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## Hombre, don't worry about it!

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The views expressed in this paper are solely those of the author.

■ I was the correspondent for *The New York Times* in Madrid when I first met Angel Berenguer. I don't remember if it was my predecessor, John Darnton, who told me that I should meet Angel, or if it was through the Fletcher connection. I was a graduate of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, and Angel ran the Tufts program in Madrid. However the first meeting was arranged, it was for me love at first sight.

Angel was a bearded, bearish, charismatic Spaniard with a wonderful sense of humor about Spain and the world around him. He and his beautiful, intellectually powerful wife Joan, a Californian who directed the Skidmore program, ran a running classroom and intellectual salon in Madrid for Spanish, American, French and other academics, journalists and thinkers. You never know who you might meet at their place, which at that time was a large apartment in a wonderful old building on La Castellana that they split up into office, classroom and living space. A magazine group was on another floor. In that apartment, over good wine and cheese and other delights—with Angel there was always good food—I met diplomats, philosophers, painters, columnists and just generally interesting and convivial people. For a foreign correspondent, the salon was a gold mine. But the center of the conversation was always Angel.

Angel was first and foremost a scholar on dramaturgy, but his knowledge of the United States led him to start a center for North American studies at the University of Alcala. He immediately made it into a great center of debate and scholarship on American culture, history and foreign policy. With an enthusiasm that wasn't bogged down in faculty or bureaucratic politics, Angel explored, experimented and executed with quality. Hoping to add genuine scholarship, he started and edited a journal on North American studies. For one issue, he invited Spanish and U.S. scholars to speak at a university conference on U.S. foreign policy under the first President Bush and asked me to be the guest editor of a bilingual book of the collected papers. Only Angel would have the courage to publish a book with chapters written in either English or Spanish. He was genuinely bilingual and bicultural.

On occasions, Angel asked me to speak to his classes at Alcala or in the Tufts/Skidmore program on issues of journalism or US-Spain relations, and I gladly accepted. I was especially honored one year to be the graduation speaker at the Alcala institute. I gave a whole speech dedicated to what I meant to say would be a feared return of American "isolationism". By mistake, however, I substituted instead the word "neutralism" throughout the entire speech. Don't ask me how I did that; American neutralism was by definition preposterous. Angel of course knew as much. But

when after realization of the mistake suddenly hit after the end of the ceremony and I turned to him and said in total embarrassment that I had just royally screwed up, he laughed, slapped me on the back, and said, “Hombre, don’t worry about it!” It was characteristic of his generosity, and I will never forget it.

Angel and Joan have two wonderful daughters, Celia and Paloma, who sometimes babysat for my two younger daughters, and with my wife Maribel we were all friends. They gave warmth and meaning to our seven years in Madrid. Along the way, I became the sword carrier, an addendum, to the three Almeria musqueteers: Chencho Arias, José Antonio Martínez Soler and Angel. Chencho was at different times the spokesperson for the Spanish Foreign Minsitry, the head of the government’s Iberoamerican outreach and president of Real Madrid. José Antonio was the editor of two newspapers and the founder of morning television for Televisión Española. We would meet evenings at Angel’s or at the Moroccan restaurant downstairs. José Antonio would host Sunday afternoons over paella at his house outside Madrid. Angel would regale us with stories of his father’s bakery shop and youth in Almeria, where Angel returned to build a house.

Rising from a middle class background in a provincial city, Angel represented the new Spain that was converging on the capital and rapidly changing the country following the death of Franco. Having had a foot in the United States, he also knew how to translate the changes for a foreigner. Angel politically leaned leftwards, but he was scrupulously honest and fair in his analysis of political and social trends in the country. In reverse, he interpreted the United States for Spain, dispelling myths that had built up on both the Spanish right and left. Once we were on a radio talk show together, and he even defended American hamburgers! What it all meant was that Angel was a genuine intellectual, extremely well read but independent and rigorous in his analysis and thinking.

Still today, I turn to Angel for his views and insights on Spain. They are sure to be original and interesting. They are also sure to be mixed with humor on the human condition. Perhaps it comes from his real love, which aside from Joan, Celia and Paloma, is drama. He has seen all today’s stories before, written by Greek and French and Spanish and other playwrights, and it gives him a unique perspective on life and politics. In the process, Angel Berenguer, as a critic and scholar, has himself risen to the pantheon of the greats. Even more, in that great heart and soul of his, is a generous mentor to countless passing students and foreigners and someone I am forever grateful to call friend.