

Interview Series:

Dynia & Vicente Honrubia

Interview conducted by Erin Der-McLeod & Michelle Moreno
Written by Erin Der-McLeod

Longevity Center Participant Spotlight: The Educated Pair - A Doctor and a Scholar

In the early 1960s, a doctor from Spain and a graduate student of history from Puerto Rico met at the University of Chicago. Their life together has taken them from Chicago to New York, to Puerto Rico, to Spain, back to New York, to Tennessee, and finally Los Angeles. Throughout their journey, education has been a common thread.

Dr. Vicente Honrubia grew up in Valencia, Spain. He studied medicine at a university in Valencia and at the University of Madrid. Dynia was born in Puerto Rico and spent part of her childhood in New York City. She attended college at the University of Puerto Rico. Bright scholars, they both received fellowships to study at the University of Chicago, where Vicente wanted to learn about the history of Spain because when he was growing up during the Franco dictatorship, information was censored. A mutual friend at the university introduced him to Dynia. Busy with her own graduate studies, Dynia recalls, “I was really not interested in teaching anyone because I had my own things to do... I still haven’t taught him about the history of Spain.” Nevertheless, after their introduction Vicente reflects, “thankfully, I met this lady, and was hooked.”

Life in Los Angeles

The couple moved to Los Angeles in 1969, when Dr. Honrubia took a job at UCLA. As a leading otolaryngologist (ear, nose and throat specialist), he took care of patients, conducted research, and served as a faculty member at the medical school. He focused his career on research, and he received numerous grants



from the National Institutes of Health. Among his many accomplishments, he served as the Director of the Victor Goodhill Ear Center at UCLA School of Medicine. He also co-wrote the seminal book, *Clinical Neurophysiology of the Vestibular System*, which is now in its 4th Edition. Renowned for his work, there is a plaza named after him in the municipality of Yatova, Valencia, Spain, called Plaza Doctor Vicente Honrubia.

While Vicente worked at UCLA, Dynia reared their two boys. Both sons followed in their father’s footsteps and attended UCLA School of Medicine. When their sons were grown, Dynia decided to pursue a teaching credential at Cal State Los Angeles. During her first year, she taught high school Spanish, but she discovered her true passion was teaching kindergarten. She says she loved teaching the small children because of their enthusiasm for learning.

Now, both in retirement, the Honrubias continue to seek new learning opportunities. With a weekly water aerobics class, balance class and tai chi in the park, the couple stay physically active. They often attend special lectures throughout the UCLA campus and are taking piano lessons. Dynia took classes as a child, noting “I was better when I was seven.” For Vicente, it is a new opportunity that allows him to fulfill a childhood desire to play an instrument. He recalls that as a child, he spent summers in his mother’s hometown, where there was a band class for local children. Many of his friends were in the band, but because he did not live there year-round, the teacher would not let him join the music classes. As a result, he very much enjoys the piano lessons that he gets to take now.

Continued Learning at the Longevity Center

In addition to their fitness and piano classes, the Honrubias have participated in many of the programs that the Longevity Center offers. They were introduced to the Longevity Center by their doctor, who told them about *Brain Boot Camp*, the Center’s three-hour session that provides an overview on how memory changes, strategies to improve everyday memory challenges, methods for remembering names and faces, and take-homes for continuing to reinforce memory strategies. After completing their Brain Boot Camp session and all the take-home exercises, they wanted to learn more.

The Longevity Center’s Dr. Karen Miller suggested that they attend *Memory Care*, an on-going weekly program that helps families with memory challenges. As a participant, Vicente enjoys the diversity of activities that occur and the social interaction with psychology graduate students who help lead the program. “You have on one side the students who

are learning to deal with patients...for patients, the therapy is fun because the students are genuinely interested in what you do,” he said. He also notes that the on-going basis of the program is important. “It’s not the merit of one class. It’s the sequence. The whole experience is what really counts.” Dynia likes the group of people in the program, getting to meet with other families with similar challenges, and learning about the brain because it is a subject she did not know much about before.

During one of their visits to the Longevity Center, Dynia also noticed a flyer for *Senior Scholars*, the Center’s program for people fifty and over to audit undergraduate classes at UCLA. It was a happy coincidence because she had learned about the program a few years prior from a UCLA student. At the time, she was interested in the program, but she was still working. After she saw the flyer, she signed up for her first class, Language and Music. Over the past two years, she has taken several courses, many in the anthropology department. She says her favorite class was in social anthropology, Society and Culture.

Taking classes in anthropology has allowed her to study a subject she had not studied previously. She also enjoys meeting the undergraduate students in her classes. “It’s fun. One kid told me last week that I was very cool,” she reflected fondly.

The Honrubias have traveled and lived in many places, but they say they feel fortunate to live near UCLA. The opportunity to come to campus for Longevity Center programs and other activities like fitness classes and special lectures, helps them maintain the active lifestyle they enjoy and contributes to their longevity.

The Honrubias would like to thank Dr. Small, Dr. Miller, and the staff for making their path easier.

