

Joan Canadell

Barcelona, 1937. Cabinetmaking Champion at the Spanish National VET Competition, Madrid, 1954. Spanish Cabinetmaking Competitor at the International VET Competition, Madrid, 1955.

How do you remember your years at the school?

We went to school, and one single teacher taught all the kids in town. We'd go out to play and run around the town, looking for nests, fruit... the clowning around of children! But it was great, I was very happy, it was great.

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

But then what happened is that then, when I was 11... almost 12, they brought me here, to Sarrià, to the Salesians, as a student at first, because here in my town, we knew very little...

They brought me here to the Salesians because San Lorenzo was going through a textile industry boom at the time, and people had looms at home, and they'd work 24 hours a day. Mom, Dad, the younger children, everyone worked. So my parents said that the only way for me to study anything was to bring me here, and I wasn't asked my say... so they brought me here, at great sacrifice to themselves.

I remember they paid 450 pesetas a month, and to gather 450 pesetas every month at home, my father, my mother and my aunt had to work at the local textile plant. My grandfather had retired, he had been a bricklayer, but he was a farmer, so he took care of our vegetable garden, and my grandmother cooked and so on. So, thanks to all that, they managed to save the 450 pesetas and pay for my studies, because it would've been impossible otherwise.

Why joinery and cabinetmaking? What does make it special for you to choose it?

One year in, they asked me "What will you do? What will you do?" "I'm going to be a joiner..." What do you know when you're 12 or 13, after all! So, I enrolled here, in the craftsmen section. It didn't answer to a specific idea. Back then, I didn't have any clear idea, but I looked around and said "carpentry, I'd like to do carpentry," and so it was. Then, as you begin to work, you like it more and more, and that's how it was until I finished my studies.

Back then, since everything was mostly handmade, it was very important, people put a lot of stock into crafts. Others did apprenticeships, sometimes messily, here and there; and, on the other hand, choosing a craft at a proper school gave you a great advantage, of course.

What was your first contact with the VET competitions?

I first found out about the championships when Mr. Salinas, the principal, came and told us there was a competition, and we all said, "Well, let's go, off to the championship!" They then gave us some assignments and told us that four or five of us would go to the competition, which would take place at the trade school.

Tell us about your experience in the national and international competitions?

That was the regional... we didn't know much more... back then. We didn't ask for explanations, nor were they given!

When you won the regional championship, they sent you to Madrid. And that's how it started, with the "Frente de Juventudes" ... I remember how, before we went to the national competition in Madrid, they had us meet at the Rambla de Santa Mónica to give us instructions and our train tickets. We went by mail train; it was nearly 16 hours to go from Barcelona to Madrid!

In Madrid, a representative of the "Frente de Juventudes" picked us up and he took us to a boarding house in Puerta del Sol, I remember... In the morning a bus came to pick us up and took us to the Virgen de la Paloma School. There, we went in, sung "Cara al Sol," were given a talk, and we started to work and kept at it all in one go, until three in the afternoon or so. After that, they picked us up, we went for lunch and, then, we had time to ourselves.

No, there wasn't a caretaker with us. There, at the school, they told you what you had to do, and everything else just... came to you, just like that. Me, specifically, when they told me that I'd won, they told me over phone. I was at the boarding house and they called... "Canadell, Canadell...! They called to say you've won!" Well, there you are, I won. That's it.

Those of us who won the national championships had to stay at the boarding-house for seven, eight or nine more days, because the awards were given by Franco himself, and because of the schedule, until they said when it would happen... so we went to the Palacio del Pardo, it was all very formal, they gave us the trophy, a diploma, and two thousand pesetas, deposited into the Caja Postal de Ahorros!¹ I still keep the passbook, as something odd that has disappeared, so there they deposited two thousand pesetas, which was the prize for winning.

Next year we went to the international competition which, once again, was held in Madrid, but I didn't win this one, so when we were done, we came back and that was the last time I took part in all these competitions.

I remember there were Portuguese, Swiss participants, and I also remember there were Frenchmen, and some more, but I can't remember... It's been a long time... I remember those because they were beside me, and that it was a mess to talk to each other, we didn't understand a thing. A little bit of what the Portuguese said... but not much more.

You were given a place to work in the championship, they gave you some drawings and said "you have to do this and that," and they gave you a set amount of time... I can't remember how much... and you had to do it in that time.

