**OpenLIVES Spanish Émigré interviews – Germinal Luis Fernández**

**PART ONE**

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| Interviewee: | Germinal Luis Fernández |
| Interviewer: | Alicia Pozo-Gutierrez and Inmaculada Colomina  |
| Interview date: | 21st August 2008 |
| Location: | Madrid Autónoma University |
| Duration: | 2:20:00 |
| Countries of migration: | United States, Venezuela, Argentina |

**Synopsis:**

[00.00 – 10:00] A family history

He was born in Barcelona on 31st July 1930 – he shares his birthday with Harry Potter. He thinks he was born on Provenza street but he can’t be sure because his mother moved every six months. His maternal grandmother was Andalusian, from Motril near Granada, but she lived Sans, which is where they lived for a long time too. They then moved when his father opened a bookbinding shop in Tenza. About a year before the interview took place Germinal went to visit it but it isn’t there anymore. He finds it funny that his father was an anarchist but now there is a church where the shop used to be. He thinks they used to live close to Tenza in a place called Rocafort. Even though he worked, his father was still really involved in politics and had been before Germinal’s birth. The police were after him, and his mother told him that when she was pregnant with Germinal the Civil Guard held a gun to her stomach. It was all to do with Primo de Rivera. But mostly the family were fine, they had a little bookbinding shop and they always worked hard.

There were two sides to the family: the Luis Simón family and the Fernández Gómez. The surnames reflect the Castilian and Andalusian backgrounds of the family. The families came from Toro and from Motril respectively, in search for work.

They were both family orientated, although the Castilian side not as much. His paternal grandfather was labelled ‘uncle feedlot’ because he made his money from the wheat fields he owned. His grandfather did well for the family, and they were comfortable, but he did a lot of business with Germany, so when the First World War happened and Germany was ruined, the German Mark became worthless. His grandfather then found himself with lots of debts, money deposited in German bank accounts, and it ruined him. Germinal’s father told him that his grandfather then became involved in gambling, even gambling in games of ‘chapas’, a game using bottle tops. He kept losing, and had to keep selling their belongings until one day they all left for Barcelona to look for work. The other side of the family, from Motril, were much more humble. When they arrived in Barcelona, Germinal’s mother was ten years old, and his father was around fourteen years old. His mother began to work in a factory making trousers when she was sixteen. His father worked as an apprentice in a printing works and learnt the trade well enough that afterwards he was able to go on to create his own business. Germinal’s father’s colleagues elected him as a representative at the Barcelona branch of the CNT (Confederación Nacional de Trabajo) labour union. His father was involved in this syndicate and although Germinal doesn’t know how highly his father rose within the organisation, he knows he rubbed shoulders with the likes of José Buenaventura Durruti Dumange and Francisco Ascaso Abadía. He was even imprisoned with them for a time. He was better friends with Ascaso. On July 20th, Ascaso was killed, just one or two days after Franco’s uprising. His father went straight to the Ebre river. He was involved in the Corps Train that took food, munitions and medication by rail. It was really dangerous. They had to leave the carriage, run and hide because they were carrying ammunition. Paco, Germinal’s uncle and the younger brother of his father, was involved in the Brigada del Biberón, fighting against the Moors. There was a ten year age gap between Paco and Germinal. He used to tell Germinal that people died more of cold and hunger than because of the war itself. They weren’t able to start fires to keep warm because the enemies in the air would have seen the smoke. They spent most of their time looking for food and for ways of keeping warm. Paco was hit by a bullet in his leg. The Moors didn’t take prisoners, so Paco pretended to be dead until he was saved. He almost lost his leg to gangrene. His leg was saved but he was never able to use it: he used crutches for the rest of his life, to the best of Germinal’s knowledge. During this time Germinal’s father was alone on the front near the Ebre, and Germinal and his mother were in Barcelona. Germinal remembers the shelling and that they had taken measures to stop the glass from shattering. People stuck strips of paper to the glass and made it look decorative. The children would think it looked pretty, but the reality was to stop the glass from shattering during the bombing. He wasn’t really aware of it at the time, but those are the kind of measures he looks back on and understands more about as an adult.

