

The civil war was from 1936-1939. It was very brutal and devastating to the country. Millions were killed. If you should ever travel to Madrid, the day trip to the Valle de los Caídos, (Valley of the Fallen) is well worth your time. It is a Basilica built into the side of the mountain, with a gigantic cross on the mountaintop. Inside the Basilica's walls, are buried the remains of Spaniards killed from both sides. It is also the burial site of both Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera, leader of the Spanish fascist movement, Flange Espanola, and General Francisco Franco. The civil war is treated as a footnote in our history. Anti-Franco Americans fought in the Spanish Civil War with the Abraham Lincoln Brigades. The Germans and Italians used the Spanish civil war to practice military tactic in preparation for world war two, hoping General Franco would join them. Picasso's painting, 'Guernica' was symbolic of the air bombing of that city.

At wars end, the country was left completely devastated. Franco refused to join the Axis powers thus Spain remained neutral. I was familiar with the Spanish Civil War songs recorded by Pete Seeger, and found that there were not many books on the war, per se and those that existed, were Pro Franco. There were some books published in England that were more objective or critical of the war and Franco, but they were not readily available (mainly black market). The war was simply not discussed openly or with strangers.

I had the opportunity to play for Spanish music teachers. This was one of my favorite concerts as it was more of a question and answer format and many of the teachers spoke English. They also provided me with an interpreter. They were very interested in my instruments. Near the end of the performance, I posed the question, "had the songs of the civil war become or are in the process of becoming part of a national folklore?" There was silence. The professor who was coordinating the event said that the question was very difficult and in his opinion they had not. Afterwards the professor informed me that the war was not discussed openly as many people, from both sides, still had very strong feelings. A few days later the embassy called and we discussed, not discussing the war

We had been in Spain less than a year when the newspaper reported that the civil war era mayor of a small town north of Madrid had come out of hiding. He had been living in the area amid family and friends for almost thirty years. He was killed within two weeks.

A very personal experience occurred in our first apartment on Calle Olivar. The general tenet base was considerably older. One day, I heard Nancy yelling in the courtyard. As I ran out I noticed two older men, at least in their sixties, struggling in the stairway. I ran down and they were yelling and holding each other's hands. One had a small knife. So I separated them, and kept yelling 'drop the knife!' I guess I forgot he was Spanish, but hoped he'd get the idea! They finally separated and relatives took them back to their apartments. The neighbors were very thankful and one family came and apologized to us. This had to do with a very long- standing feud, and apparently they had altercations in the past. The man who initiated the fight, had to leave the barrio and live elsewhere. We then were actually required to go to court about the incident as witnesses. The matter was dropped as the man agreed to leave the barrio permanently.

There was a wonderful restaurant north of Madrid near Franco's residence. It had all the trappings of an outdoor German Beer Hall. In addition to serving Spanish food, they also served wild boar, bear, deer, and other game birds. The boar was quite good, the deer, so-so and I passed on the bear. It was great being in the country, good food and beer. During one visit, I noted cars all over the area. I found a spot, but the 'Brown Shirts' mobbed the place. Brown Shirts', for the color of their Nazi type uniforms, was the name used for the Spanish fascists of the Flange Espanola. They were having a memorial for their fallen leader Jose Antonio. They were singing and every now and then gave the fascist salute. I didn't stay too long, had some beer and left. Apparently they meet a few times a year. The Flange movement had been an integral arm of Franco's take over and was feared after the war. Here they were, 1974.

While in Tangiers, I found a small Arabic café/bar called the Rinco (corner) it was a common Spanish term and I found that the owner, Juan was from Granada. There were others who frequented the bar, a rather mixed clientele. They additionally had some decent Spanish wine.

I told him I played, so I came around one afternoon and fooled around at the bar. He gave me some free wine. I did this every now and then. One day there was this older man most likely in his late sixties, watching me play. I noted he had nails so I asked if he played. His name was Pepe and he adamantly said no but after awhile he admitted that he had played years ago. Finally he took my guitar and started to play a little, He used his thumb predominately much like the very old style players, and knew some basic runs and right hand strums. He complained that my guitar neck was very wide, which was the way Ramirez built. He was from Granada and mentioned some makers, but I never heard of them.

I mentioned Ramon Montoya and Nino Ricardo and his eyes lit up. He said hey were the best ever. He was not aware of Sabicas, but asked about Paco de Lucia, who he heard on radio.

Before I left Morocco I went back to say goodbye to the owner and in passing asked how they ended up in Morocco. Juan said that after the war, things became very dangerous for the anti-Franco forces. Many moved north or to Portugal or Morocco. He said that Pepe's brother had been killed after the war ended. They were seamen so they worked on ships, eventually settling in Tangiers. He wished me well with my playing. This made me reminisce about the coffin maker in Oviedo. He had also moved north.

When the Guardia Civil Sang

The Guardia Civil were the regional troops founded in the mid 1850's to serve as land and civil enforcers outside of the larger cities. They wore black triangular leather hats, capes and carried machine guns. They developed a fearsome and brutal reputation, especially during the civil war. It is difficult to describe their function in terms of police as we know them, but in general, they were similar to regional lawman, like our old Texas Rangers, except that they had enormous power, especially after the war when they acted as mediators for disputes in small towns, enforced fines, jailed and kept control, sometimes, with little regard for human rights. In many ways, although their brutality was documented during and after the war, they were the law and order in areas where there was none. I first encounter two of them in Madrid, and I observed people crossing the street rather than walk by them. I was told that in Madrid and other large cities, they were just visitors and the local police had jurisdiction.

In December of 1973, we were holding our Christmas party at the American School, when we were put on notice that something had happened in Madrid and no one was to leave the facility. Additionally a truckload of Guardia Civil came to the center, with a few setting up perimeter positions, and the others inside the facility. They were tough looking and had a presence that oozed control. We could not obtain any information as to what had happened in Madrid. The radio and TV were playing music. We invited the Guardia to our party and found that they were quite pleased with our overture and in time, they had taken off their hats, guns and capes and were singing to the children, laughing and taking part with the candies and cookies, and I remember one having a very fine voice as he sang traditional Spanish carols.

I couldn't help but look at our 'protectors' in a different light; as fathers, grandfathers and family members who loved and were probably loved and respected by families they saw infrequently.

Eventually we were informed that a bombing at the church he attended everyday had killed Luis Carrero Blanco, President of the Government and Franco's apparent successor. Apparently the ETA, Basque Separatists, had obtained an apartment on the side street and burrowed under the street planting explosive assuming that at some point the presidents car would be over the mark or at least close enough to kill him.

There was no love lost between the Guardia and the ETA, similar to Northern Ireland and the IRA, but I do remember them singing carols with us, and wondering if indeed Jung was right in his assessment that we become or gravitate to the things we hate.

Don Jose Ramirez III and Frets

I had developed a strong interest and knowledge of guitar construction. I never was afraid to ask questions about construction and found that some makers were quite cooperative versus those that denied any information. Paulino Bernabe and Manual Contreras were builders who didn't mind sharing, especially once they realized you had a basic knowledge, and hung around their shop a few times a week. Paulino, who was an accomplished guitarist, was very open about his innovations and techniques as was Contreras, who was experimenting with double tops and rosewood flamenco's. I purchased one of the first three he built with wooden friction pegs in 1973.

