**OpenLIVES Spanish Émigré interviews – Encarnación CUBEROS**

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| Interviewee: | Encarnación CUBEROS |
| Interviewer: | Darren Paffey, University of Southampton |
| Interview date: | 11 June 2008 (2nd part) |
| Location: | Encarna’s house, Pessac |
| Duration: | 39:40 |
| Countries of migration: | UK, France |

**Synopsis:**

[00.00 – 10.00]

I was admiring a display cabinet full of model aeroplanes in EC’s living room. Asking her if she liked planes, she explained these were her son’s, and that he used to like making these even when he was young. He had put them in a box marked ‘*Cuidado’*, and after the car accident in which he died she didn’t want to touch anything. Years later she wondered what was in there, so opened it and found the model planes.

Looking at a photo, these were her great-grandchildren. Another photo: her two sons when they were young. Another photo: her late husband. I ask about the African ornaments and decorations; her brother the *gendarme* worked in the French colonies – Martinique, Guadeloupe, Madagascar, Reunion and brought her these gifts. She went to Guadeloupe every year for 14 years to see him when he was there. One of his sons was in born in Point à Pitre.

Another photo shows EC and her two sisters. When they were in Caranac, the daughter of the factory boss organised concerts which raised money to send to young prisoners in Germany. They performed in Carmen. The others are her sisters: one who now lives in Paris, and the other – the youngest – who died 15 years ago. They’re *souvenirs* she says. EC allows me to take photos of her photos.

She has tea with cold milk. She started having tea in the UK. In Spain she used to have *cafe con leche*, then in the UK they gave her tea and no one liked it. When people invited them to take 5 o’clock tea, they began to like it and she has drunk tea since.

Memories of when Franco died. She remembers it was the year her grandson was born. She tries to remember what year it was, 72? 73? I say I think it was 1975 and she remembers that yes, her grandson was small then. I ask her what she felt on hearing the news. *Que se muera* she replies. He may have done some good things too. But he killed many people just like Hitler did.

[10.00 – 20.00]

During the war, when she was able to go and work, Germans came to the factory where she was working. They came to take off the wood produced. Once there was an officer, and a 14/15 year old boy. There were the French collaborators who were on the side of the Nazis. Someone had graffitied ‘*vive de Gaulle*’ on the factory wall. A factory official asks the boy who wrote it. When he replied he didn’t know, the official hit him, and then asked and hit him a second time. A German soldier entered and the factory official said ‘look what they’ve written’, and the German soldier told the Frenchman to leave the boy alone, as it didn’t matter. EC says they weren’t all bad.

EC’s husband was taken to Germany for forced labour in a gunpowder factory. They hardly ate there. He was 20 when he went there. One time he lit a cigarette in the factory, a German caught him and whisked him into his office saying ‘do you realise what you’re doing!’ EC’s husband replied he didn’t care, that he missed home, that nothing mattered etc. German asked him where he was from. Bordeaux, he replies. The German says that there are lots of pretty girls in Bordeaux, and they chatted for a while. German said that if some other soldiers had caught him, they would have killed him. He, however, was at war by force, not because he wanted to be. EC’s husband replied he didn’t care, that they could kill him, he was cold, hungry, etc.

Franco did what he did; was one person but there were lots of bad Spaniards too. EC’s husband was in Germany for 2 years and had a rough time; they had a rough time in France too though. EC knows what it’s like to be hungry. Times were very difficult. After liberation, things started to change, but very very slowly. There’s always some kind of problem somewhere. Even though in France, as in Spain, things are very good and prosperous now, there’s always some kind of *jaleo* going on. In the UK too there are problems, and there are lots of foreigners in the UK too. A lady EC knows in the UK, her sister was married and lived in India and used to send EC lots of postcards.

EC talks about her doctor – same one for 20 years – he complains about the English saying ‘*no valen nada’*, but EC retorts and won't hear a word said against them. EC knows that in England she was very well off, and she learnt a lot and saw a lot there. She talks of people who are much ‘higher’ than us.