[10.00 – 20.00] First memories

Germinal’s first childhood memory is of his parents taking him to Prat de Llobregat, near the airport, where they bathed in a river. There were a number of fruit trees, including peach trees, and he really enjoyed the time he spent there. It has all changed there now. A short time before the war started he remembers going on a boat with his mother, his mother’s sister and his cousin Liberto to Motril. His mother’s uncle owned his own bar there, close to the sea. It was so close to the sea that when he got out of bed there would be sand. At sunrise men went out with huge nets and they would make a funnel, and he would see the silver sardines jumping up out of the water. They would make a fire on the sand and would cook the sardines. He also remembers a convertible car his father bought, when everything was well for their family in Barcelona, around 1935. He had a Peugeot, in the typical style from that era. It had what was called a ‘rumble seat’ that pulled out from the back, and that is where Germinal sat and where he enjoyed being most as a child. Then when [the military uprisings of] 19th July began, some of his most prominent memories are of the huge bonfires. They lived in an apartment in front of the Sans market entrance. It had a balcony which looked out over the main street in Sans. His mother had suffered miscarriages and he had no younger siblings. He doesn’t remember much from this time, but his father has told him that he once took Germinal to a syndicate when he was around two or three years old. He put Germinal on the shoulders of a demonstrator and he began to sing “Sons of the people, chains oppress you” (the lyrics to the workers’ song “Hijos del pueblo”, referred to as “Sons of the people” in English), even though he was so young that he was still learning to speak, which made Germinal’s father was proud. Germinal’s mother told him that he then insulted the priest who lived in the flat above. Germinal went to school in Barcelona for just 15 days before the war began. All that he can remember learning there is that there are four provinces in Cataluña, and that there are twelve months in a year. He remembers that when he was about eight years old, on the other side of the fence to his father’s workshop, there was a slaughterhouse and some shacks. They were really run down houses, and he knew a widowed man who lived there with his fifteen or sixteen year old daughter Lola (Dolores Albert). Lola was friendly with Germinal’s mother, because his mother felt protective of her since she was an orphan, and Lola worked in Germinal’s father’s workshop. As it turned out, Lola had a Catalan uncle – Tomás Albert – who volunteered and fought on France’s side in World War One. When the war ended and France and the allies won, Tomás Albert naturalised as a French citizen. In light of the situation in Spain, with the bombardments and the lack of food, Tomás Albert wanted to come for Lola and her brother, his niece and nephew. Germinal never knew what Lola’s brother was called, or how his mother fixed it so that Germinal could pass as being him. Lola’s brother would have been around 12 or 13, and Germinal was eight, and he questions how it was all arranged for him to take Lola’s brother’s papers. His new name was Germinal Albert (he says with a French accent), and he and Lola boarded the train for Barcelona. From what he remembers, the militia registered them while they were on the train. They then met one of Tomás’ sons in Perpignan, and travelled with him to Frontignan, near Montpellier, where they waited for Uncle Tomás. Germinal remembers that Tomás and his son were not poor people as such, but they lived as though they were. Either way, he is grateful. He lived with them for a time, until Lola found a job working in a restaurant in Frontignan, when he went to live with her. This would have been in 1939.

The interviewer asks to go back in time a little and to talk about Germinal’s first memories of living in wartime Spain.

Germinal’s most prominent memory is of the sirens that sounded before a bombardment. He recalls that at night, lights from the Air Defence (Defensa Especial Contra Aeronaves, DECA) on the ground spotlighted the German and Italian planes as they circled over Barcelona. They had guns, one of which was from World War One and was called the LAVI, because it was nasty like a bug or a dog that barks a lot and doesn’t stop. It was really loud. But it was the spotlights that Germinal was really interested in. He remembers how, when an aeroplane went through the light, it looked as if it had turned to silver. As a child, he didn’t realise the danger they posed. They used to fly low as they attacked. As a child it seemed pretty to him. He would be outside amongst it all. The Republic barely had an air force. They tried to trade with other countries, but western democracies were not allowed to intervene with Spain. Meanwhile Munich were saying not to worry, that there wouldn’t be another war. But shortly afterwards Germany invaded Poland and World War Two began.

[20.00 – 30.00] Arriving in France

He recalls playing in street while the city was being bombarded, and their mothers looking for them everywhere to take them to the refuge. He says all of these are children’s memories of the war, feeling completely calm. He also remembers queuing for food with his mother. Some women took knitting needles because fights always broke out because the food hadn’t arrived, or because there had been but they did not get any and they had been waiting for hours. When it came to the fights, they would fight until blood was drawn. He remembers his mother fighting. He used to occasionally go with his mother to get food, because often she would have nowhere to leave him. During this time Germinal’s father was fighting near the Ebre. They didn’t see him for over a year, and Germinal saw him again two years later in a concentration camp in France.

