

## **Francisca Latorre Vaillant**

Oh how time goes by.....more than half of my life has been related to Wood and its protection. Everything started in 1977, when I decided to study Forest Engineering at the university, which was a sort of chance. During my last year in high school, some friends and I received an invitation to visit the Faculty of



Agronomy at the Universidad de Chile; where they showed us what they did, the different work areas, etc., then, we took a brief look at the Faculty of Forest Engineering, located in the same campus, and it just happened, I immediately forgot about agronomy because I found fascinating everything about forests and their management, fire control equipment, etc., besides, I loved the natural environment, away from the city, where the faculty was. I realized then It was what I needed, that being in contact with nature was my drive and that it fitted my personality perfectly, so it was the only option I chose to apply for at the university.....lucky for me, my admission test score was good enough to enter, otherwise today I would be in the streets selling peanuts instead of being part of this wonderful group, the IRG.

My parents weren't very happy with my decision of studying a "men" career, as back in those days women did not study Forest Engineering, and they were concerned I couldn't find job on that field. But, it was my decision and I did not give up. Normally, less than 5 to 6% of faculty admissions were women, however, that year, 1978, we represented 25% of the total, a historical record until now.

Not long after that, and even though I loved to study the forests, I became more interested in wood engineering and industrialization... I ended up as a Forest Engineer with Mention in Wood Industry.

At that stage, I met an attractive professor, Sergio, who I fell in love with, and we got married right after I received my professional degree of Forest Engineer.



That was the first fruit produced by the University, then, our daughters came along, three beautiful girls who have filled my life with happiness, and now we have two lovely grandchildren whom Sergio and I adore!

I finished my university studies in 1984, and my first working experiences were sporadic jobs in market studies, plated boards sales, and then health insurance sales.

In 1986, we moved to Concepción, the core of Chilean forests and the wood products industry. There, I had the opportunity to work at the Universidad del Bio Bio, teaching wood anatomy and forestry. We returned to Santiago in 1989 and in 1990 my relationship with wood preservation started, when Thomas Hanke invited me to



work with him in the newly created local company, Hickson Quimetal, a joint-venture resulting from the union of a local company, Quimetal, and an international company, Hickson Wood Protection, both CCA producers in those days. Both companies were eager to expand to other Wood preservation products in Chile and that was the reason for the joint-venture, as it was clear that it was a growing market. Twenty eight (28) years have since passed, and I am still working at the company, which is now called [Lonza Quimetal](#). Although it is true that my responsibility has always been focused on the commercial area, I have also been very involved in technical aspects related to the use of the products and impregnated wood, I have also participated in the development of new products.

When I began working in this company, fluent English was a very important requirement, but truly I could barely speak or understand English at first (Spanish is my native language). I had studied English at the British Institute right before entering HQ, but had few opportunities to practice. Over time, I was able to improve my English communication thanks to the



permanent contact with Hickson people, as well as other companies we worked with in Europe, the United States and New Zealand, communication that even now is not easy for me, however, I can understand and make myself understood.

Due to my job, I have travelled a lot within Chile, usually thousands of kilometers each month, which was very complicated at the beginning, especially when my daughters were little. I missed many events and activities at school, such as year end, Mother's Day, etc. However, we survived without problems and today my daughters are quite independent; Anita is a Nutritionist, Carolina a Pediatrician, and next year Francisca will become a dentist. She is the only one who still lives with us and whom we pamper a lot.

*Click on thumbnails to view enlarged images*

One of the things I like the most in my job, is the relationship I have with people; each day I must talk with dozens of persons, both local and foreigners, which is something I really value. I have established great friendships within the company, as well as with customers, suppliers and a lot of people in the wood orbit, both in Chile as well as abroad. I am always meeting new people.

The first time I attended an IRG Conference was in Whistler, Canada in 1997, but it was thanks to Jeff Lloyd's incentive that in the last 6 years I became more directly involved, for which I am very grateful. It is a privilege to participate in the annual IRG meeting, to have the possibility to know what is happening in the wood products protection world everywhere, meeting the familiar participants each year, creating bonds, and also meeting new people, of course. It is wonderful to visit different countries and to get to know different cultures, and I thank the company for allowing me to participate.

Not everything is work; in my free time, I enjoy very much spending time with my family, I love to read, watch movies, cook, and gardening, that is, home oriented



activities. I really enjoy family life with our siblings and their families. In Chile, family bonds are very strong, and it happens frequently that our children and siblings live relatively near, or in the same city which is something I really like.

Four years ago, Sergio and I built a beach house, in a beautiful and quiet place called Mirasol, with a splendid view to the beach and the ocean. We go there once or twice times a month and have a nice time there.

Of course, the house is made of 100% treated wood!

