

In memoir, Berger remembers '60s Spain adventures

Andrew Travers
The Aspen Times

Aspenites know Bruce Berger as an accomplished poet and nature writer, as a historian, as a fixture at Aspen Music Festival and School concerts and as a consummate party host. But few probably know of his adventures in Spain, where he lived in the mid-1960s.

That period is the subject of his new memoir, "The End of the Sherry," which he'll read from and sign tonight at Explore Booksellers.

Berger lived in southern Spain for three years, from 1965 to 1967, during the twilight of the Franco dictatorship. The young expat arrived at age 27 for a road trip around the Mediterranean but soon found himself playing

IF YOU GO ...

What: Bruce Berger, "The End of the Sherry" reading and book-signing

Where: Explore Booksellers

When: Today at 5 p.m.

piano in nightclubs and in a succession of rock bands around provincial Spain, selling fish on the black market and working in a carnival act — taking copious notes all the while.

"The book is about my own experience, but to me what's more important is that it's a portrait of a place and time," Berger said.

He brought a Smith Corona typewriter overseas and chronicled his day-to-day life while he was there, and that changed his life.

"I decided that writing was what I wanted to do with my

life," he said.

Berger, a poet and author of the Aspen books "Music in the Mountains" and "The Complete Half-Aspenite," wrote his first draft of the memoir in 1971 and began sending excerpts around for publication. Pieces of it have been published over the years — a section he pitched to Rolling Stone ended up in the Yale Review, for instance, and several of his columns in American Way in the 1990s came from the manuscript.

Berger said he's now glad he didn't publish the memoir in the early '70s, however, because he went back in 1986 and gained a new perspective on his experience by seeing how much the world he lived in was lost.

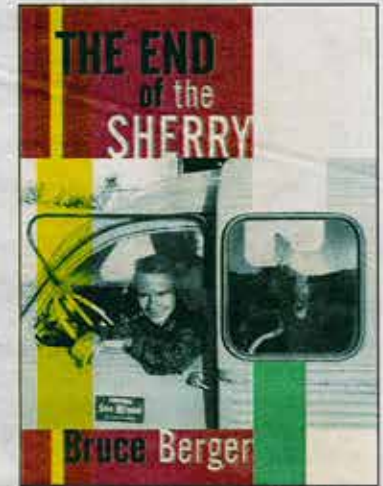
By the mid-'80s, Berger said, "the global village had hit, and it

was getting urbanized." He revisited his manuscript recently with an eye toward painting a portrait of the way of life he experienced in Spain, which has faded in the decades since Franco's death in 1975, and of the unexpectedly lively culture that bloomed under the authoritarian oppression of Franco's reign.

The book chronicles Berger's experience with politics, religion, drinking large amounts of sherry, meeting veterans of the Spanish Civil War, the police state, the treatment of animals, the lively Spanish outdoor-movie culture of the '60s and small-town life during what he calls his "delayed adolescence."

"It was extremely colorful," he said. "And then it all changed."

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COURTESY PHOTO

Aspenite Bruce Berger's new memoir, "The End of the Sherry," chronicles his time in Spain in the mid-1960s. Berger will read from the book and sign copies tonight at Explore Booksellers.