The interviewer asks to return to Germinal’s memories about moving to France. Germinal says he was motivated to go mainly because his mother wanted to save him, and because he would have Lola there to watch out for him. Also, being the youngest, Germinal had to grow more confident. Women were told that letting go of their children was for their own good. Germinal’s mother had to do this two or three times, which he finds incredible. He and Lola left early in the morning, and it was really cold. They went to the Estación de Francia (the ‘France Station’, a major railway station in Barcelona). This is a fact he has had to find out since, because at the time he had no idea about the Estación de Francia or what it was. It was November 28th, shortly before Christmas. He went to the station with Lola, his mother, and his aunt. He was eight years old, and Lola was fifteen. They had two cardboard suitcases and travelled alone until they reached Portbou, near the border. In Portbou they were made to alight. It was a republican zone. Germinal recalls that the Militia took Lola to one side, but they barely took any notice of him. They still registered him, as they did with everyone, because some people had tried to escape and take valuable items. He and Lola had to then get back on the train, and were in a carriage by themselves. He recalls going through a tunnel, and as this was back during a time when trains were powered by coal, when they came out of the other side they were covered in soot and sweating. He thought it was lots of fun. Lola’s cousin met them, and it was easy for him to find them as they were the only two people who got off the train. They then went through to Frontignan, and a day later he was back at school. About a six months later, in May 1939, when Franco had won the war, Germinal’s mother came on foot to Frontignan from a concentration camp near Burdeos. His father was in another concentration camp, the infamous Argelés-sur-Mer, which was known for being terrible. At this time Germinal and Lola lived with a woman called Mrs Miramón, while Lola was waiting tables. It was only possible to leave the concentration camp if a French national agreed to take responsibility for you, so Mrs Miramón offered to take responsibility for Germinal’s mother, and also offered her a job. One day Germinal came back from school and Mrs Miramól told him to go into the kitchen, and waiting for him behind the door was his mother. His father was still in the other concentration camp, and he and his mother went to visit him there in around June of 1939. They went with a friend of his father because they had no money and couldn’t pay for anything. Germinal could not ever forget visiting his father there. He remembers the gendarmes shouting loudly ‘Luis Valeriano! Luis Valeriano!’ because they thought Luis was his first name and Valeriano was his surname. Then he recalls his father emerging from a cabin. He looked like a zombie, but when he saw Germinal and his mother waiting for him by the entrance he came running. He was really thin. His father went in the car with them to the border where there were passport controls. There were some French officials who were saying ‘Negrín’ and ‘Franco’ to people. If they said ‘Franco’ then you got in a carriage to go to Spain, but if they told you ‘Negrín’ then you had to get on a different carriage which would go to a concentration camp. To those who were returning to Spain, the others would shout ‘sons of bitches!’, ‘traitors!’ and ‘Franco supporting fascists!’ at them. Germinal found it terrible. His father went to a concentration camp. Again, Uncle Tomás saved their lives, because he took on Germinal’s father as if he were his own nephew, even though he didn’t have to. Germinal questions how you can ever repay people like Uncle Tomás. So Germinal’s father was able to leave and get a job in a wine cellar, driving the tanker for Borelí Brothers. Germinal remembers them all being happy. They had a little place. It didn’t have running water, but they were happy: his mother worked in the restaurant, his father drove the wine tanker, and Germinal was in school.

[30.00 – 40.00] Before World War Two

Germinal spoke French in school, and did really well. He was top of the class until a Belgian refugee arrived, and then between them they always came first and second. Germinal puts it down to the need they had to work and to move forward. Despite the poor conditions they lived in, they were happy. But then September arrived and World War Two started. The documents of all of the foreigners living in France were invalidated, and so everyone had to renew their papers. France had fallen under German power, although there was still an area of the country, where the Vichy government was, that was still considered “free”. Because they were complying with Hitler, all foreigners in the country were effectively left without papers. Germinal’s father couldn’t work and needed to go to the nearest prefecture to get new papers. Republican Spaniards had nowhere to hide. The Spanish consulates were all Francoist, so whilst other nationalities could go to renew their papers, this was not an option for them. Germinal and his family, and others like them, were left completely stateless. Germinal’s father had no option but to go to the prefecture, either in Marseilles or Montpellier, Germinal can’t remember. The waiting was done overnight, and no one came out – everyone was a prisoner. Then they were sent off, two by two, to the concentration camp. Germinal was still in Frontignan with his mother, who carried on working. Two or three days passed, during which Germinal questioned the whereabouts of his father. One day, he and his mother returned to the flat to find three men, bearded, hungry and dirty. The three men, who included Germinal’s father, had eaten everything in sight. They had escaped from the concentration camp. They were unable to apply for any paperwork, so they had to hide. They washed and shaved. Germinal remembers that his father told him how they escaped from the concentration camp. The camp was surrounded by barbed wire, with a watch tower every few metres. In one section there was a bank. The barbed wire was not so thick there, and there was a little space at the bottom. The soldiers there were Senegalese, quite new to the camp and not on top of things. When new prisoners arrived, they each received a tin plate and spoon, and a blanket, were checked for lice, and given a number. When they had to line up, they arranged themselves in the queue so that as they went past the bank, his father threw himself into the ravine. At the bottom was the railway line, so he hid there with a blanket for a few hours, until someone fell on top of him, and then a short time later someone else came down the bank. The three of them waited there and agreed to travel together. They only ever travelled by night, stole fruit or whatever they could find to eat along the way, and headed for the house in Frontignan where Germinal and his mother lived. Germinal says at the time he was only around ten years old and was not aware of the importance of what his father did.

They did not speak Catalan at home, but his parents could speak it and they taught him. He still remembers a lot of the Catalan songs his mother used to sing to him. Germinal takes Catalan lessons, and is currently at level B1. He is aiming for B2, and says that being able to speak French helps him a lot. He was like a sponge when he moved to France. After six months he could speak French fluently. Germinal calls it ‘children’s French’, because it was the language he used with friends. He was called ‘Spanish shit’ at school, particularly at first. He recalls that Tomás and the Alberts were considered gypsies by other people in the area. They weren’t poor, but they chose to live a particular lifestyle. They were good people, and Germinal says he owes them having his mother and his father, everything. However they were looked down on by the French because of their lifestyle. They called Tomás a ‘tomato’, and so Germinal too was considered to be a ‘tomato’. He remembers coming to blows with some people when they went out. At school Germinal recalls being divided by gender. The boys wore black overalls and the girls wore white. He remembers noticing it at the time and thinking it was incredibly pretty, the way the boys were all dressed in black with their aprons, and the girls with their ribbons.