I remember that, for one of the championships, I had to build a *mesa camilla*². I can't recall other ones. Here, in the regional one, we did a sort of board that folded like a hinge.

Tell us about your career after degree

When I finished my studies, I stayed here for a year or so, working as a factory hand, and it was great, we were great. We were young; we'd go out for a walk on Sundays... And often, when companies needed trained – or somewhat trained – workers, they came here, to the Salesians, I guess they also went to other schools, like the trade school, and they'd ask "Do you have anyone who can do this, or that, or this other thing?"

Rivas y Praderas, which doesn't exist anymore, was a big construction company that had its own carpenters, and they wanted to update their system. They came to the school to look for people, and three of us went to work in carpentry. It turned out we didn't work as carpenters at all... They set up a control system and we worked as

¹ The Caja Postal de Ahorros (Postal Savings Bank) was a Spanish savings bank that existed between 1909 and 1991

² A traditional Spanish table covered by a long tablecloth under which a brazier is lit.

timekeepers. We obviously needed to know carpentry because if, for example, they nailed something, we had to know if it had to be a nail or a screw, or if it was a joining, but we didn't actually practice the trade.

They quickly saw I knew the trade, so they put me in the office, with other, older, people who supervised the workshop, went to the construction sites, worked with surveyors, architects... They put me there as the youngest and I improved my woodworking, but not in a practical way, more in a technical or managerial way.

I finished my military service and I went back to work there. I really liked it there, but then... with another colleague from the Salesians, we thought... "We should start up on our own, see how we do." And we did. His father was an accountant and helped us a little bit with the figures. We rented a place there, in Pueblo Nuevo, a neighborhood in Barcelona. It was ninety square meters. We bought an all-purpose machine that did a lot of things, and that was it, we started our own business, good Lord...

Yes, we started our own business and I remember that one of our first assignments was for the company we'd worked for... because it was a very large company, and whenever they had small commissions which they had to agree to take – because the client was the child of an acquaintance, or of a director, or that sort of thing – well, it annoyed them to have to do it in a big workshop, so they sent them our way. And we did fine, we finished the job, invoiced the company, and that's how I edged into the carpentry business and didn't quit until I retired.

What do you feel about WS has become in a such a big organization, with more than 80 country members?

I am happy, yes, I am, because I took part in something that back then we didn't give any importance to, but it really was a challenge, and it's kept up and survived over the years... which is odd, because this isn't very common. I'm very happy, of course, and very satisfied, I like it a lot.

When I took part in the international championships, as far as I know, there was Portugal, Italy... and I don't know if Morocco was there, too, but everything was so different... the sector...

Do you think that VET students are necessary in your trade?

It's much better now. People are much better prepared, and if you add to that that they learn the trade, they know about accounting, they work with computers, that's a great deal of help, and the tools are more modern... What you really need are good workers, but it's impossible to find a good operator.

Right by my house a man has a workshop. He had a workshop and was looking all over the place for a worker, not now, a few years ago, but a good worker, a man who knew their way around this, yes... First thing they ask is how much they're going to earn... and what do they know how to do? He had one who'd come in the mornings, another one in the afternoons, one was there for three weeks, the other one left because they didn't really like it, because there aren't any good workers, we need good workers, but in all areas of vocational education, you know?



Joan Canadell: I made a small winding staircase, remember?

Lluís Fradera³: Yes, yes. Look

Joan Canadell: This staircase is in a one to five scale; the real thing is five times larger.

Lluís Graus⁴: It's harder to make the smaller ones than the big ones

Lluís Fradera: Well, I had the last one, number 378.

Joan Canadell: It didn't matter! Well, insofar as it was a job, but that's it. They kept it... This staircase has been all over Spain and finally...

Lluís Fradera: Where is it? At his place

Joan Canadell: I have it

Lluís Fradera: It made its way to where it had to be...

Joan Canadell: I do have it, but only because after it traveled around the country it made its way back here, to the Salesians, but when they were going to close up the school, Mr. Prat, who is my cousin, told me "If you want to get your staircase back, I have it here, they're going to throw it out." So I hopped on my motorbike and went to get the staircase back... Of course, it was broken, and I have to finish the top part. I had the balusters made again by a turner... I couldn't find a turner in Barcelona... In all of Barcelona I found one single turner, one hand turner, look how the trade is doing, you know, if they have no work... What can they do?

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

⁴ LLUÍS GRAUS, Cabinetmaking Champion at the International VET Competition, Barcelona, 1960.