Paulino, who had a very good sense of humor, noted that the secrets for a great guitar were: getting the best wood possible, good building skills and luck. Paulino's guitars, like Ramirez of the 60's-mid 70's, had a superior consistency, and seemed to remove luck as a factor. Most flamenco guitarists in Madrid played the guitars of Conde Hermanos, Sobrinos de Domingo Esteso (usually just referred to as Conde's). Their sound was quite different than Ramirez, Paulino, and other major builders

Ramirez guitars were built to exacting specification designed by Jose Ramirez III built by master builders. During the 1960's Paulino, Contreras, Felix Manzanero and Mariano Tezanos were some of the major builders for Rameriz. Paulino, Manzanero and Contreras all left in the 60's to establish their own stores.

Eugenio Gonzalez, who was a well known old school flamenco, courteous, patient and tolerant of foreign flamencos, managed the Ramirez store front.

I had been struggling with my guitar in that the action on the Conde's was easier on the hands, and I couldn't quite figure out the problem. I stopped in to talk to Eugenio about this and as luck would have it, Don Jose was in the front. He then went into the back and came out with a pad and pencil and for the next twenty minutes gave me a course in frets and action. He noted that they used a fret that produced a purer tone and action that facilitated volume. He noted that, Sabicas, Serranito, and Manolo Sanulcar use his guitars.

What do you say after that other than thank you!! But he didn't stop there. He continued that Carlos Montoya played a Ramirez with lower frets and adjusted action, as well as generally tuned a whole tone low. He said that they could adjust my action but warned that I may not like the resulting sound. After I left, I was still amazed that this giant of guitar construction would take the time to go through all that with me.

His excellent book on guitar is mentioned in the reference section.

My Guitars

Owning 'the' Flamenco guitar became a quest that still remains after forty years. I, like most guitarists, are always looking for that one fabulous guitar.

My first teacher, Harry Berlow, owned a 1950's Marcelo Barbero. Harry wanted five hundred for the guitar, a small fortune in 1966. I had never heard of Barbero but had I bought and kept that guitar, it would be worth near thirty thousand or much more in today's collector market. Most builders considered Barbero one of, if not the best of all times. Sabicas used a 1951 Barbero to record his legendary solo album 'Flamenco Puro'.

When I arrived in Spain I went to the Ramirez shop. As I was in the process of buying the guitar, Sabicas arrived and the shop came to a halt. Everyone was out shaking hands. He spoke with Jose Ramirez briefly and left his guitar for some alteration. I mean, think about this in terms of Karma!

I became aware, as I began taking lessons, that very few professional flamenco guitarists played Ramirez and that a very high percentage, played Conde Hermanos, Sobrinos de Estesos.

Over my first year I continued to have problems keeping the Ramirez in tune, and finally, after a heartbreaking evening, decide to change the wooden pegs over to mechanical. Even after the change, I continued to have problems with intonation especially when I played up the neck

While adjusting the bridge on my banjo, it dawned on me that perhaps the bridge on my Ramirez was not in the proper location. I found a cloth tape measure and measured the distance from the nut to the twelfth fret and then from the twelfth fret to the bridge bone. The distances should be the same, but they were not! The distance was off by almost two millimeters. So it was not I, but the guitar!

I went back to Ramirez, tape in hand, and started explaining my problem to the shop manager. He then sort out Mr. Ramirez. He used my tape and I could see he was not happy. He then had them bring out a large compass and used it to make a more precise measurement.

Mr. Ramirez apologized and asked if I wanted my money back or another guitar that he would personally check before giving to me. I told him I was very thankful for his graciousness and I'd take the guitar. I eventually took the money, so Miguel lent me a beat up Conde to practice.

It was 1973 when Manuel Contreras built three Brazilian rosewood flamenco guitars, with wooden friction pegs. I could have purchased a first grade Ramirez or Conde, but this guitar was so beautiful and had a very unique sound. I still own this guitar and played it extensively.

In 1974 I came into some money and decide to purchase another Ramirez. I had continued to stop by the shop, say hello and hangout. I used to tease Eunegio, shop manager, about showing me one of the special ones they put aside. He always maintained that all the guitars were superior and none are put aside.

As fate would have it, one day I stopped by and Eunegio told me to come by the next morning and he'd show me some guitars. So I was there at store opening and just hung around. About an hour later the great Serranito, arrived returning two guitars. After he left, Eunegio offered me the opportunity to try them. One was, in my opinion better than the other, and I bought it. Over the years, anyone who played this guitar was impressed and I had several offers of purchase. Over the past ten years I have used it more than the Contreras, although I find myself switching back and forth for periods of time.

In 1986 I returned to Spain for several weeks and hoped to find another guitar. While playing at the Ramirez shop I noticed a flamenco negra, (rosewood flamenco guitar). I started playing and found it to have a deep but muddled sound, very odd. I had noticed over the years that both Serranito and Manolo Sanlucar played Ramirez flamenco negras and mentioned that to the shop manager. He told me that they were not playing flamenco negras but a Flamenco Classica that are on limited production. I asked to see one and they brought out what looked like a classical guitar with the deeper body, mechanical pegs, and with a golpe plate. As soon as I strummed the guitar, I could not believe the volume as well as a clarity not associated with rosewood. It was just unbelievable. It also cost twice as much as a flamenco model!

I have used this guitar very limitedly and mostly in larger venues without amplification. I have had several offers from guitarists to purchase the Classica, but it is not something that can be replaced as they stopped building these in 1987. I am still looking for that 'one' guitar, my own holy grail.

As I ponder my semi-retirement, I have decided to sell off my guitars, which also include a circa 1835 parlor guitar. I have sold the parlor guitar and both the Ramirez flamenco and classical. I have kept the Contreras as that was the guitar my son wanted. I am also playing a Juan Orozco from 1975 given to me by my friend Ron. It presents a strong 'flamenco negra' sound.

Carlos Montoya

Very few artists ever attain the worldwide renown of being considered the primary performer within a given genre. From the late 1950's, especially through the 1960's, and into the 1970's, Montoya represented flamenco guitar to the world through numerous recordings and concerts. Although Montoya's name was synonymous with flamenco throughout the world, within Spain, he was lightly regarded, and mostly dismissed as a flamenco stylist. I first heard Carlos live in New Jersey, late 1966. The hall was small and filled. His program included about twelve to fifteen pieces each half. Others guitarist would play six to eight, making each one longer. Carlos' style of frequent changes and varied tempos kept people engaged. I thought he was marvelous.

In 1972, I attended a solo concert of Paco de Lucia in Madrid. At intermission, I went downstairs. Friends were gathering to discuss the first half. In the corner was a small group with Carlos Montoya. I took a chance and went over introducing myself to him as a student of Harry. He threw his arms around me and gave me a hug. We spoke briefly and he wanted to know if I was aware that Harry died. I told him I had just received a letter from his wife about Harry's passing. So at this moment he asks me 'what do you think of Paco?' Talk about pressure! I graciously said that it was new and modern, and I much preferred the older, more pure styles. He emphatically said: 'Frio' (cold), 'sin espiritu' (without spirit). I thanked him, shook hands and walked away. Of course my friends saw this encounter and I played it out as if Carlos and I were just great old friends. I had the pleasure to attend Carlos' farewell concert at Carnegie Hall. I believe he was in his early eighties. The audience was sparse, maybe a few hundred people. His technique was greatly reduced, but he still had his distinctive sound.