The interviewer asks Germinal about his memories of World War Two. Germinal says he remembers more from this war. His school closed when the war started, but he still needed to be schooled, so he went to a girls’ school. Half of the day was for girls, and the other half of the day was for boys. It also was a hospital and a refuge for people coming from Belgium and northern France, who they treated really well. Spanish people were not treated very well.

[40.00 – 50.00] Moving to Marseilles

Germinal recalls going to the mountain with his father to find firewood. His father came back loaded with wood like a packhorse, but Germinal only found a few little pieces. He also remembers looking for snails between the walls of houses, and stealing from people where they could. It was a case of needing to survive.

There is some confusion about the timings, so the interviewer asks for clarification. Germinal says this is before the war started in the September. Germinal remembers that in September children in schools were made to watch *Mein Kampf* to show who the Germans were, who was behind what was happening. It was a war, and they had to hate the enemy. They saw the German atrocities, and even though it was based on Hitler’s book, the information was presented to them to show him as the enemy. He remembers there being so many refugees at the girls’ school, so many people that they couldn’t all fit. It was during this time that Germinal’s father escaped. The people his father escaped with had friends in Marseilles. Marseilles is a big city, and it was much easier to hide there than in Frontignan, where everyone knew each other. His father went with them to Marseilles – they caught a train there but jumped off before reaching the station so that they wouldn’t be caught. Then they hid in a shack, made with parts of the railway and wood, like a barrack. His father hid there with the others. Germinal stayed there for a couple of days, because his mother decided that they should also go to Marseilles. So Germinal had to leave Frontignan, Mrs Miramón, his friends, school, everything. They wanted to be closer to Germinal’s father, but there was a secondary reason too. Mexico, the country that had offered most help to Republican Spain, had bought or was renting a huge but abandoned property about twelve kilometres from Marseilles. It was called Chateaux de la Renault, and because of the laws around extraterritoriality it was under Mexican jurisdiction, which meant that the French, the French police nor the Gestapo could enter. Once you went in, if you came out then they would send you straight to Germany to a concentration camp or to a munitions factory. His father went to live there with over a thousand other men, doctors, government ministers, Spanish republicans from all social strata and cultures. It was like a sanctuary. It was a waiting place, because Mexico were already sending boats across to take Spanish exiles, including people like Luis Buñuel. Germinal’s mother also wanted to be there because, since Paris had been taken by the Germans, all of the embassies had moved to Marseilles, and the people who did not support Hitler moved there. Everyone wanted to leave France, what with Europe at war and enormous queues to get into any of the consulates. The lucky ones were those who could get on a boat to go to Mexico, and this was Germinal’s parents’ plan. So Germinal, his mother and Lola, stayed in Marseilles in a small room close to the station, and every day his mother would go to queue at the Mexican consulate to see if they could get a place on a boat to Mexico. Germinal says it seems like they were always being put on a waiting list. Also at this time, Germinal’s mother was pregnant with his brother René, and so was unable to look after Germinal. Germinal went to live in the Chateaux de la Renault with his father. Under 16s were not usually permitted, but a special exception was made since his mother was unable to take care of him. His mother had to go to hospital in Marseilles, but she only spoke broken French. His father learnt to speak French, but his mother only ever learnt a few words. The nurses ended up naming René, but the way names were arranged in France was different, and they did not understand that ‘Valeriano’ was not his surname. He was called René Andrés Valeriano, when in fact his name should have been René Andrés Luis, so that he could be recognised as being Spanish. It caused him quite a few problems, but luckily it was all sorted out and he was granted Spanish nationality. René was born in 1941. In Marseilles there was an organisation called The Quakers. Nobody knew who they were but they were giving second hand clothing and food to babies and children. They gave clothes to René, and Germinal’s mother fed Germinal some of the food that the Quakers had given her for his younger brother.

Germinal returns back to before his brother was born, when he was ten years old and spent a lot of time with a group of troublemakers, doing whatever they wanted around Marseilles. They were Spanish children, and the eldest was Claudio who was 14. Germinal remembers him being a bit of a gangster. They stole food from the Port of Marseilles. The boats from Algeria were their favourites, because they brought oranges and dates. Every now and again, as the boats were being unloaded, a wooden crate would fall to the floor and break, and dates would go everywhere. The floor of the port was covered in grease and dust – the street cleaners would come to sweep the floor and there would be mountains of dirt. The children were like tigers, lying in wait for a box to fall. Germinal has thought about it since then, and gets emotional knowing that, even though they didn’t have to, the men purposefully let the boxes fall.

