

Maestro y Maestra

By Marilyn Reeves

During my senior year in high school I had Mr. Custer for all three morning classes. First period was art, second was English and third period was Spanish Two (I'd had him the year before for Spanish One). These three classes were the ones in which I made my best grades, probably because they were the studies I enjoyed the most.

Mr. Custer was a crusty old coot who made liberal use of the red pen. He's the one who taught me the fine points of writing and editing English composition, and was an excellent "*maestro*" or Spanish teacher.

From Day One we were greeting each other in Spanish, learning vocabulary, conjugating verbs. And in Spanish II we were all reading, writing and conversing in Spanish, with a fair degree of fluency. Because of Mr. Custer's excellent instruction, I was able to enroll in sophomore-level Spanish during my freshman year in college. But after being away from it for over 40 years, my Spanish skills had dwindled away to nothing.

After I retired I fell in love with a musical quartet called Il Divo. Beautiful music, beautiful voices ... but they mostly sang in Spanish. And I couldn't understand a word. I missed my old Spanish skills and decided to try to relearn it.

So I enrolled in the Spanish courses here at Windsor Gardens, and began again at the beginning, retaking Spanish I. Some of the latent memories soon kicked in, however, and I quickly advanced to Spanish II.

The first two or three years saw a parade of instructors. The first was a lady from Mexico, who retired. She was replaced by a woman from Argentina, who, in turn, was followed by a young man from Venezuela. All were adequate. None was outstanding. Then, along came a lady from Spain by the name of Ana Wahl.

Ana was amazing! She was smart, kind, charming ... and no nonsense! A true "*maestra*" who knew her stuff and knew how to teach. Once again I found myself immersed in the Spanish language – reading, writing, conversing – much as we had done in Mr. Custer's class so many years ago. Ana rekindled in me a love of the language, and I loved *her* ... as a person and as a teacher.

I spent one summer vacation conjugating over 500 verbs into an Excel program, so that I could quickly and easily access the correct verb form when I was writing articles in Spanish. And when class resumed in the fall, Ana very patiently reviewed my writings, making corrections and suggestions. I was in Spanish Student's Heaven!

And then she left. She had to quit her job in order to stay home and care for her ailing husband. New instructors were hired, but I was spoiled to Ana Wahl. Without her dynamic teaching methods and meaningful input, my interest in Spanish – along with my skills – quickly faded. I

dropped out of the classes, and am back to only being able to speak and understand a few words. It was great while it lasted, however, and I will never forget that wonderful *maestra*, Ana Wahl. *Te echo de menos, Ana*. I miss you.