I had debated about going, but once there I was glad to be a witness to such a remarkable artist. He truly followed his own drumbeat, and died at age eighty-nine.

Manitas de Plata

Manitas is from southern France and born a Manouche Gypsy. Spaniards lightly regarded him as he was not Spanish and his playing was not within the structure of flamenco. Manitas became prominent in the early 1960, at the yearly gypsy pilgrimage at Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer in Carmargue. He frequently performed with the singer Jose Reyes. Like Montoya, Manitas played within a style of his own, in that he continually altered the compas cycle. His runs and rhythmic patterns often just ended and he would pick up the compas at some point. His playing also lacked continuity, as he would flow from thought stream to another, even mixing up rhythms, but he did 'sound flamenco' and met many of the stereotypes Americans held of Flamenco. Manitas, either alone or with Jose, produced a lively and entertaining flamenco show. He was a friend of Brigitte Bardo, Jean Cocteau and Pablo Picasso, who drew pictures upon his guitar. Manitas became quite a celebrity in Southern France. The sons of Manitas and Jose Reyes formed the Gypsy Kings. Montoya and Manitas could not be more opposite in life styles. Montoya was the solitary musician relating to his family and art, while Manitas lived the larger gypsy life, parties, publicity, and highly marketed by his management. His concert at Carnegie hall, in 1965 was quite a show with his jumping from the stage and playing in the audience. As of this writing he is still alive and celebrated his 90th birthday.

Sabicas: Agustin Castellon Campos

Sabicas' playing represents thirty plus years as the most influential flamenco guitarist. The only other guitarists that can be considered peers are, Ramon Montoya from 1900 to 1930's, Nino Ricardo, and of course Paco De Lucia. Sabicas' album, 'Flamenco Puro' from 1959, raised flamenco guitar technique and musicianship to unimaginable heights, as did Paco de Lucia in the early 70's.

So after devoting his full life to the flamenco world, what does one say about Sabicas? Sabicas was a child prodigy and developed an awesome technique in his teens. 'Nino Sabicas' is referenced in the book 'Arte y Artistas Flamencos', by Fernando el de Triana, 1935, as becoming a major guitarist. Sabicas left Spain in 1935, joining Carmen Amaya's traveling flamenco show in South America. Thus no matter where he was, he was deeply rooted within a flamenco community. As an accompanist for the dance, Sabicas defined the genre, especially on his recordings with Carmen Amaya, but it is his solo work that truly defines his art. Those incredible first three albums shredded existing guitar barriers, and defined the future of flamenco guitar. I remember Julio Vallejo commenting that Sabicas and Paco were much the same. Both were innovators of technique and expanding the musical parameters of the guitar.

So, in the end, one of the four greatest flamenco guitarists of all time, lived most of his life in New York City being over shadowed by lesser guitarists like Carlos Montoya and Manitas de Plata. Sabicas rarely received the global recognition so greatly deserved. Upon his return to Madrid in 1966, after being away from Spain for thirty years, he was fully embraced by the flamenco community both old and new. Sabicas defines, and always will define, a thirty-year flamenco era, never to be forgotten. Sabicas died in 1990.

Paco de Lucia

Paco is the culmination of all the flamenco before him as well as having developed a new flamenco movement and taking flamenco guitar into a fusion with the music of the world. Paco has been the greatest guitarist, innovator, technician and ambassador of the flamenco genre to the world for over forty years. .

Many people focused upon his technique and called him emotionless, but as with all innovators and change agents, one has to develop an understanding of the new sound and direction Paco was taking the guitar. The introduction of Bossa Nova chording, phrasings and mood, was difficult to comprehend at first hearing. Initially Paco experienced difficulty being accepted by the hard-core flamencos.

I have attended several of his solo concerts along with his Sextet, and he has never failed to deliver an outstanding performance.

Paco's 1981 recording, with Al Di Meola and John McLaughlin, 'Saturday Night Live in San Francisco', is a landmark album fusing the music of these three guitar giants.

As of this writing, Paco is 64, still playing and has released a new album.

If you have never heard Paco play, I would clearly add him to the list of things people should do before they die.

Nino Ricardo

Manuel Serrapi, 'Nino Ricardo', was the major flamenco guitar influence within Spain from the 1930's through the 1960's, especially on Paco de Lucia. Little known outside of Spain, Ricardo was a working guitarist highly regarded for accompanying singers, solo guitar and dance.

I was playing a loaner guitar from Miguel and having it repaired at the Conde/Esteso shop on Calle Gravina. When I went to pick up the guitar, I began playing in the shop and when I looked up, sitting opposite me was Nino Ricardo! I stopped, somewhat stunned, and he said *toca, toca* (play). To say I was intimidated was an understatement, so I started to play and he was just listening, nodding and finally said *despacio, despacio!* (slower). He then asked for a guitar and he started to play the Soleares I was playing (which had some of his famous runs). After a minute or two he stopped and said that foreigners have a tendency to play too fast. I mentioned taking music from the solo album he made a few years before. He laughed and said '*manos veijo*' (old hands). He asked how I became involved in flamenco. I mentioned Sabicas and he said, '*El Maestro!*' (one of the greatest). He asked me about Paco de Lucia, and I commented that I liked the older styles. He said Paco is '*la futura*'. I thanked him, shook hands and left. As I was walking away it dawned on me that he was wearing the same black and white sport jacket he wore on his album cover. This was a moment in time that I knew I would never forget. In hindsight I should have purchased the guitar they gave him in the shop, as it probably was the best they had! He died about six months later. I attended the service for him in Madrid.

'Triguito'

Juan Gonzalez, 'Triguito' was a very well known guitarist from the old school. He was well into his sixties when I began taking classes. Triguito, had been a part of the flamenco world from the 1930's on and knew all the great players from those years and claimed to have traveled with the great Ramon Montoya and other influential performers of the eras. In time, I found that Triguito had a passion for flamenco stories but his stories and history were often embellished or somewhat suspect. I played a few selections for him, and given I was in my last year in Spain, playing pretty well. He said that there wasn't much he could show me and even gave me the names of some other guitar teachers. It took him some time to realize that I wanted him to critique and give me advice in phrasing, speed, and feel. At first this took some time, as he was generally complimentary or interested in the music or technique I was using, but eventually, he got the hang of it, and laughed that I was '*renting his ears*'. Overall, I think these lessons may have been my best experiences. I enjoyed listening to him when he did play some simple little passages, without the abundance of technique, sounding so '*right*'. Triguito really made me focus upon accenting and feel within all levels of technical demand.

Conversely, although not being able to play at speed anymore, he began showing me more technical and challenging music, mostly from Ramon Montoya. I guess it was his way of saying; '*there was a time when I could really rip*'. I stopped lessons with Triguito to begin classes with Julio Vallejo, in Paco de Lucia's style.

Julio Vallejo

I had been trying to learn some of the new chording and techniques used by Paco de Lucia from watching the Japanese players at Amor de Dios, from my Japanese friend Hirito, and from other guitarists and friends, who themselves were picking up bits and pieces. In a chance meeting with another guitarist, he mentioned that Julio Vallejo might be giving lessons, but was expensive. I wasn't aware of him but he was one of several young guitarists that backed Paco on one of his albums.

