

The One Hundred Years of Maitena Uriarte Aboitiz

By Jone Aboitiz Daher (maiden name: Jone Aboitiz Uriarte)

My mother has faced unique challenges, adventures, and good fortune in her 100 years. Her positive happy disposition, her passion for life, proud spirit, and interest in others filled her days and built her home, in spite of the many times she had to uproot herself to start a new life.

She became a one month old orphan in Manila when her mother, Carmen Aboitiz, died of peritonitis. Her father, Teodoro Uriarte, was heart broken. His work did not allow him to take Maitena with him, so she was left in the care of loving aunts and family in Manila. But when she was 6, Teodoro took her back home to Lekeitio. She left the only world she new in Manila, making the transatlantic trip to a completely different place: the home of her paternal grandmother in Lekeitio. In 6 months she spoke fluent Euskera, almost forgetting her native Visaya, and she learned to love her father.



The small town of Lekeitio, with her grandmother and loving father, formed her values and left a permanent imprint in her spirit that stayed with her all her life. In Lekeitio, she had the freedom to roam the town, with the responsibility to be home by sundown. Her sense of independence, of loyalty and honesty, came from those years.



Maitena, age 17 in Lekeitio.



The second uprooting came with the Spanish Civil War. At 18, following her father's instructions, she boarded a ship to go back to the Philippines. Thanks to her Philippine passport, she was able to escape Europe's tragedies, only to suffer the Japanese invasion of Leyte and Cebu. In spite of her happy wedding to Augusto Aboitiz, and the birth of her first three children, she faced numerous troubles during this war: shortages of essentials, great dangers, and more tragically the death of friends. Her father almost died. Yet she still remembers the fun times she had then, such as her first dinner parties with friendly American soldiers and learning to speak English after a beer or two.

A third uprooting happened at the close of World War II. With not much left to take with them, Maitena and Augusto, with their young children, boarded another ship to start a new adventure: life in the Americas. This transition was difficult. There were so many uncertainties, and more children came in Uruguay: 7 in total. However Maitena's trusting nature and optimism conquered all. When my father started his first potato chip business in Uruguay, he faced a major set back. The first potatoes his newly imported machines fried turned black. My mother saved the day by doing her own research: in the market she purchased several types of potatoes and fried them at home. She discovered that some types fried beautifully and others turned black. Thankfully my father's business flourished. Augusto and Maitena built their home in Montevideo and made life long friends. They enjoyed some very happy years there.



Maitena and Augusto. Uruguay 1953

Regardless, a final move was in store. From the mid-sixties to the mid-eighties, Augusto and Maitena faced the region's economic and political crisis, as well as turmoil of every stripe. Augusto passed away in the early 90's. With a heavy heart, Maitena decided to move from Buenos Aires to San Sebastián, Euskadi - to retire in the lovely apartment by the beach she had purchased with my father some years back. This place was full of happy memories, and to this day brings us together as a family. Here she found happiness again.

At 100, Maitena continues to swim in the bay of Donosti, to go to the theatre and the movies, entertain at home, and still loves having passionate conversations about local culture and politics. Her stubborn, proud, cheerful, sociable and welcoming nature is now at home. Roaming free, as in her Lekeitio years nearly a century ago.



Martin Aboitiz, Maitena, Mikel Aboitiz, Eukene Aboitiz. San Sebastian, August 2018