

First UN Session in '45 Recalled By Secretary Who Joined Staff

By Magda Arce

My experience in the international world is closely related to the United Nations. It goes back 20 years to the celebration of the San Francisco Conference in June of 1945, at which time I had the privilege of working as secretary to the Chilean Delegation.

Then, in 1946, I was encouraged to join the staff of the Headquarters of the organization in the suburbs of New York, on Lake Success.

I took part in competition for the post of bilingual translator in the Spanish Section of the Secretariat or Headquarters. After an entire day devoted to tests in three languages (English, French, and Spanish), I was fortunate to be chosen for the post of Official Translator No. 1 to the United Nations on June 1, 1946.

The Headquarters was then located in the old gyroscope factory on Lake Success, L.I. In order to commute from New York I had to allow an hour and a half for travelling by subway, train to Great Neck, Long

Island, and bus to Lake Success. Everything was at a starting point. Our Spanish Translating Section was composed of four men and myself, all natives of Spain or Latin-America. I spent two years as a translator to the U.N. These creative years were like "living history." Many famous names and personalities of high rank and prestige in world affairs were familiar to us and left in all of us a kaleidoscopic impression of hope: Sir Anthony Eden, Prime Minister Macmillan, Nikita Khrushchev, Madame Pandit Nehru, Andrei Gromyko, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, our

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Gabriela Mistral, and many others. They were figures of flesh and blood and not simply names or shadows for the translators who, like myself, did their best to express in their native language their speeches filled with a firm decision to fulfill the ideals of the new born organization.

Obligations of personal character — my marriage to a UN official — temporarily took me away from the UN. However, I returned later once more to be a part of the international world, this time as an acting delegate to the Delegation of Chile in 1952.

The Headquarters was now in its new and imposing glass skyscraper near the East River in central Manhattan. From the small factory on Lake Success, there now arose the shining and giant building of the UN, symbol of sobriety, good taste, and daring modern architecture. This marked the evolution in the physical conformation of the UN. From the initial figure of 50 member states, it would exceed 100 in 1952, reaching at present 130. The international employees of the Headquarters or Secretariat, which in 1946 scarcely numbered 500, today amount to 4,000.

When the VIIIth General Assembly was adjourned, I remained with the Chilean Delegation to the UN for one more year, until June, 1963.

Today, just twenty years after my first association with the UN at its creation in San Francisco in 1945, I again find myself in California. Although I am no longer directly engaged in UN work, I have the satisfaction that I am still working for the promotion of more harmonious international relations, as a visiting assistant professor of Spanish at UCSB.

On the 20th anniversary of the signing of the UN charter, I wish to recall the words of former President Harry S. Truman in his inaugural address at the San Francisco conference in June, 1945:

"If we do not want to die together in war, we must learn how to live together in peace."

I believe that the UN has succeeded in expressing with fidelity and justice the living thought of the former President of the United States.

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