Through Miguel, I tracked Julio down. He was playing in the Tablao next to restaurant Botin. This show was basically aimed at tourists. He charged about twenty dollars, which was very well above general lessons costs, but he had knowledge not easily obtained. When we started he ran through some falsetas I wanted to learn. He was amazing. He struck me as an unhappy musician, but played so effortlessly. He also was frustrated at my inability to pick things up faster. He spent considerable time instructing me on the need to change my right hand to the technique used by Paco de Lucia and gave me some left hand exercises that were just killers.

In parting, I told Julio that there were many foreigners, who didn't know about him, who would have no problem paying the cost of lessons. I realized that Julio was technically superb, but did not really develop his own pieces and at some point must have realized the tremendous challenge of playing within a flamenco environment that include Paco, Serranito and Manolo Sanlucar. About three or four years ago, I was playing in a show with a guitarist. After talking awhile, he told me he had also learned from Julio, who had apparently developed quite a following for lessons.

Peers of Paco de Lucia

At the same time Paco de Lucia was beginning to record, there were two other guitarists, 'Serranito' and 'Manolo Sanlucar' who both possessed extraordinary techniques and were performing in the flamenco world, especially Serranito, who performed at the flamenco Tablao, 'Corral de Moreria' with the great dancer Lucera Tena and later at 'Café Chinitas'. It was an oddity that three such giants should emerge within a few years of each other. Had Paco not existed, either of these two men could have become the main guitar force. Although all three first albums were brilliant, Paco's had a special something that evoked a mystic.

Serranito continued with a brilliant solo career and remained as an artist associated with Café Chinitas. Manolo Sanlucar, also maintained a very active solo career and became very involved in performing at festivals and giving master guitar classes.

Paco Cepero was a guitarist who was regarded as a great accompanist for the cante and dance. He performed at 'Torres Bemejas' along with my teacher Miguel, until moving out to perform within the flamenco community as a whole. He is the only guitarist that I feel mastered all three aspects of flamenco; dance, cante and solo. His solo work was greatly overshadowed by his reputation for accompaniment. Cepero's solo album, 'Amuleto' in 1977, is clearly as impressive as the first albums of Paco, Serranito and Manolo Sanlucar. Other top soloists, are Vicente Amigo, Tomatito, Javier Conde, Adam Del Monte and in the gypsy style, Moraito de Chico.

D.E. Pohren: (A Tribute)

Don Pohren became the basic source of information for English speaking foreigners interested in Flamenco, and along with his ranch (finca espartero) in Moron de la Frontera, Seville, quite influential within the hard-core flamenco community of that area. His book, *The Art of Flamenco*, first published in 1962 and then revised in 1967, was the first work in English to really breakdown flamenco into understandable components. Additionally his book made references to guitar makers, flamenco professional, tablaos, and lessons, etc in different Spanish cities. For most of us, this became the reference source for the various rhythms and other related information that was not readily available unless you had spent time in Spain and really delved into the flamenco world.

After a year in Spain, I was awed that he seemed to have broken down the barriers for foreigners to infiltrate the hard-core flamenco circles, especially the gypsy culture, and believe me, they were some barriers. Madrid and Barcelona were homes to a large and varied population of professional flamencos, as well as foreigners. Thus the opportunities to experience a broad array of teachers, knowledge, performers and performances was far greater than in the south. In time I learned that Don's wife, danced under the name Luisa Maravilla. I have a real respect for his scholarship and help that the book provided. The finca setting in Moron de la Frontera, deep in the heart of the flamenco motherland, provided a place for foreigners to learn and become part of the flamenco world. Along with the old school master guitarist, Diego del Gastor, they provided a flamenco experience, as well as some monies and fame to the region for the flamencos associated with his vision. I was never a fan of the older school 'blood and guts' style of flamenco. Most of the non-Spanish guitarist I knew, who studied the old styles, seemed to be trying to recapture a world that had long faded. In light of the flamenco styles of the 60's and 70's, I had little interest for the turn of the century world.

In time, well after leaving Spain, I developed a greater understanding and joy of the pre-war, turn of the century 'golden era'. I look back and wish I had taken the time to visit the Moron/Jerez areas. Don passed in 2007

John Fulton-American Bullfighter

In 1972, the Sherry Feria in Jerez de la Frontera was dedicated to the American writer Washington Irving. The Embassy asked me to perform at some of the outdoor festivals. This was all pretty loose. The embassy contingent was invited to the Pedro Domecq Finca, which seemed to go on for miles after you entered the gateway. The Domecq line of sherry and brandy, bull and horse breeding were legendary. The family was considered royalty. When we arrived at the ranch I noted that the tower on their liquor label is also on the ranch. They also had their own small bullring. One of the family members, Alvarado Domecq, was considered one of the finest horseback bullfighters.

The overall presentation was mind boggling, with men dressed in period costumes from Goya's time walking around with a Jamon Serrano leg on their shoulder, cutting you slices and all the liquor you could drink. There was a horse show with some children, who looked about ten years old, riding these magnificent horses, horse drawn carriages and finally a few bullfights in their ring. The bulls were not killed and finally they allowed some of the young boys with capes to go in and fight a few bulls. I'd found some flamencos, very gypsy, and was fooling around with one of the guitars, when I noticed this non-Spaniard, dressed in period costume watching me.

He approached me and, as fate would have, it was the American bullfighter John Fulton. I was very impressed to meet him and overall we began talking about his involvement in bullfighting. He asked how I was doing in the flamenco world. I told him I had the basics down and taking numerous classes from different teachers. He smiled and said, 'do you hear you are very good, for an American' and laughed. I said that seems to be the message.

I asked him if he was going to fight at the Feria bullfight and he said no. Now given that he was a full matador, internationally known, and the Feria was in honor of Washington Irving, you would guess that they might allow him to fight, but they refused. He told me he had spent most of his life fighting the system and even when he had the money to try and get into a larger arena, or pay for the bulls or bribe the promoters, he still couldn't get his shot. He operated a business as an artist, painting with bull's blood, and selling to tourists. He wished me well and we parted.

During the Feria bullfight, John jumped into the ring as a protest and was arrested by the police. I recently obtained some information on John and it is quite impressive that he never seemed to give up on his dream and clearly had jumped in with both feet. It was nice to have met a real life Don Quijote. John died in 1998 still fighting his windmills.

Bullfighting

Flamenco and bullfighting have always been kindred spirits and the gypsies were very involved in both worlds. I became addicted after my first bullfight and attended any fights in Madrid or elsewhere. I make no apology for my love of bullfighting and have stopped trying to explain my passion. I am well aware of the criticisms. A bad fight is as brutal as a bad-boxing match, but in its purist form, bullfighting is a magnificent experience. I can honestly say I've attended well over two hundred fights but count maybe about twenty remarkable fights and unfortunately half of the two hundred were disappointing or just play butchery.

Hemingway wrote in 'Death in the Afternoon', that foreigners could not truly grasp or comprehend the overall historical and culture factors of bullfighting.

Paco Camino was still fighting and near the end of his glorious career. He had been one of the top fighters for years and had reached a superstar status.

