**OpenLIVES Spanish Émigré interviews – Encarnación CUBEROS**

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| Interviewee: | Encarnación CUBEROS |
| Interviewer: | Darren Paffey, University of Southampton |
| Interview date: | 11 June 2008 (1st part) |
| Location: | Encarna’s house, Pessac. |
| Duration: | 76.00 mins |
| Countries of migration: | UK, France |

**Synopsis:**

[00:00 – 10:00]

She went to Southampton. Her mother wasn’t there, father was killed. Remembers a camp that was made to receive the kids and then people came to take groups away. They were 4,500 children there. Remembers the Havana ship, and remembers that Franco sunk it quite a while afterwards. On her journey, the boat was escorted by 4 British boats. Luckily, otherwise she wouldn’t be here, she says!

Well looked after in UK. Always going to different events and parties. She’s not losing her memories at all, even at 84 years old. Gets various bits of memorabilia out that she has kept since she was a child, including copy of the Daily Express from 7 January 1938 in which she appears as one of the Basque refugee children. She does not know where the others are who were also in the article and at the event. She once met up with them years ago in San Sebastian. Also shows me copies of other documents, including when EC was repatriated with her two siblings to her mother who by then had fled to France.

When her mother put the three children on the Havana to UK, she asked a teacher to keep an eye on the children (as EC was injured) and ensure they were together. EC was with siblings for 2 years in Guildford. Met many lovely people in Guildford who cared for them.

[10:01 – 20:00]

When in 1939 WW2 began, they were sent to Manchester. Then has letters from Lancashire & Cheshire Joint Council for Spanish Relief and taken by the Basque Children’s Committee. Letter of repatriation from 1940, asking billet parents to put the children on train to Euston for them to then go to France to join their mother.

EC says she has always liked to keep things like the letters.

In a document from the Provisional Government of the Basque Country (Gobierno Provisional del Pais Vasco) registering her mother and siblings’ birthdates her DOB is recorded wrongly – she was actually born in 1924. She was born in Malaga, and her siblings in Seville. She remembers that when the niños embarked on the Havana, they were each given a sign with a number on it, which is something else she has kept. Shows me copies of documents which were done for her in the Rue Ste Catherine (Certificate of Council for Spanish Relief in the UK confirming her status, National Registration Identity Card). Refers also to Eduardo (Bernad, of the Asociación de Jubilados) who has made copies of her documents for her. She doesn’t remember what all of them were for. We look through these (see list of documents). Juvenile Employment Bureau card, so she could work. She only worked a very short while in Manchester.

While looking at a letter from the Basque Childrens’ Committee asking her carer to put the children on the train for repatriation she refers to Mrs Horrocks who looked after them very well. She did used to hear from Manchester a few years back; they sent her packages. Mrs Horrocks had her own family but also welcomed the *niños* into her home.

Memories of that family in Manchester are excellent. People often say *tonterias* about the English but Encarna won’t say a word against them. In Guildford there were approximately 40 *niños*. They were with some very wealthy people, and were used to going to London. She visited museums and lots of other places. Remembers eating in Piccadilly. She still has sweet tins she received. They are memories so she cannot throw them out. They used to do little concerts and she used to have little sweets in there that she ate before singing.

[20:01 – 30:00]

These sweet tins are over 70 years old but she cannot throw them out. They’re memories for her. She also has small things she sewed, because she learned to sew there. When she sees these things, she remembers her times in the UK.

They used to have lots of parties in the UK.

They used to send her postcards from the UK which she still has. These items remind her of the times there after she had experienced such awful times in Spain.

It was 31st March when they bombed San Sebastian. 26th April her father was killed in Guernica.

Getting a sense of her trajectory then, she was born in Malaga, then her family moved to Seville. They were in Seville until she was 6, then they moved to Belgium. Her father was *evenista*. Worked in the Seville exposition of 1929. After that, he was sent to Belgium with the family (1930) – she doesn’t remember how long for. They were then going to send the family to Brazil, but there were turbulent times there too, so her father said no. So they went to Paris, France (1932-33) but after several months there was no work. There were 6 of them, needing to eat every day, and money ran out.

Father decided to take the family back to Spain, but not to Andalucía, instead to San Sebastian because it was nearer. Encarna was 7 yrs old when they arrived to San Sebastian. She remembers there were problems in those days as sometimes she wasn’t allowed to play out in the street or go to school. Her father met a lawyer and became friends, and it was the lawyer who helped her father to find work back in Spain. Not long after they moved there, civil war broke out.

