Chapter 4
The Inland Lighthouse:
A Photographic Study and Interpretation of Place and Remembrance

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ABSTRACT

This chapter looks at an investigation of personal history as a study of an apartment, and its inhabitants in the neighbourhood of El Retiro in Madrid, as seen through the gaze of a returning migrant. The apartment, the contents therein, and the biographies and its inhabitants for over 100 years are explored as a site of memory. To do this, the author has applied Pierre Nora's concept of 'Lieux de memoire' to undertake a study and photographic interpretation of this location. Sites of memory are considered 'places, sites, causes' in three senses: 'material, symbolic, or functional'. A place need not have a physical location to be considered a site of memory: objects, photographs, colours, sounds, scents have as much bearing significance as a monument and become equal players in the act of remembering. Taking this as a departure point, the photographic and autoethnographic process of documentation and reflection used expand beyond that of a literal record to one in which interpretation, speculation, and fictionality have been applied in the creation of images and visual narratives.

It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement. Jacques Derrida (1995)

Volverán las oscuras golondrinas / The dark swallows will return. Rima LIII Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer (1868/2007)

ADRIFT

I am the daughter of emigrants. My parents, Jose Antonio Martinez Sanchez and Maria Angeles Estrada Diaz, migrated to Australia in the early 1970s. They left their office jobs in Madrid to work as unskilled labourers in tobacco and sugar cane farms in Northern Queensland. The reason for this move is still unknown to my family, and it is one that remains unspoken.

Shortly after my birth in 1973, my parents and I returned to Spain, glad to be rid of the endless horizons, humidity, snakes, and other unpredictable Australian wildlife. My paternal grandfather was terminally ill, and his impending death was the primary reason for the first return. This was one of the many trips that took place over the next three decades. My parents were, to use the colloquial expression, boomerang migrants; a term applied to those shifting between their country of origin and new location on more than one occasion.

The perpetual and unpredictable movement of my family between these two countries contributed to a lack of permanence in our lives, and resulted in my parents, like many other migrants, taking on

Figure 1. My parents, Jose Antonio Martinez Sanchez and Maria Angeles Estrada Diaz, myself, and our dog, Kur (Kur passed away shortly after this photo was taken, his love of slaughtering the neighbourhood's chickens ended with him being poisoned). April 1973. Ingham, Australia. Photo by J. Martinez Sanchez. (© 2022, Judith Martinez Estrada)
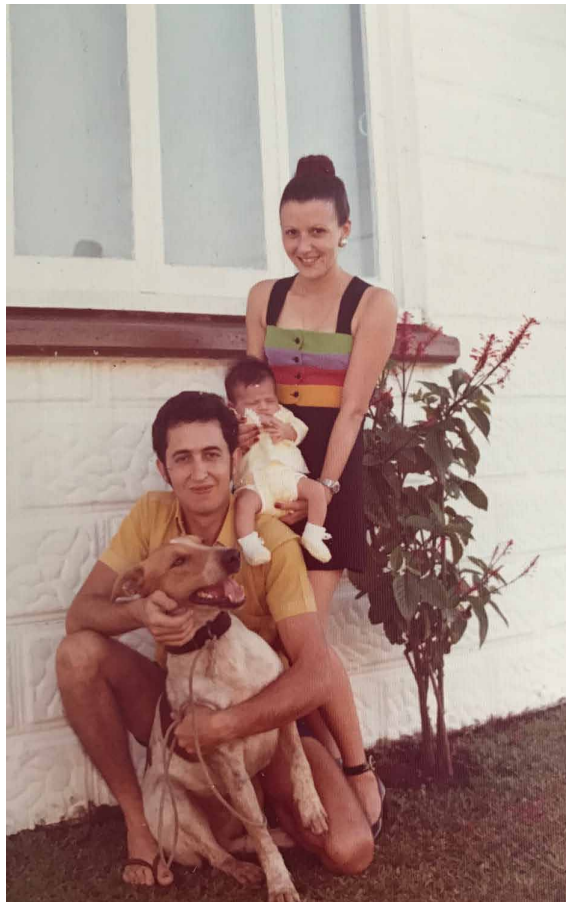
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