With his second bull he was just magnificent. He had the crowd behind him and his passes were very close. He performed several dangerous passes. By the end of the fight the crowd was wild and he was awarded two ears. The old timer next to me was just sitting there. I said to him 'come on, this was really great.' He replied, 'maybe one ear'. I said 'who is better'? He said, 'Belmonte'.

Juan Belmonte was the bullfighter Hemingway wrote about in Death in the Afternoon and was legendary from the early 1920's through the 1930's. I asked him about the last legendary bullfighting giant, Manolete. He replied, 'excellent but very cold'.

Men like Belmonte and Manolete, represented 'eras' and considered the greatest of their time. It is like mentioning Babe Ruth, Wayne Gretzky, Joe DiMaggio, Ted Williams, Michael Jordan, Juan Fangio.

I wondered why so many bullfight aficionados had never moved past Manolete. In the thirty years since his death in the bullring in Linares, 1947, no bullfighter had been able to define or create an 'era'. Was it simply that there have not been any fighters of that caliber, or perhaps, as suggested by critics, bullfighting had lost its art and passion to the promoters desire for money, control and promoting lesser quality fighters. Additionally, many rings would not purchase the top bulls due to cost or the refusal of the matadors to fight dangerous bull breeds.

The newspaper reported that matador Jose Mata was seriously gored. I had been at some of his fights. The newspapers had him dying, but they always have the bullfighter fighting for their life as it generates press. I'd witnessed matadors being gored; usually younger fighters who push the bull too far, thus the bull starts charging the matador and not following the cape. Then, as to personally humiliate me, Jose died. I was quite moved and a few months later I wrote a poem about the death. I don't know why, but it just seemed to be the thing to do. I started watching much closer after that experience and suddenly I seemed to experience a greater emotion and intensity when at the fights.

During the San Isidro festival in Madrid, I had tickets to the Sunday fight because the fighters and bull were better and I must have had something important to attend on Saturday, or I would have been at the fight as well. Woe is me!!

On Saturday, Palomo Linares, a young good-looking journeyman fighter, who took lots of risks, was fighting. The girls would scream out his name, Palomo! Palomo!, wildly applauding his passes. Well, to everyone's disbelief, he fought and was awarded the 'Tail'. The tail is the ultimate award. Now at the Plazas de Toros in Madrid, there was an understanding that nobody would ever receive a tail, as such perfection did not exist. The only recorded award of a tail in Madrid, so the newspapers reported, was in 1934, but there was some issue that the fight was an exhibition and not an official fight. The best a matador could hope for was two ears. Earning one ear in Madrid was a really big deal. On Sunday there was pandemonium at the ring. There were many horse-mounted police along with foot police. Arguments were going on both outside and inside the ring. When the president of the ring, who awarded the tail, entered his box, the crowd began booing and throwing cushions and items into the ring. Palomo Linares was fighting again and when he entered the ring, there was a combined cheering and booing. I must say he fought without fear and received an ear for one bull, which I honestly think he earned. He had to know the aficionados were out to get him. The tail incident stayed in the press for several days. Eventually, the president and a few of his aides resigned. Now had they awarded a tail to Paco Camino, it may have been better received, but I don't really think so. The three legends of bullfighting; Joselito, Belmonte and Manolete all fought in Madrid, and were awarded two ears, but never a tail. A tradition had been broken.

My first encounter with a bull occurred with a tourist trip, whereas they take you to a local ranch and let out a small two year old bull with leather balls on the horns so tourists could safely try to *fight* them. How stupid. Actually, the little bull knocked me on my ass the first pass. I did get up to try a few more passes. One was probably about one foot away. The bulls are so fast at that age that they turn on a dime and are on top of you before you get your cape up. I did one pass where you flick the cape up and the bull lifts it head and jumps. That was cool. Thankfully they were little bulls. Sometimes I'd go to the locale where they kept the bulls for the Sunday fights. You could get up close, and believe me; even the smaller ones were huge.

Another real encounter with a full size bull occurred in a small town south of Madrid that advertised a local 'corrida'. They would wall off the central plaza and put up portable seating. My date wanted something to drink, of course as the bull was to enter the ring. I went down to the café and in the processing of returning I heard the loudspeaker announcing 'el toro es libre'. Now my Spanish, never being that good, kicked in; 'the bull is outside the ring'. After a few seconds this bull came around the corner and stopped. There was a Spaniard with me who said wait. About ten seconds later the bull charged. We dropped our drinks and climbed up on to a fence with the bull swinging his horns around beneath us. Finally some young kid, and I do mean a kid about fourteen, came around with a small whip and drove the bull back around into the ring. I asked the Spaniard why we waited. He said, maybe the bull would have turned around and we wouldn't have had to climb the fence. That's the last time I took any advice from a Spaniard. I remember my date's disbelief as I recounted my harrowing near death tale. She did get her drink. Recently, Barcelona has banned bullfighting, due to animal activists, poor attendance and ticket cost. There also are strong efforts to have bullfighting banned throughout Spain. Que Lastima. They are now reassessing the ban.

The Matadors Wore No Hats

I remember him vaguely.
But then I better remember so many others,
There he was in the limelight, dark hair, slim,
 glittering in the sunlight.
Amateur I called him.
 I knew it and so did he
I'd seen him before.

I remember him vaguely
He was not very spectacular,
 actually rather awkward.
I remember so many others, their facial
 expressions, movements, style
The papers said he wouldn't live
The papers!
If they said the guy would live, who'd give
 a damn.
But the reports persisted.

I remember him vaguely
 He had been dying before
Sunday came and I took my seat
None of the matadors or persons in the entry processional
 wore a hat, but I paid it little notice
Then everybody stood up,
A brief speech from the president's box:
 Jose Mata had died.
What struck me most was my arrogant indifference,
 to a life lived on the edge

I remember him only vaguely,
 but watch the bulls much closer.

Back to America

After living in Spain for many years, returning left me with some cultural shock, mostly negative, because I had become very comfortable within the Spanish world. I have never lost or regained the feelings of inner peace that I had in Madrid. For about two years I played sporadically and returned to school. I started teaching and decided to seek a more permanent place to play. I found the Casa Miguel in the West Village and began playing solo on weekends. There were several other small bars on fourteenth street that offered flamenco, but overall, it all seemed very lame.

The owner of the Casa Miguel wanted to introduce dancing to the show, and located a dancer named Jorge and two female dancers. Jorge was an aspiring flamenco dancer with very strong footwork along with an aesthetic use of his body. He was fun to perform with. The girls were both taking lessons from the same teacher and they danced a very basic style. The bar was a mixed crowd and at times, we were just background music, but we enjoyed performing. One evening Jorge introduced me to his teacher. I had never heard of her, but after she danced at the club I realized she was very good. She asked me to play for her dance classes, to which I agreed, as she was willing to pay. Many of the guitarists and dancers performed for either food or lessons, or for free. Money for flamenco was always poor to minimal. I played for her class and was just amazed! She was the best dancer I had ever accompanied and her footwork was equal to that of Carmen Amaya, who she idolized. I also discovered that she was one of the foremost dancers in the states and know worldwide. She had come to the states with a flamenco company and remained. She led a flamenco dance company and additionally performed Spanish dance for the ballet.