Her father was a Republican, and because of that they had to flee San Sebastian. In Durango, 31st March 1937, she was injured. Her father was fighting and was killed on 26th April in Guernica. Her father worked in the *intendencia* and on the day Durango was bombed, it was his day off, so he was at home. In front of their home was a school, and by night, a military regiment occupied it. Franco knew this and bombed it, but missed the school and the bomb dropped on their house.

[30:01 – 40:00]

Two of her father’s friends had come to see him that day, and they said ‘today is our day, something is going to happen’. Mother had sent the children to play in the street, garden. Aeroplanes were circling. One of her father’s friends went to the balcony, looked out and starts saying ‘it’s for us!’. Father was still in bed, got out and put his feet on the floor and the bomb fell and he fell back on top of the bed (??). The bomb fell on the door of their house. The family fled their home. It was around 3pm. Everyone later was in the street eating what they had been able to grab from their homes. She remembers seeing the planes coming, and her father had always told her that if she saw the planes coming, don’t go a certain way but go in the other direction. Don’t run in front of them but run behind them. They were German and Italian planes and they were dropping bombs and machine-gunning too. There was a cornfield nearby and her mother went with the children there. Encarna always followed her father, who told her ‘go! go!’. He had a soldier’s uniform on. A while after the planes left, they came back, shooting more. Encarna was a mess (*toda desecha*); all her clothes were ripped and covered in blood. Her father went mad. They couldn’t take her to the hospital because all the roads were destroyed by the bombs. There was a car which had come from Deba, not knowing about the bombing, and so her father stopped the car and told the driver to turn around and take them to the hospital. She remembers everything. The planes had seen people in the ground and had started firing machine guns too, and her father was telling the driver where to go because they were being shot at all around. They finally got on the road they could leave by. The doctor was not there when they got to Deba, but the doctor’s son was in training and gave her first aid. Her father left her there to go back and get the family and return to Deba. She can’t remember exactly how long they were there, but something like a few days. She couldn’t get out of bed or do anything.

When she finally got a bit better, she was taken to a house in Bilbao which the Republicans had the right to requisition (homes that Francoists had abandoned). Her father had to return to the regiment. Her mother took her to hospital each day, and the doctor told her mother that Encarna was lucky because the bullet had struck within a centimetre of her heart before exiting. They heard that the bombings would continue, and heard of a boat that would leave and take children away, so her mother decided to send her children away from war.

Memories of the family home before the war were wonderful. Her father liked music. Her father cared for them very much. He wanted them to learn lots and see lots in life, so he took them everywhere to learn. In those days, it was not seen as necessary for women to be educated, but her father thought very differently and wanted his daughters to learn and be educated as best possible. In San Sebastian her father would take them to the beach, the countryside, the cinema, everywhere. But it was for a very short time as she wasn’t lucky enough to know her father after the war.

[40:01 – 50:00]

She knew a bit about England before fleeing there. Before getting on the boat, her mother told them to write to her and let her know how things were going. Every week, their hosts would get them to write to their mother. They also took photos of the children so they could send them to their mother. Her brother had to be in hospital with a bad knee for a while, and Encarna used to visit him every week. She told him ‘write to mother, but don’t tell her where you are!’ Her mother suffered a lot in France. Encarna says that she hadn’t suffered in Spain nor England, but when she arrived in France, she suffered hunger and all sorts. She used to say to her mother ‘why didn’t you leave me in England? Here we’re hungry and things are bad’. Her mother got to France by boat from Santander to Pollac. A friend gave her mother the option of going to work in a factory instead of being put in a concentration camp. Then she was put in the country so she wouldn’t be seen, as a Spanish refugee.

In Guildford the family were all together in a large house, 40 children with interpreters, teachers, etc. There were fewer girls than boys. They were frequently invited out to houses for tea. EC remembers a woman whose father/grandfather was a doctor to the Queen. They once went to a house where there were gardeners, maids, etc., what EC calls *haute société*. There was a butler serving them.

They used to get lots of presents. For her 14th birthday she got a watch. She doesn’t have it now because it stopped and was left at the watch repair shop when she left the UK.

[50:01 – 60:00]

The Havana went from Bilbao to Southampton. It took three days to arrive and a lot of them were ill. She remembers them being offered breakfast, but she wasn’t very hungry when the boat started tipping from side to side! When they got to Southampton there was lots of flags and celebrations going on for the Coronation of King George and Elizabeth the Queen Mother!

