

Lluís Graus

Lleida, 1941. Cabinetmaking Champion at the International VET Competition, Barcelona, 1960.

Introduction

In the 1959-1960 competition, I came in first in the national group, and then in the international one. We did it here in Barcelona, we didn't have to leave Spain, but it was fine!

I competed in the cabinetmaking field, category A. Let's say that... well... you had to do different kinds of assignments, put them together differently, with very nice geometric patterns... you know.

How do you remember your years at the school?

We all know each other in my town and there, well... we went to school and we all played together, boys and girls, and I lived there, in San Lorenzo, until I turned fourteen.

And later, how did you access to a technical training?

Since I wanted to be a cabinetmaker, I had to come here, to Sarrià, and take an exam to get into vocational education, and then stay here as a boarder for five years.

Parents had to find out beforehand what the exam date was, and line ups were long, because many people wanted to get in, and not everyone would be accepted. Back then we took the exams and waited for the results. I was lucky, I was accepted and started when I was fourteen.

There were many classes, math, writing... in my case, I had already helped my father as a joiner and cabinetmaker, I helped him, and I could already see, clearly, what I wanted to do and what I liked, since this came easily to me and then... what with drawing and daily classes, it was a gift! You couldn't enjoy these many things in a small town!

What was your first contact with the VET competitions?

First, well, I can't seem to remember... I went to do something in Tarragona... to take some tests at some trade schools... they told us to take them there... we took them wherever they told us to! Another time, I went to Madrid, to a national championship, but then, when it was time for the international one, it was here, in Barcelona, at the trade school.

Everyone felt really comfortable during the national championship, since we all understood each other, and then, in the international one... they were friendly. I remember an Irishman gave me his country's flag, so I had to find a gift for him as well... and, well... we understood each other well, we were young! The championship, if you won, good!, and even if you didn't win, it was still good, you were doing your best and were leaving a good impression of Salesian schools.

Being a boarder here, in Sarrià... right now I can see the windows in the rooms... we were here, and we knew we were lucky to leave a small town and come here, to the city... Even though we were boarders... we learned, and we got training.

Teachers taught us... and drawing was very important in the workshop, because if you understood the drawing, then you could actually make it, because you understood it, and so, you felt confident enough to compete and say "well, I'm going to do it!" And we wanted to, for sure.

Barcelona 1960, tell us about your participation in the international competition

We all wanted to win, but there was a lot of competition. You saw that they were good, too, and then... well, you had to give it your all so that it was perfect. We were happy and well-organized, that we were.

There were squares and rectangles, you had to design them and give them a triangular shape, and we put them together by hand, everything was handmade, so to speak... we were given a certain amount of time and we had to push ourselves to finish it, but we did it in a week!

I think that in the afternoons, after the championship, they took us to see important factories. I remember the Coca-Cola factory and Telefónica in Madrid... and that was awesome, seeing industrial facilities, up close, it was really worth it!

And it was like that every day, always pushing forward. Especially in the international championship, there was always someone, I remember a Frenchman, who was faster... but, to us, what mattered was keeping on it and doing our best... not stopping until it was done

The awards ceremony was in Madrid. The higher-ups of the Falange promoters gave us a suit with the crest so that we would all be dressed the same, and told us to "off to El Pardo" and there we went by bus, to the Palace of El Pardo, to wait... and to see a lot of things that were unknown to us... At the time it felt funny... They explained to us, "when you go in you salute like this, and then... the *Caudillo*¹ will give you the award!"

I guess we must have gone on some special trip... everything was perfect, because when you're young, everything's fine, you don't regret anything.

As far as the organization was concerned, everything was good and pretty well organized, how we had to go, how we had to introduce ourselves, how we'd be placed to do our jobs... everything followed a set of rules, a specific procedure, and it was fine, it was very well organized.

What did it mean to you the participation in the competitions?

For the school it was also important; for the family, it was everything, even more than for us. They said, "it was worth our while that he went there."

Afterwards, you have problems in your life, but it's worth it to make an effort and go to a competition of any kind; nowadays you see a lot of them, you see grandchildren who have swimming competitions and they enjoy it, well, we grandparents enjoy them too!