Her most distinguishing trait was that 'I feared her!' I played very fast and never thought I could be 'out danced', but her footwork and compas was so quick and strong that she just intimidated the hell out of me. She also began giving me pointers correcting my playing to better relate to her movement and expanding my understanding of the dance formats.

Unfortunately, one day while teaching a bulerias, she used a step including several twirls. I just could not get the step coordinated. After becoming frustrated with me, she yelled, 'what's wrong! Sabicas played this for me!' Well Sabicas I wasn't, but rhythmically I was very good. So to stop this, Jorge stepped in and said he would do palmas (hand clapping the rhythm). As they completed the step, she was out of time! They repeated the step and again the step was out. In watching her I discovered the problem. I then played the step in time.

I told her she was dancing in a free time for the twirls and all I had to do was pick her up on beat ten. She refused to believe me and after the class she left without speaking to me. Jorge gave me thumbs up. My momentary victory also was a great loss, as there was so much she could have taught me. I gave thought to seeking her out and apologizing, as the divas always win, but I did not. Anyway, never mess with the guitar player. Our show at the Casa Miguel came to a close and we split up. Jorge eventually finished school, gave up work and became a full time dancer, created his own company and opened a restaurant. He maintains a very successful reputation in New York.

After the Casa Miguel closed, I found a solo gig in a small family owned restaurant, La Mancha, in the Atlantic Heights section of Brooklyn. The owners operated the place in a very casual manner with good food and a steady Spanish bar crowd. It was a nice place to play, as people enjoyed the music and I never felt that cold feeling of being in the corner playing for myself. I played there about five years until they sold the business in 1986. I was also playing in other small venues.

Upon losing the job in the La Mancha, I stopped playing for about twelve years. Why? Something to do with girlfriends and having weekends free or maybe just burn out? I always maintained that I would start up again. Such was the dream.

Returning to Spain

In 1986, I returned to Spain! I had been obsessing on my return and the possibility of obtaining work and staying. I had saved some money and hoped I had enough for the trip and another guitar. My former teaching assistant, Dolores, still lived in Madrid and invited me for a three -week stay. Dolores had arrive in Spain before me and lived in a gorgeous top floor apartment. Touching down in Madrid was wondrous and within an hour, I was amazing how much of my Spanish came rushing back. I settled in with Dolores and took her to Casa Botin for a meal and made the ultimate pig of myself ordering just about as much as I could eat without passing out. We also repeated the next night when we went out hitting all my favorite tapa bars near the Plaza Santa Ana. I began going out about six in the morning and generally returning well after midnight. This continued for the three weeks, with an occasional melt down for more sleep. I lost touch with her a few years after my trip.

Spain was different. Almost ten years without Franco produced increased crime, political counter clashes, serious unemployment and inflation. To my delight, much of the Madrid environment I previously lived within and loved had not encountered much change. Most of the waiters in the places I frequented were still there. I visited all the guitar makers and did purchase another guitar, on credit card, as the prices had escalated and I also was spending money faster than I had expected.

I revisited my three previous residences. The building at Calle Olivar had been refaced and looked great, although when I ventured inside, the courtyard and structure was pretty much the same. A floor through, one entire side of the building front to back, was selling for \$32,000. The building at Calle Churruga, had not changed and one of the tenants was still there so we chatted. The building at General Mola also remained the same.

When I visited Calle Churruga, I stopped by the Café Commercial, where I often spent mid-day or evenings. Cafés had their distinct personalities and clientele. I remember going to the Café Gijon for the first time and basking in the charm. I noted an older gentleman sitting alone at a small table. His drink was empty. I had a small dessert, espresso and a 'mono' (the anisette drink with the ape on the bottle label). I was there just enjoying the ambiance and by my standards I had overstayed without ordering anything else. I noted, as I left, that the older gentleman was still there and probably was going to stay until he was ready to leave. For regulars, waiters never hassled you.

I sought out two guitar teachers, with whom I never had the chance to study while living in Madrid. Both were legendary players, and I will not name them out of respect, but I really was pissed. They both quoted about thirty dollars an hour, even though I was going to take about three lessons a week. And then, after I played for them, they both wanted about fifty percent more because I would be getting 'advanced' material. I told them to forget it and found, via Miguel, a young 'paco' style guitarist, Carlos de Triana. He charged a reasonable price, very organized and was involved in writing scores for film and television. I kept a diary of minor stuff like special meals and the state of affairs. I especially liked going back to the 'Rastro' and seeing 'my space' occupied by some others.

I made the rounds of the flamenco shows that had dwindled from about fifteen to seven or eight, due to the serious downturn in tourism and labor costs. Working in Spain required obtaining a work visa (green card). I previously had a green card, but in asking around, they were virtually impossible to obtain, unless you presented specialized skills that could not be obtained from hiring a Spanish Citizen. Unemployment was a serious national issue and work visas were carefully monitored. Dream or not, the idea of working was squashed. I cried on the plane coming home. I have mounted a few attempts to return but either money or circumstances have stopped me. Maybe I don't want to have the sad experience of having to leave again. I would very much like to take my son to Madrid, but in estimating costs, and wanting to stay for at least three weeks, such a trip is financially prohibitive.

I have never felt so at peace or belonging as I did in Spain, and will always consider Madrid as home.

Antonia and Silvia

I was introduced to Antonia through a friend. After meeting, we both realized the benefits of having a steady flamenco partner. Toni had been involved in flamenco dance and music since college. I began playing for her dance classes, which are fun, and performing in small club dates. She and her husband, are part of a bossa nova group. Over the past seven or eight years, I have been amazed by her allegiance to flamenco and her dance classes in light of her employment as a defense attorney and raising three children. Toni dances within the modern style and had strong technique. If anything, she always keeps me moving forward and persists in trying to get me more involved in New York. Toni studies with teachers in New York and trips to Spain. Of late she has been mixing very traditional and modern styles. I discuss the Sevillanas altercation in another section. Overall I am resistant to the more modern sound, but it can produce a nice counterpoint to the more traditional flamenco numbers, that is once I get the hang of it. Of late Toni has produced five flamenco shows bringing in professionals. They were excellent shows. This new entrepreneurial activity certainly has invigorated me to start practicing and in one encounter made me experience the cycle of life. At her last show, she hired a young dancer named Jose. He was burly looking and not what you'd expect, but could he dance and use his body! He brought down the house. Afterwards, we were sitting around, and Toni said ask him about his mother. An odd question I thought, but Jose smiled. As fate again would have, his mother was one of the most active flamenco teachers in New York during the late seventies and eighties. She taught most of the dancers I accompanied back then.

Talk about feeling old! Jose's father was a good singer and the family lives in Florida. I asked him about a very fine guitarist, Emilio? He said Emilio was also living in Florida. I had never met Emilio as he apparently played sporadically and had a reputation of being somewhat introverted. Emilio's reputation among other guitarists in New York was that he 'played like Sabicas'. I located his solo album, and he really could play. It is somewhat disconcerting that someone of his skill level never really got his shot. Toni and I continue to perform together with my hope of living long enough to see Toni retire so that we can really begin to practice.