Whenever there was a party, they were invited. There was another place where there were over 200 *niños*, and when the Guildford group of 40 were with the larger group, it became apparent that things were better for the Guildford *niños*. The people in Guildford who looked after the *niños* were very wealthy. The children used to go to the fair. For EC, other than her childhood with parents, those two years were the best of her life. Manchester wasn’t quite the same as Guildford (!!). For a start, they were in a normal house with a family, although Mrs. Horrocks looked after them wonderfully and they never went without, it wasn’t the same as Guildford.

EC has never been back to Guildford. She once went back to the UK almost 30 years ago with her niece who is an English teacher, and when chatting to the lady of the house they were staying in, this lady’s father had looked after the *niños*. EC showed me a small address book containing the details of people in the UK, including Guildford, Chiswick, Sussex. EC’s husband never went to the UK – she told him she was going on the trip and that if he wanted to come, he could, but if he didn’t, there was a restaurant on the corner where he could get food while she was away! He was happy to let her visit the UK. She would have liked to have gone to Guildford, but didn’t manage it.

Discussing the letter from the Basque Childrens’ Committee, that was the letter sent when she and her siblings were to be repatriated to join their mother in France. The children were in the UK for 3 years exactly – it was May when they arrived and May when they left. Her mother was living in the countryside near Bordeaux, but EC didn’t like the countryside. She remembers the wooden shoes that villagers used to wear, like the Dutch. EC thought ‘I can’t wear those!’. EC was 15 years old when she got to France, didn’t know anyone, didn’t have anything, and went to work. The family lived in two rooms. EC wasn’t used to this and didn’t like it, getting frustrated and asking her mother why they had to come here.

[60:01 – 70:00]

EC and her brother used to speak English at home and her mother used to ask them what they were saying, as she didn’t understand. The supervisor at her mother’s factory used to tell them not to forget their English, but little by little it goes. She remembers songs from England like ‘Good morning, good morning’, and ‘Daisy, daisy’. EC didn’t go to school in France and didn’t have French lessons as she was already 15. Her brother went to school.

When they got to France, they had no idea how long they were going to be there. They couldn’t return to Spain because of Franco. They had family still in Spain who didn’t know anything about where they were, they didn’t even know that EC’s father had been killed. EC had cousins who tried looking for them via Radio Andorra. In the end, they found them. She has lots of cousins in Barcelona who left Andalucía because of the lack of work. When EC met her cousins and family for the first time since leaving, she was over 50 years old. While she didn’t live in very good conditions with her mother and siblings in France, they at least were together again, and that was the important thing.

Every now and then, the topic of return came up in conversation. Her mother would have liked to have returned, but couldn’t. They lost everything there. They left with nothing. Her father used to write a lot to family in Andalucía, and they used to send photos. That’s how they now still have pictures and photos – otherwise they wouldn’t have any.

They had friends who returned to Spain, but they don't know what happened to them. There were people who wanted to return, but when they got there, Franco had them imprisoned or they were killed. EC’s family heard about such things. These things are hard.

EC was at least 45 years old when she went back to Spain for the first time. She went to Barcelona where her cousins live. (EC has just come back from Spain and had taken a fall; she showed me her injuries. She’s had worse, she says.) They had been writing to each other for a while without knowing each other. Every Christmas her auntie sent her a lottery ticket. All of EC’s family went that first time. They chatted lots and lots. Her father’s sister was there, and spoke to EC lots about her father. The auntie since died, aged 92.

[70:01 – 80:00]

Some of EC’s cousins and her uncle have visited her in France too. After that first time, EC and family went to Spain every year. She goes less now, as she’s older and doesn’t like travelling on her own. She speaks a lot with her family on the phone.

Return was a constant and recurring thought. EC’s mother once returned to San Sebastian when she was over 50 years old; this was before Franco had died. EC’s sister took their mother. Crossing the border, the guards asked her mother to name people in San Sebastian who could vouch for her. They let her pass, but back then it wasn’t easy. Her brother couldn’t go, because when he was 20 years old, they called him back to do his military service. Their mother told him he had to do the military either in Spain or in France, so he stayed in France to do it, where he had his family. He went into the army, studied and did the necessary training to be a *gendarme* until he was 50 and was able to retire. EC took French nationality as well as Spanish. Her mother did not.

EC was married to a French man whose mother was French and whose father was Tunisian. EC had a daughter and a son. Her son died 34 years ago (aged 20) in a car accident. Her daughter was married and had a 4-year old child, and had a second child in the same week that EC’s son died. EC says she has had a hard, hard life. At this point, EC offers to prepare some tea.