Well, it was exciting; your school encouraged you to participate and, well, you liked it, you were eager, the work, drawing... it was better than math, and it brought me more pleasure and satisfaction.

I've seen my father work at this at home all my life, I've kept at it; and even today, sometimes, I have to make something for my grandchildren... a bed... as something more, because I can't work, but I like it. I've been lucky enough to be healthy, I never hurt my hands; you know, back then, with the tools and machines we had at the time, it was easy for injuries to happen when working wood.

I still have some, why forget about them? They can always find their place at a museum, because I still keep my father's tools, which can't be used anymore, but they could definitely work as museum pieces.

¹ While the term *caudillo* refers to political and military leaders.

Tell us about your career after degree

Well, when I finished, they looked for a company where I could apprentice, you see different things and wonder "haven't I done this?" but, with time, you do... you leave the Salesian training centre and you apprentice... and you learn some more until, about a year or a year and a half later I made my way back home, where they were waiting for me to do whatever needed doing. First, we made some furniture, since there was no furniture industry back then, and we made a lot for newly-weds... dining room sets... whatever came our way. Then, with time, people started having vacation homes and we had the chance to work on many little homes, do carpentry work... different built-in cupboards, depending on the architects, but really... well, you have to work, and if you enjoy it, you do a better job, time flies.

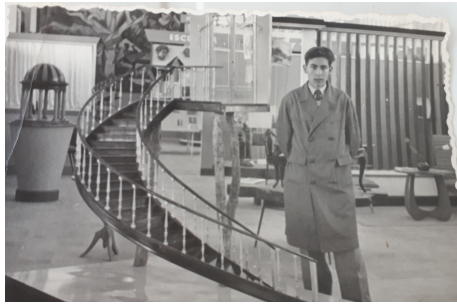
I always worked for my father's business, which eventually became mine. My family... my children didn't want to follow in my footsteps. My eldest, Ramón, came here, to the Salesians, to learn carpentry, but he realized he liked books better, theory, so he started architecture, and now he's a university professor in Barcelona. His job is sweeter, and he likes it... It's just so!

Each of us does what... well, we finished a little bit bent over, because carpentry is very demanding, it's heavy work...

In your experience, is currently VET a good option for young? In comparison with when you studied, what would be the differences?

That's a fact, youth can succeed, and have a better education, day after day... it was important to compete; it builds character, but before that, you need good training, like the one we had, which gave us the strength to go forward, to be a good professional, whether you're a mechanic, an electrician, a carpenter... It's not enough to just make money, it's actually better to have training and do better every day.

In a trade, whatever it may be, you're a better worker if you have formal training. We, for example, had to understand the drawings, now, maybe, with computers, they might understand them better, but we didn't have that, so drawing it and then making it, which was what they taught us, well, it gave good results.



Joan Canadell²: Who made this staircase?

Lluís Graus: I guess it was more than one of us... from our class

Joan Canadell: I don't remember this staircase anymore, I didn't see it, this one yes, this one I remember.

Lluís Graus: There was a museum inside.

Joan Canadell: I don't remember this staircase,

Lluís Graus: We made it later, maybe in the final years... We made that to give importance to the work

Lluís Fradera³: Works for exhibition or...

Joan Canadell: An exercise...

Lluís Graus: Wood turning...something I would've liked, but I never had the time.



Lluís Graus: This is at El Pardo, and the suit they made us wear, I don't know how the picture was taken, but I have it back home.

We had to go here, to Barcelona, to a specific place, where they measured us... we went there by bus, and then, to the competition in Madrid, we went by the very slow train, and then we made it to Madrid.

Joan Canadell: And all night long all we heard was *chugga chugga chugga*.

Lluís Fradera: In this picture where you show the trophy, you look like a chauffeur, with that sedan behind you, ha-ha!

² JUAN CANADELL, Cabinetmaking Champion at the Spanish National VET Competition, Madrid, 1954. Spanish Cabinetmaking Competitor at the International VET Competition, Madrid, 1955

³ LLUÍS FRADERA, Spanish Competitor in Cabinetmaking, Gold Medal. International VET Competition in Brussels, 1959.