Silvia

I met Silvia in one of Toni's advanced classes. Silvia is a tall, enchanting Argentine woman who had been dancing since childhood. She possesses a grace and elegance that is embodied in her dancing. She loves and embraces flamenco and dance in general. I began learning individual pieces for her to choreograph, especially the Guajiras rhythm. Our performing and practicing has been an on again off again activity over the past eight years. Over the past year we performed in a weekly flamenco show. Silvia continues to study and develop her flamenco repertory and I look forward to continuing our musical liaison.

Miscellaneous Thoughts

'La Ultima'

The local food market, usually about one city block, is filled with indoor food merchants. I loved to cook so wandering through the market was a joy, although early morning, especially on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, became a chore as the market was crowded with women buying for the weekend. The market was clearly women's territory.

I was always amazed at the variety of seafood and cheeses, and often would try food on the recommendation of the merchant.

They also gave great advice about cooking. There weren't many foreigners in the market so the merchants really got to know you.

There was a system when you approached a merchant, with customers waiting. You asked 'quien es la ultima?' or simply 'la ultima?' (whom is the last person)? You then became the 'ultima' passing on the title to the customer arrived after you. This actually worked better than ticket machines.

Some of the older ladies, looking so timid and gentle, were simply vicious about the 'ultima' system and verbally battled if someone tried to cut in. I remember one lady trying to cut in on me saying, 'I didn't see you!' At six feet five inches, towering over her, I just laughed. I told her to go ahead, only to have another woman begin a verbal battle with her, so she finally backed down. I was then allowed to go in order.

Another time to avoid a merchant was when they had fresh callos (tripe). With fifteen to twenty women congested at the merchant's stand, 'la ultima' took on a life of its own.

They also battled over how long someone was taking to order or purchase. I can well remember my aggravation watching some lady inspecting each of the fifty sardines until she selected four; or sampling half a dozen cheeses, before she purchased. I learned to ask nicely if I could go ahead as I only wanted one item. Usually the merchant just gave me what I wanted without giving her a chance to respond. I think I got away with this, as I was a foreigner and a man. So much for 'la ultima'.

I discovered that the Spanish government had a practice of sending state operated food trucks, during major holidays, to the out lying areas of the city where there were no markets to avoid price gouging of the locals. This seemed like a nice idea.

I really miss the markets, especially my fleeting fame as, 'la ultima'.

Lunch Time Rumbas

While playing at Amor, I stopped by a very small café/bar up the block. It was filled with lunchtime workers and a number of 'older' women flirting with them.

One of the women was asking me about the guitar and kept pushing me to play. The owner said play, so I played some Rumba and the 'ladies' started to bump and grind around the workers. This went over very well so I got free food and drink whenever I stopped by. I really didn't like the idea, as the 'woman' was really well past their prime.

I also noticed that every now and then, they took a worker into the back.

Rumba lessons I guess?

‘La Liga’

I began playing soccer while in college, and quickly became an avid fan of ‘La Liga’, the Spanish soccer league. Soccer games were like playoffs each week. Should two power teams, such as Real Madrid and Barcelona play, it was the equivalent of a super bowl. Sometimes I would ride buses to see different sections of Madrid. On this particular day, the bus suddenly stopped and people began getting off. I thought perhaps there was a mechanical problem. A few older riders were grumbling at the driver, but everyone else was going into a cafe. I got off, somewhat dumbfounded, when the bus driver came over and took me into the cafe. Spain was playing in the European Cup. Traffic pretty much stopped. So along with others, I had my wine and as soon as the half time started, the people ran onto the bus and took off for the fifteen-minute break. I got off before the fifteen minutes and found that many stores had a television in the window and people were gathered around to watch. Televisions were not a routine possession for the masses at that time. Cabs also stopped. Basically Madrid and Spain came to a halt. Such was the passion.

Then there was the Soccer lottery. Each week there was fourteen games and you won if you had fourteen, thirteen or twelve right. Seems easy enough. Payoffs amounts were based on how many people in each category had the correct picks for that week. Your choice was to simply pick the outcome of a match: win, tie or loss. I quickly realized that ties were a problem. Many a lesser quality team, once deciding to play for a tie, can hold off a top team. Then of course there was always the probability of a strong team losing to a lesser skilled team. I found that my skills were in the seven to eight correct picks. Ties always caused me to loose. Then on one Sunday, I had twelve! I was so thrilled going down to the lottery shop to collect my winnings. I was imagining another guitar. They would not pay me! In my broken Spanish, I realized, that they realized that I had twelve, but would not pay! I returned with a dictionary and still no money. I then tried another lottery shop, with the same results, except there was a Spaniard who spoke English and was listening to me arguing with the lottery worker. He pulled me aside, laughing, and informed me that the schedule for the past Sunday was so predictable that almost everybody in Spain had twelve. When there are that many winners, they only pay for fourteen and thirteen. I never had twelve again. My guitar teacher Miguel also laughed when I shared this story.

Then there was the little old lady from a small town in northern Galicia, who had one of only two or three winning tickets with fourteen correct. The ticket was worth millions of dollars. She was being interviewed with her family around her, all with huge wide smiles. She had filled out the ticket on her way to church just checking the boxes randomly. That Sunday, several of the major teams lost, there were some unpredictable ties and overall, it was one of the most bizarre weeks anyone could remember. She then said she was giving half the winnings to the church. Ugh. I still kept playing.

El Guisante (the pea)

We were fortunate to own a car. We purchased 'el Guisante' from English friends for four hundred dollars. The car was a legendary Seat 600, in pale pea green. It actually was a Fiat built in Spain. Side view mirrors were not mandatory thus people drove having only about a thirty-degree view of their surroundings. This was a particular problem in the large glorietas when trying to change from one lane to another or exit. I must say there were occasions, when I circled a glorietta several times before exiting. The car had two doors that opened from right to left, (suicide doors). When I stood outside spreading my arms, I almost made the length of the car. It was small, but reliable, using almost no gas, and allowed us the opportunity to travel. After awhile, I did fall in love with the car. I remember some memorable trips with Nancy, especially to the lovely city of Aranjuez where there was a wonderful restaurant set within an old olive and wine factory. I sold the car the day before I left for four hundred dollars.

Pulpo

I was never an adventurous eater. I was twenty-one when I first tried Chinese food (bacon wrapped shrimp), so the overall Spanish cuisine was overwhelming to me. The meats were great, but in time I began trying new foods, mostly at the tapa bars, and eventually fell in love with, 'Pulpo al la Feria' (octopus sliced thin on a wooden plate with salt and paprika sprinkled over the pulpo). This is my choice for a last meal.

There was the Pulpo tapa bar, which had huge copper pots in the window where they cooked the pulpo. They then hung the pulpos above the pots cutting off the tentacles to warm in the water and serve. Basically I lived there and would never pass a chance to stop in. I was way beyond being 'a regular'. They also served great roasted potatoes (patatas bravas) with a spicy sauce.

Upon my return to Spain, the Pulperia was my first stop. I was standing, nose against the door, awaiting their opening, when one of the waiters came over and opened the door, saying 'where have you been'? I said I'd gone back home, but I have returned! He invited me in and most of the waiters, who recognized me, began to laugh. Although not opening for another half hour they made me a double order, with some 'cortas' small wines 'on the house'. Now that's being a regular.

