



# Saint Josemaria Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

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## The life of saint Josemaria for children

*Paulina Mönckeberg*

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### The life of St Josemaria for children

#### Interview with the author: how this book was written

Paulina Monckeberg, author and illustrator of the book [Vida y aventuras de un borrico de noria... y su relojerico](#) (“Life and adventures of a water-wheel donkey... and his little watch-mender”) tells how the book came to be written. A graphic designer for the marketing department of the University of Chile, South America, she started drawing when she was eight. She never thought of becoming a professional artist because she looked on drawing as a hobby, but little by little she discovered that was where her vocation lay.

When she heard that someone in Spain was writing a book about St Josemaria’s life for children, she got excited and wrote to ask if they needed an illustrator for it. By return of post she received a challenging reply: the suggestion was that she should not just illustrate but actually write a new biography of the Founder of Opus Dei.

“I found that the first book was almost ready to print, and they wanted me to write a different one,” Paulina recalls. “I’d never thought of writing a biography, so I thought I’d better ask someone else to write the text while I did the pictures. But in the end I saw that I was the one who had to do both. That’s how I started work on “Life and adventures of a [water-wheel donkey](#) and his little watch-mender”. The title is because St Josemaria used to refer to himself as a ‘water-wheel donkey’ and his affectionate name for his Guardian Angel was ‘Little Watch-Mender’, because he often woke him up in the mornings when his old clock stopped and he couldn’t afford a new one.”

### Guinea-pig

When Paulina sent her first ten chapters to her publisher, she was told that the

book was too long.

“I thought of cutting it short, and stopping at 1928, the year he founded Opus Dei. But my friend’s son, who was acting as guinea-pig by reading the book for me, begged me to put in the part about the [Spanish Civil War](#). If I included that, then I’d have to include the whole lot! But I understood that boys were keen to read about that part.

I’ve always thought that if you write for children you have to tell things from their viewpoint,” says Paulina. “So I included scenes that show the supernatural side of life as well as the natural side, even when there’s nothing about it in the documents. For instance, I have our Lady knowing that the Spanish Civil War was going to happen, and that St Josemaria would emerge unscathed.”

## **Documents**

Paulina spent two years on full-time research. “I found a lot of material in the films that were made of St Josemaria’s trips to Latin America, because in those gatherings he laid bare his soul, and talked about childhood events he’d never spoken of before. When he answered people’s questions he’d illustrate what he said with incidents from his childhood, like the fact that he didn’t use to like red peppers. All the stories in the book are true; the only literary license I allowed myself was to include scenes that come in some of the points of *The Way* as if they came from St Josemaria’s own life. I do think it’s likely that he drew on the experience of his childhood to write those points in [The Way](#). For example, the little boy who is playing with his father, who tells him: ‘Put this here, and that one there, and that other one over there,’ and in the end... he’s built a castle!”

## **Love and suffering**

The style of the book’s illustrations show close attention to detail. Paulina studied old photographs that had been handed down in her own family, and looked up information on the period, the way people dressed and decorated their houses.

“St Josemaria’s mother must have taken great care of details,” says Paulina, “because the warm atmosphere in Opus Dei centers reflects what she taught her son. So I put loving little details in the pictures, like the framed family photos on the walls and bedside tables, those are all genuine photos of the Escriva family, from the time when St Josemaria was little.”

The book includes painful episodes from St Josemaria’s childhood, like the deaths

of three of his sisters, and especially that of [Chon](#) , who was next after him in age and to whom he was very close.

“When I was a child I lived through the deaths of one of my sisters, and one of my schoolfriends,” Paulina confides. “So I didn’t avoid including those sad parts, which also make up some children’s lives and leave a strong mark on their characters. I tried to reflect the impact of that suffering on St Josemaria’s life.”

*Vida y venturas de un borrico de noria... y su Relojero* (“The Life and Adventures of a Water-Wheel Donkey and His Little Watch-Mender”)

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