[50.00 – 1: 00.00] Marseilles

However it wasn’t enough so they also went into the warehouses to look for food. The doors were shut with a chain but opened a little, and the children were quite thin. Germinal did not do this for very long, because then he moved to the Chateaux. His father worked in agriculture in the Chateaux, even though he was a typographer by trade. He learnt quickly, and that’s how he survived. They had a vegetable garden, and so even though they just grew a few potatoes, it meant that they didn’t go without. Germinal remembers working on the vegetable patch with a friend. He thinks it was his friend Corsino, or someone else he knew from the Chateaux, or Mongrant. When his brother was born he had to spend more time with the women, because the women and children were in a smaller castle and he was no longer able to stay in the Chateaux where his father remained. Then the United States and Mexico declared war against the Axis powers, and so when Mexico became involved the Chateaux was no longer a sanctuary. The gendarmes came with buses and took the reds, the Republicans, to concentration camps and to munitions factories. There weren’t many men left there, as a lot of them had escaped or got involved in the Maqui (a guerrilla group which fought against the Franco regime). Germinal’s father had some contact with the Maqui. Germinal remembers something he just cannot forget. One morning he woke up in bunks that some men had put together using poles, wire and bags. Germinal was sleeping in the bunk below his father, in the stable block of the castle. In the middle of the night the light from a lantern passed in front of his eyes and he heard one gendarme say to another “it’s a child”, and they left him alone. He remembers seeing buses and not wanting to go near them. After that they sent him to Montgrant Castle where women and children had to stay. It was more of a big house than an actual castle, but Chateaux Renault was a real castle with towers. Germinal remembers that food and finding enough to eat was fundamental. They were a terror to the French farmers because they went out during the night and ate the food from the field before it was ready to be harvested. After speaking to a woman about it, Germinal believes that Montgrant was organised by the Republican Ministry of Spain, but it was still considered Mexican territory. They still had to survive by stealing and eating whatever they could find, such as the bitter leaves of a yellow flower. They even had to kill dogs. They had two or three dogs that they played with, but then a man came - maybe a gendarme but Germinal can’t be sure – and killed the dogs because they were worried they would go mad and suffer because of the lack of food. Germinal doesn’t think they ever ate the dogs. During this time Germinal ate so many beans, haricot beans, kidney beans, that he could barely stand to look at them. They were given beans because of the high protein content. They also used to be given what Germinal refers to as ‘topinambour’ (Jerusalem artichokes), although he cannot think of the word in Spanish. He also recalls being given something salty which he thinks was octopus because he remembers seeing the suction pads. It had been completely dehydrated and Germinal found it disgusting. At this point Germinal was also going to school for a time. In Montgrant there was a Spanish Mexican history teacher. Germinal recalls that the first national anthem he learnt was the Mexican anthem, and they learnt about Lázaro Cárdenas and Ávila Camacho, the Mexican socialist presidents, because Montgrant was still considered to be Mexican territory. It was considered Mexican territory until the United States and Mexico joined the allies. After that, a company in Montgrant bought it as quarters for their employees. A representative from the company passed by one weekend, and it was amazing how the Spaniards had made everything look lovely. It had been abandoned and worn out. Germinal’s father got a job farming for the company, and automatically all employees had the papers to be able to stay in France, which meant Germinal’s father could not be sent to Germany. Germinal doesn’t know if this also happened to other people too. They gave his father a small house, and René was also there. This was in 1942 or 1943, and René would have been two or three years old. Germinal himself had already moved to the United States by this time, and so this is what his parents have told him since.

[1:00.00 – 1: 10.00] Preparing to move to the United States

Germinal’s parents told him this when he saw them in Venezuela.