There were some Spanish specialties that I could never bring myself to try, even though being told they were delicious. One was sheep brain served in half of a sheep's skull, Callos ala Madrilenas (tripe in a stew), gelled blood cut into small cubes and quickly fried, Angulas (steamed tiny baby eels looking like thin noodles with eyes on them) and some of the blood sausages. There also were some cheeses cured in manure of which I also took a pass.

La Sangria

Down the block from the Casa Miguel in the West village, was a small flamenco haunt called 'La Sangria'. After our show, I would sometimes stop by for a drink. On one occasion, to my shock, Agujetas was there. Agujetas was a legendary gypsy singer, who was without restraint and followed flamenco formats when he wanted. He had a strong following in the south especially amongst the gypsies. On a good day you could accompany him and on another day he sang unto himself. I had attended a show in Madrid where he was accompanied by guitarist Manolo Sanlucar. This was a disaster as Agujetas continued to cut into the solo work Manolo was playing between verses or just stopped and started when he wanted. You could see them exchanging unpleasant glances and mumbling. After a few numbers, Manolo got up and the show was over. The rumor was that Agujetas was in New York searching for his American wife? In my opinion, Agujetas was his best unaccompanied or with very sparse accompaniment.

Agujetas was loud and somewhat drunk. He wanted someone to play for him. There were two other guitarists in house, Americans, but they wouldn't play. Keeping in mind the encounter with Manolo Sanlucar, I figured, what the hell. When I stood up he laughed as I towered over him. He wanted to sing Soleares, so I played some opening work and he eventually started. He did start in the middle of my falseta so I stopped and just picked up the rhythm. For the rest of the piece I just kept stopping and starting with him and basically eliminated the idea of a continued compas. After he finished, he nodded to me! I always laugh about my success while playing everything wrong!

Epilogue

As I review this sorted sampling of my life, I find both a sadness in my remaining on the sidelines of flamenco, as well as a great joy, in that I did adventure and experience within my flamenco passion for over forty years

Flamenco has positively affected all aspects of my life. Perhaps my desire to maintain a greater sense of security has overshadowed greater immersion into flamenco, but one foot in seems better than two feet out.

I once wrote that: “ if you’re ignoring you daydreams, you’re not facing reality”

All in all, I believe that a person’s life is an individual perception measured only by his memories.

In the end, all we really have is that inner voice, softly speaking, of what could have been.

Suggested Material

In our modern world, my concept of owning books, tapes, 78's and albums, searching through old book shops in Madrid and any Spanish city I visited are somewhat romantic, but unrealistic in light of the incredible wealth of material available on the web.

If you are from the more tactile world of owning books and albums, I recommend the following, knowing that many of the suggestions are probably out of print. Two outstanding sources for material are Luthier Music in New York City and Flamenco Connection 1-888-Flamenco. If you search the web you will find other Flamenco niche sites that offer material.

My recommendations are:

Utilize You-Tube, type in Flamenco and good luck. There is so much material on You-Tube, in contrast to when I was learning in the 70's, when a scrap of paper with a falseta, was considered top secret. Locate flamenco history, dance, guitar, and lessons, whatever!

1- *The Classical Guitar: a short history*. This is the best resource, with pullout length pictures of Classical and Flamenco guitars as well as builder biographies and more information than anyone would ever need. The hard cover was about one hundred dollars, but the soft cover is very reasonable. A must have!!

2- Emma Martinez: *Everything you wanted to know about flamenco*. I thought this was a joke when I first heard the title, but in reality, it is simply the best book I have ever reviewed concerning the history and development of flamenco. She nails it!!

3- Jose Rameriz III's book about his life, Ramierz family history and guitar construction.

4- Any copy of D.E. Pohren's books, for their historical information.

5- Recordings

1- Ramon Montoya's solo album: *Ramon Montoya Recital de Guitarra Flamenco*

2- *Flamenco Puro* by Sabicas

3- Solo album of Nino Ricardo: *Torques Flamenco Para Guitarra*

4- Solo albums of Paco de Lucia, *Fuente y Caudal* or *Almoraima*

5- Albums by Serranito, Manolo Sanlucar, Paco Cepero, Tomatito, Vicente Amigo, Andres Batista

6- *Rito y Geografia del Torque*. Alga Editores Murcia, Spain. This is a six volume set of flamenco guitarists from Spanish T.V. and other sources from the mid 60's through the early 70's, and is a MUST have, if you are serious about flamenco guitar. Approximately, nine hours of video

7-*Antologia Del Cante Flamenco*, Hispanovox, 1958. Produced in France, this three record set, (10 inch discs) is one of the first anthologies of Flamenco singing and guitar it is a jewel. If you can locate this recording, pay the bucks, as you will not be disappointed.

8 *Reina del Flamenco*; Carmen Amaya. This is the best recording of flamenco dance and guitar ever pressed. She is performing with Sabicas on guitar. It does not get better.

9 *Los Cantes de Cameron De La Isla, with Paco de Lucia*. This is a double record album and captures them at their best. This was a landmark/benchmark recording that changed the future of flamenco singing and guitar accompaniment.

10 *Friday Night in San Francisco*. Al Di Meola, John McLaughlin and Paco de Lucia. This is absolutely the greatest tour de force guitar album ever produced. Unfortunately, the wonderful music is at times, overshadowed by the monstrous technique of each guitar giant.

I had the pleasure of seeing them at Carnegie Hall, New York in the mid -eighties

11- *Rito y Geografia del Baile*: Same producers as #6 above. This is 18 hours of dance from the earliest recordings onward

A great deal of the above, even the out of print material, is on You-Tube.

Videos.

‘El Maestro del Flamenco’, Sabicas,

‘Blood Wedding’ by Saura

‘Flamenco’ by Saura

‘Desde de Utrera’.

‘Light and shade’, Paco de Lucia

‘Queen of the gypsies’: Carmen Amaya

‘Los Tarantos’ Carmen Amaya

‘Flamenco Flamenco’ by Saura (contemporary artists and style)

These are available from either the above sources or other vendors on the web

Teaching Tapes

If you are interested and can learn from teaching tapes, I highly recommend the guitar tapes of Pepe Habichuela and Tomatito.

These are not for beginners, especially the Tomatito tape. Included with the DVD is a booklet with music and tabs and they both play the music at tempo and then slow. They may seem expensive, about one hundred dollars each, but given the wealth of music, the tape cost is miniscule compared to the material presented. There are many tapes for dance and singing as well, but you need to be careful of the levels.

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(BACK OF BOOK COVER)

Michael Moroch
“Miguel de Lucientes”

(Photo will be here)

During the mid 1960's, Michael performed as a folk musician in the New York and tri-state area playing banjo, guitar and other folk related instruments. In 1966 he was introduced to Flamenco guitar, which quickly consumed his musical interests. After studying in New York, Michael left for Spain in 1970 and returned in 1976. Michael resided in Madrid and in addition to studying guitar, performed American Folk Music throughout Spain as part of the U.S. Embassy Cultural Exchange Program. Michael also taught at The American School of Madrid and lived in Tangiers Morocco. Michael studied with many teachers learning different regional styles. Michael's playing is strongly influenced by the flamenco guitarist Sabicas. Upon returning to the U.S, Michael performed as a soloist and played for flamenco shows in the New York City area. In the mid eighties, Michael stopped playing for approximately twelve years and began playing again due to both his own desire and the guitar interests of his son.

