

Professor Jesús Miguel-García The Spanish Ambassador to Tuxedo

by
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Professor Jesús Miguel-García is recognised as the leading Spanish language specialist in Winnipeg, but before coming here, he called Burgos, Spain home. He got his degree in Education at the University of Valladolid, then studied Linguistics and Literature and, in 1991, received a scholarship to Newcastle University in England, for being first in his university.

He earned a degree in Linguistics and was employed at Newcastle as a lecturer, first in the Spanish Department; then the Adult Education Department. He worked in other departments as well, and other British universities, eventually becoming a Languages Manager for Open University.

While in England, Jesús met and fell in love with his wife Colette, who was originally from Winnipeg. When Colette wanted to return home to Winnipeg to be closer to her family, Jesús came back with her. “Love conquers all,” he says. “I remember saying, ‘wherever you go, I will follow you.’ ”

So in 2002 he quit his job, sold his house and moved to Winnipeg. They made a few preliminary trips to Winnipeg before moving. Their first trip was in the summer, which, Jesús says, “was a wise move. To see Winnipeg in summer time, you see it in a much better light.”

Jesús began teaching at the University of Winnipeg and the Université de Saint-Boniface. Then in 2003 he decided to found the Spanish Institute, “To provide personal service and quality to students in doing translations and interpretations,” he says. “Also to organize events to do with the Spanish language and the Spanish culture.”

“The vast majority of my students are studying Spanish because they like travelling and they like learning, so they do it for personal development,” Jesús says. Other students may come for professional reasons, or because they have

family members who speak Spanish. The average student age would be 50 or older, although Jesús has a number of younger students.

Many of the students of the Spanish Institute are at the beginner or elementary level, although Jesús does teach intermediate or advanced classes as well, for those who want to improve or get a refresher.

A number of students live in the Tuxedo area and Jesús says, “One of the main reasons people come to my classes is because it is nearby. I have quite a few students from Tuxedo, Charleswood and River Heights.”

The Spanish Institute is built right into Jesús’ home. This was more convenience than plan. “The study was there. The office was there. So it worked out very well. Even for the students it is very convenient and easy to park,” he says.

Jesús has won a number of awards over the years. Among them are: The Top Ten Most Influential Hispanic Canadians, The MTS Pioneers in Business Award and The Star of The City Award for Hospitality. He also received a number of academic scholarships, one for research and, of course, the one that sent him to Newcastle. He may even have one more on the horizon. Jesús says, “I have been nominated for the Excellence in Teaching Award at the University of Manitoba. My students nominated me for a course I was teaching at St. Paul’s College called, ‘The Jesuits, Their Influence and Legacy.’ ”

“I see teaching as part of my vocation and mission,” Jesús says. “But at the same time, I want to do as much as I can in the community.”

Not only does Jesús teach the Spanish language, he also has a vast store of knowledge of Spanish history, and in particular the Jesuits in Spain. Jesús says, “I was educated in a Jesuit school in Spain and went to the Halls of Residence run by Jesuits when I was at University. I have always been interested in the fascinating history of the Jesuits founded by Saint Ignatius in 1540 and their contribution to science, education, huge contributions to communities’ wellbeing and welfare, arts, literature, economy theory, human rights, and human dignity, theology, and their zeal for souls.”

“There was a new course being taught at St. Paul’s College called ‘The Jesuits, Their Influence and Legacy,’ so I applied and presented my CV and proposal for the syllabus for the course and I was invited to teach the course,” he recalls. “Once you teach, you learn more about their work and legacy in almost all areas of society, science, theology and arts, from poetry and literature written by the Jesuits

to astronomy, mathematics, physics, calculus, geometry, fortifications, astrophysics, seismology, moon studies, telescope developments, harmonics, acoustics, chemistry, microscopy, medicine, the invention of the pantograph, liturgical devotions, philosophy, architecture art, painting, music, finance theory and fair prices and salaries, social justice (a concept coined and developed by a Jesuit in 19th century), the famous Ignatian Spiritual Exercises, dictionaries of aboriginal languages, the exploration and missionary work in all continents and in New France.”

“Their feats and exploits are well documented and have been recognized with monuments, stamps, coins, movies, and naming 35 moon craters to honour Jesuit scientists, and a European satellite after Msgr. Lemaitre, the father of the Big Bang Theory in 1923. Also, one can't really fully know and understand the history of New France and some of the aboriginal nations without reading the Jesuit Relations, a detailed account of their amazing work and exploits. And also all the Jesuit martyrs and saints are truly exemplary too. Actually the patron saints of Canada are Jesuits. It is absolutely riveting and edifying,” he says.

Being from Spain, Jesús has always been very interested in Spanish history. As an example, he says, “The Laws of Burgos’ in 1512 was the foundation of human rights as we know them now, but many people don’t even know about it.”

Jesús has also hosted several events at McNally Robinson Bookstore. One such event was a week-long series of events to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the book, Don Quixote. He says, “As a teacher I wanted to share my passion for literature and Don Quixote was one of the most influential books in literature.”

Another event he held at McNally Robinson was a Valentine’s Day reading of Spanish poetry. “This was my opportunity to share some beautiful Spanish love poems with my students and with the public,” he says.

Among other events he organized were: a talk on Spanish architecture at the Winnipeg Art Gallery, an exhibition on Picasso in collaboration with the Spanish Embassy and the Millennium Library, and a concert of Spanish sacred and religious music at St Mary’s Cathedral with Camerata Nova. Jesús says, “I invited them to organize a concert devoted to Spanish music and they did a fantastic job.”

Outside of his work Jesús enjoys spending time with friends and family. He loves Winnipeg’s cultural community and not only attends events, he volunteers his time when and where he can. He says, “I was President of the Manitoba Chamber

Orchestra. If you are part of the community you volunteer your energy as part of your free time, and it also gives you an opportunity to enjoy beautiful music.”

Jesús enjoys living in Tuxedo and loves the closeness to Assiniboine Park. He says, “Here in Canada you are surrounded by all these trees and nature. This is something that is difficult to see in Europe. There you have more history, great architecture, buildings and churches hundreds of years old, but here you have the trees and space.”

He likes the tranquility of the neighbourhood, the easy access to Tuxedo Park Mall and the proximity to downtown. To him, though, what really makes Tuxedo special are his neighbours. Jesús says, “We are fortunate to have wonderful neighbours and they have become friends.”

Although Jesús works from home and he has both friends and students in his neighbourhood, he can't think of very many occasions where the line between his business life and his personal life has blurred. He says, “During the day is when I teach and the evening is my private life. I find it easy to compartmentalize.”

Jesús is doing his best to give something back to his community, first by sharing his knowledge of the Spanish language and Spanish history with others, and secondly, simply by trying to be a good neighbour. His feelings can be summed up with the statement, “Be as involved as you can in your neighbourhood, because by doing so you create a better environment for everyone and it is very rewarding.”

So if you want to learn or update your Spanish, get in touch with the Spanish Institute, right in the heart of Tuxedo. But even if you don't, keep your eyes open and you may just see Jesús out and about, doing his part as the Spanish Ambassador to Tuxedo.