The interviewer wants to summarise the situation at this point in Germinal’s life. Germinal’s father was in hiding. His mother was in Marseilles trying to get the family on a list to board a boat to Mexico. She rented a room in San Morné close to Montgrant. Germinal lived in Montgrant whilst his mother and younger brother in San Morné, but it was only around five minutes there and back. His mother became involved in the Quakers, and it was there she met a man, known to Germinal only as Frank, who told her that they were arranging to send Spanish children to the United States, and that it had been authorised by the government. She told him she had a son and he told her she should send him to the United States. Germinal thinks he realised what was going to happen before his mother told him. In Montgrand he spent the day stealing and coming to blows with the French. Germinal explains it as an internalised anger about having lost their childhood. They could see the way the French people looked lovely, wearing their overalls, going to school and being well fed. It was wartime, but the French weren’t suffering, they had their families, and it made the Spanish children angry. He didn’t realise at the time that it was anger, but in retrospect he thinks it must have been because they used to start fights with them and stone them. One day they were wandering around a forest or out stealing, and they heard the bell calling them back. The principal was there, and she introduced them to another woman who Germinal recalls was very elegant and dressed all in black. She was from the Quakers and had come to ask those who could, and those whose parents could give permission, if they wanted to go to the United States. She was American but she spoke to them in French. Germinal remembers that he often spoke French with some his friends there, even though they were all Spanish children. Those who wanted to go made themselves known, and if their parents gave permission then they were the ones who went to the United States. They spoke to Germinal’s parents. He already knew that it was going to happen. He recalls that at that time, what they knew of America was cowboys, aeroplanes and lots of food. He knew about Hollywood and cowboy films. His parents told him that this was his chance to save himself and get out of the hellishness they were living. Germinal saw it as an adventure, but he also felt sorry as he boarded the boat, as it was the first time he had seen his father cry. The children were excited to be on the boat. They were unaware what the boat journey represented, that they could be separated forever, as many were. Germinal considers himself lucky, despite the frequent separations from his family, not being able to see his brothers grow up and all of the experiences they were unable to share, he still considers himself lucky. He had to stay in La Rubiere, in a pretty country house. That’s where they were given vaccines, and the Quakers gave them decent food. The man Germinal knew as Frank came each weekend to spend time with them. From there, there were two groups of children on the boat, and forty children altogether who went to the United States. Germinal is not sure if all children who were given permission to go to the United States ended up going, or whether they were selected to go to La Rubiere. The children all had to be gathered together, and ultimately the forty of them from La Rubiere didn’t all make the journey together but rather in two groups. There were 23 in the first group, and Germinal went in the second group. In the first group were his friends Felipe and Corsino, but Germinal travelled with the group of 17. The first group went via Casablanca, but Germinal went from Marseilles to Oran in Algeria. They spent three days and three nights on the train, through the Sahara in the middle of July. They didn’t have any water, and you could imagine the toilets. On the train, the seats were made of wood and had vertical backs. Normally they hold four or six people, but all seventeen of them were sitting on two of these seats. The ones who got to sit on the floor were considered the lucky ones. Germinal had a stamp collection, and he traded them for space to sleep on the floor, because that was where there was room to stretch. At about three o’clock in the morning they reached the Algeria-Morocco border. They needed to change trains. Germinal remembers that they were accompanied by a couple, who he thinks could have been Jewish. They weren’t necessarily Quakers. Germinal recalls that the Quakers were never imposing: all they wanted was for the children to be well. As stateless children, Germinal feels they owe a lot to these people and to humanity in general. Germinal remembers that when the train arrived in a Moroccan town, the only real building was the train station and perhaps the city hall, but the rest were like tents. The people who lived in them were nomads who travelled with their herds. When the train pulled into the station, Germinal remembers that a lot of sellers appeared with smuggled cigarettes, fresh figs, and a goat for milking. They waited until the train came in and then tried to sell their goods, and that’s how they lived. Eventually they arrived in Casablanca, and Germinal thinks they were taken to a hospital. He recalls there being a lot of beds, and that there were over seventy Jewish children there.

[1:10.00 – 1: 20.00] Arriving in the United States

All of the children there were between eight and 14 years old. They didn’t take anyone older than 14, because at that age you were old enough to fight. Germinal remembers that the youngest was a child called Eusebio Girón who was about six or seven years old. Germinal himself was around eleven or twelve years old. He remembers making fun of the Jewish children when they were praying. Germinal is unsure how long they stayed in Casablanca, but the boat that came for them was a Portuguese vessel called Nyassa, named after a colony in Mozambique. Portugal was a neutral country and not involved in the war, and the ship’s route was from Lisbon to Casablanca, and from there to Bermuda and on to Baltimore. It was already carrying a lot of Jewish children when it left Lisbon. When they boarded a boat, he and a friend – possibly Corsino - made a deal with a black man who worked in the kitchen, called Manuel. They peeled potatoes, and in return got given first-class food. They spent four or five hours a day peeling potatoes. Germinal remembers the sweets, how when the pastry chef left the room they would eat the cakes he had made. In addition to children, there were also Belgian and German refugees on the boat, and lots of Dutch Jews. Germinal remembers making friends with some of the Jewish children and singing Jewish songs without understanding the lyrics. He spoke to them in French, because that was the common language. He doesn’t remember much about the couple who accompanied them. Felipe told him that there were three people who accompanied them, but Germinal only remembers and young man and woman, who would have been in their thirties. The boat went much slower than boats today, and Germinal remembers the boat crossed paths with an English destroyer in the middle of the ocean, but it was on their side. The boat docked for five days in the Bermuda islands, and they disembarked. They still lived on the boat but they were allowed out. The governor of Bermuda was English and so he put on a party for the group, as he had done with the first group that had gone over. He remembers having a great time at the party, and that some of the women were interested in the British soldiers who were looking after the boat, who were wearing Bermuda style shorts. From Bermuda they went on to Baltimore, but they didn’t get the same reception there as the first group had received. The first group had docked in New York, and they were given a great reception, with the Red Cross there. Germinal thinks it’s because they were a smaller group. The larger group also was met by a famous Spaniard called Eduardo Cuyero, which the smaller group didn’t have. But afterwards they were taken to New York, to the Bronx where there was a philanthropic foundation called the Gold Foundation. He remembers there being a lot of parks and a zoo. They had already been publicising the fact that European children were coming over, to see if anyone wanted to offer their help and take in children. Corsino was one of the first children to be placed with a family, and he sent Germinal a photo of him on a horse which made Germinal jealous.