I ask if she ever thinks about going back. She replies there are lots of people she knows there who have died. There was one woman, Mrs Merrigan (?) and her husband; she remembers them and their family. Another, Mr Jenkins, married a Spanish teacher. He was one of those who helped the *niños*. Everyone she met there was wonderful. Saturday mornings, they used to go to the cinema – the number of films she saw! She remembers the singers in the films, Sinatra, etc. The carers took them to the cinema, the swimming pool, the beach during the holidays. She doesn’t remember which beach it was. They used to stay overnight and during the holidays.

[20.00 – 30.00]

The young English people (the house the *niños* lived in was very big) used to come to see the Spanish children. The carers used to defend the children and say ‘don’t talk to those English children’, but EC says they did anyway! Once she escaped the house to go to the fair, and remembers being disciplined. In the dining room at mealtimes, talking was prohibited. There was a German interpreter who had escaped Nazi Germany. This person spoke several languages, he was always there at mealtimes. EC says she was always talking. They used to say *tú, Encarnación de los diablos, ¡cállate!* They used to get a star each time they were naughty; three stars meant discipline. The discipline was things like peeling potatoes, cleaning things, etc. The girls used to have to look after the younger children too, for example fixing buttons on their pyjamas or things like that. In the end she wasn’t disciplined like that. EC says you must have discipline: without discipline, everything goes wrong. Look what happens, she says.

EC would like to have gone more often to the UK, but she didn’t. She has some very good memories. Her good memories are of the UK, and of Spain when she was young and with her family. After that, memories aren’t good. Things changed.

She worked in a factory. After she married in 1946, her husband didn’t want her to work. EC tells me to eat some biscuits!

[I take a phone call from Laure at this point; she’s on her way to pick me up]

EC likes living there in Pessac; she has very good neighbours and gets on well there where she lives on her own.

I ask if she still thought about returning after Franco died. She states no, very confidently. Her father was dead, it was all very different. What would her mother have done there? In San Sebastian there was no family left; they were all in Barcelona. Her mother didn’t want to go and leave the family in France. Her mother didn’t live with them, but they saw each other every week. *Habiamos perdido todo. ¿ Ir donde? ¿Qué hacer?* Her mother began to work in France. She might have wanted to, had her husband lived, but not without him. Her family has always had good relations. There are families who have disputes, who don’t talk: they were never like that. She still sees her brother very regularly who also lives in Bordeaux; their sister lives in Paris and they see her less, although her brother goes more as he has children who live there. EC’s family has never had problems; they’ve always understood each other very well. Every Sunday, her mother used to come to the house for dinner. EC’s husband loved her mother too. Good job too, as if they’d had to deal with family problems on top of everything else….

[30:01 – 40:00]

Did they know others who’d returned after Franco died? Yes, but those people had family there. We didn’t. The family we had had all gone to Barcelona. Life’s like that. For some it goes well, for others, not so well. EC believes she’s had a bit of a bad lot. When you find yourself in a hospital in a strange country you know nothing about at the age of 12, it’s not great.

She remembers the camp in Southampton where they went when they arrived. Nearby there was an airport, and hearing the planes frightened her a lot. They reassured her, saying ‘there’s no war here’. Another thing that frightened her and frightens her still, is thunder. Lightning doesn’t worry her, but when she hears thunder she still freezes up with fear. This kind of thing happens. She’s OK now hearing planes, that’s not a problem, but when there’s thunder, that reminds her of the bombs and attacks. So it wasn’t good being near the airport in Southampton. When they then moved to France, she was in the countryside. In Manchester, she remembers, she was afraid because the Germans were bombing there too. She was afraid. War again, planes again. In a bombardment, they’re dropping bombs and it’s like being in a cloud of earth where the explosions churn up earth, and she remembers falling into holes the bombs made. At the time you don’t feel fear, it’s always afterwards. Her mother used to say ‘go and play with the other children’, but EC remembers not being able to run, and it was as if she had something in front of her which wouldn’t let her pass. She wanted to go and play and run like she did before, but she couldn’t. She was like that for a long time. It’s terrible when that happens when you’re a child. It happened, and that wasn’t her day to die. Each one has luck or they don’t. We know when we’re going to be born, but no-one knows when they will die, and good job too. I’ve had a hard time. Even now, it hurts EC. When the weather gets stormy, she gets afraid. They’ve had to give her a pacemaker.

[At this point, Laure arrives. EC goes out to greet her and bring her in. I go through signing the release forms with EC as Laure comes in. **End of interview**]