The interviewer asks Germinal what his first impressions of the United States were, and what drew his attention. He recalls that Chesapeake Bay was an enormous shipyard when he was there, full of damaged warships. There was one huge boat that had a hole in one of its sides, so large that it looked like a truck had driven through the side of it, but they were mending it. All of the main structure of the boat had been pulverised, but they were still trying to put it back together, which he found incredible. Germinal also remembers the food, particularly the ice cream. He also remembers the train journey to New York, where they passed through Philadelphia, which he says was Quaker central. They stayed for a while in Ellis Island, which was an island off the port of New York. All immigrants had to pass through there, it was like quarantine to see if you had any illnesses. He recalls going to a place where there were six or seven doctors, and he needed to go to one after the other. It was after that that they were taken to the Gold Foundation. With the Gold Foundation he learnt English, and they had classes where they were taught about American life and tried to instil the children with an idea of the ‘American way’, for example, they were taught patriotic American songs. The Americans didn’t know if the children would be there for a short period of time or forever, so they wanted to try to shape the children and incorporate them into society whilst they were young. Germinal remembers singing a song with the proud line ‘I am American’, but it wasn’t something he was critical of. The teacher was called Mrs Love-Lloyd. She asked Germinal his name, but they called him German (with a French accent) because Germinal was considered to be a revolutionary, anarchist name. He kept his French name for a while, although they did begin to call him Jerry a little later. The Thatchers, who he stayed with, didn’t live far from the Canadian border, or from the Niagara Falls. It was a really pretty area with lots of lakes, mountains, and wide valleys, with lots of space for the dairy farm and a ranch.

[1:20.00 – 1: 30.00] Life with the American foster family

Winston Thatcher lived there with his little girl and wife, who were both called Doris. To one side of the property was a brick house that they called the Red House, which is where the grandmother, the baroness, lived. She had come from Germany, after the Gutenberg reign, as did many people of standing in places such as Russia. A lot of them went to Monaco, to Monte Carlo. Germinal knew the grandmother as ‘grand-mère’. This was an American woman who went to Europe and met a German baron, got married and had a daughter. They lived in Stuttgart and belonged to the noble classes. He used to have some photos of the family – she was a beautiful woman in her youth. When Germinal knew her she was in her fifties, which he considers to be still young, but with her black hair he thought she was really beautiful. He doesn’t have the photographs anymore, because when he was a child he didn’t think to keep them. He wondered why he was placed in a farm, and it turned out later that his father had asked for him to be put on a farm, with a protestant family is possible. Germinal isn’t sure why, since his father was an atheist. He thinks it might have been to annoy the clergy, and also because the people who work in the fields live best in times of war because there’s always something to eat. When he lived at the farm, Germinal also had to work, doing the milking or whatever it was that needed to be done. He never felt like one of their children though, there was always a difference. They loved him though, and the grandmother loved him most. Instead of living with the Thatchers in the Red House, he had to stay upstairs by himself. He got scared because he thought it was haunted. He’s been back since and it’s actually a really small place, but at the time it seemed enormous because he was only young and everything is relative at that age. When he was in the family home he always felt wanted, but he was always aware that he was the child they had taken in. At some times of year he had to get up at five o’clock in the morning, before the sun had risen, to do the milking. They did the milking and then put the milk in containers and put them in the spring water to regulate the temperature and keep it at 20 degrees. He did this with his foster father. He doesn’t like to call him his adoptive father because his father was alive and in France. It was different for children like Corsino who were orphans. Germinal was looked after and everything was done to ensure he was educated well. The grandmother used to read to him until he fell asleep at night. His daily routine consisted of getting up at around five o’clock in the morning, in winter he remembers it being really cold, and he had to milk the cows and feed the pigs and hens. He used to do this with Sophie, who was the grandmother’s maid. She had been brought over from Germany, and was like Doris’ nanny. There were others who worked there, who came and went. Germinal learnt how to milk the cows. He remembers there were cats that used to come at milking time to drink the milk. He had to pour the milk through a gauze to clean it, and then cover it, and used water from the well to cool it. It was so early in the morning that it was cool enough. Then at six or six thirty, a representative from the cooperative would come with a thermometer. In winter there was never a problem, but when spring came they wouldn’t accept it if it was more than 70 degrees Fahrenheit, or about 21 degrees Celsius. Now it’s all modern and electric, but it was quite a big job in those times. It was starting to change while Germinal was there. There was a bigger farm that was already using automatic equipment to milk cows. He finished his chores at around half past seven in the morning, and then he had to go and get changed because his clothing would smell like the stables because he’d also have been clearing manure. He’d then wash – although not so regularly in winter - and put on his school uniform, he would have breakfast, and then shortly before nine o’clock he would leave for school. He used to have Sophie’s strudels or homemade bread for breakfast, and then would eat lunch at school. There was a cafeteria where he could have a meal for a dollar. School finished at half past three. Germinal was the only Spanish child in the school, and he and a Canadian student were the only foreign students. When he started he was put into the sixth grade, and the school was mixed, unlike in France. He doesn’t know how, but he was accepted into the sixth grade. One of the first things he remembers is being made to take care of a doll, like he were a girl, and he hated it so he threw the doll on the floor. He had only just arrived and he had a machismo attitude, and the teacher told him that that was not how things worked in the United States. Germinal remembers that there were lots of differences, but it is where there were big contrasts that have stayed with him.

[1:30.00 – 1: 40.00] Life with the American Foster family (continued)

The interviewer asks when he learnt to speak English. Germinal thinks he started to learn in the Bronx. The day after they arrived in Baltimore was 31st July, his twelfth birthday. He recalls that the Nyassa, the vessel they had travelled on, was torpedoed on its way back to Lisbon even though it was neutral. At the Gold Foundation they had a classroom where they gave classes in English and taught songs in English. Until a man came to take him to the farm, and then he was at the farm until the war was over when he contacted his parents through the Red Cross, but they couldn’t come to the United States because the immigration waiting list was so long, so they went to Venezuela.

The interviewer directs the conversation back to Germinal’s time at the farm and his daily routine there, and prompts him to talk about what he did after school. He was invited out to do things a lot because he was considered to be a bit of an oddity, a bit eccentric. He went to lots of parties, and then in Junior High, when he was about fourteen, he asked a girl out with him to a bowling alley. He fitted in quite well, and was more or less American having recently arrived at the Thatchers’ house. The Thatchers invited some children from the area over to get to know him, to become friends with him and play with him, and it was those children who told him that his name sounded a bit too much like ‘German’. That was in the middle of the war, so they renamed him Jerry, and anglicised his second name so he was called ‘Jerry Lewis’. No one could even tell that he was Spanish until they got to know him. He was quite popular, although he had always been quite withdrawn. When he was living at the farm, he liked to go and make a cabin in the woods, go hunting. He had never been particularly sociable, but the fact that he stood out and was a bit different meant that he drew a lot of attention. Because of the friction between France and Spain, in France he experienced some discrimination, but never in the United States. He was always asked if he was a loyalist, but he didn’t know what it meant. He presumed it meant republican, so he would say that he thought he was.

When he was staying with the Thatchers, there was a really serious accident. There was a hill near a hangar, and also near a bus station, so there was a pipe running along the ground to the garage to where the buses used to refuel, and that was where they used to go with their skis and sledges. One night there was a lovely moon and the ground was covered in snow, and so Germinal’s friends, the ones who called him Jerry, suggested they go skiing. It was just after Christmas and he had been given a sledge, the biggest in the valley. His friends brought an extra person with them. They threw themselves down the hill once, and then went up to go again. The tube had leaked and was stuck, and Germinal remembers that the building cast a shadow over the tube. They all knew it was there, apart from the boy they had invited along with them, and none of them said anything to him about it, or told him to be careful. Germinal feels responsible for this, for inviting someone sledging with them and setting him off down the slope and causing a disaster. The boy’s life was ruined, he was in a really bad way. He went and stayed with the grandmother and then she got cancer.

The grandmother had lived in Montecarlo and studied in Switzerland. She was a daughter of German noble classes, involved in the Stuttgart Opera. She came from a family who owned a very large printing business in Stuttgart and had worked with Goethe. She found a lump in her breast and went to Rochester in Minnesota, because that was the best clinic for breast cancer in the United States. They operated and did everything they could, but in the end there was nothing they could do. During this time Germinal was in touch with his father. It was 1946 and the war had ended a year before. Before that his parents had known he was in the United States but didn’t know if he was alive or dead, and he knew nothing of them either. His parents were still in France and had had a daughter, Jacqueline. Germinal never knew Jacqueline because she died as a child. They lived in the countryside, on a farm. René and Jacqueline were playing on the farm when she fell into an irrigation canal and she was carried three kilometres away. His parents sent him a photograph of her, and of where she was buried. It was around this time that his parents saw that people were needed in Venezuela to work on the land, and his father immediately got a job.

[1:40.00 – 1: 50.00] Preparing to go to Venezuela

Immigration to Venezuela was organised in France. The Venezuelan government gave the option to republican Spaniards, although Germinal is unsure whether it was open for any Spanish people. Later, in 1952-53 there was an influx of other nationalities to Venezuela too, of Portuguese and Italians too, but this was towards the end of 1946. Germinal’s father got a job with ‘Acción Democrática’ (Democratic Action), which no longer exists. His job was as chief typographer at ‘Tipografía Vargas’ in Caracas. It was interesting because the man who owned it, Rudufiaga, who was an enormous man and Venezuelan but of Basque origin, turned out to be Germinal’s wife’s godfather. Since his parents couldn’t go to the United States, Germinal went to Venezuela. The Quakers organised it. Since the grandmother died during the last year he was in the United States, he had been staying with some of his teachers, the Wilers, who really loved him. They were Amercian. He stayed with them until it was time for him to go to Venezuela, and then he caught the train to New York where he was met by a woman from the Quakers. He then got a plane to Caracas in Venezuela in July of 1947. He had arrived when he was 11 and left when he was 17, so his father could hardly recognise him.

He returns to his routine when he lived with the grandmother. On some days at around four o’clock in the afternoon they would walk the seven dogs by the river and have an afternoon snack. One of the dogs belonged to Germinal, and was a present from the grandmother. When he turned 17 he bought himself a Winchester rifle and he killed a stag. It was almost a test to prove yourself a man in that part of America at that time. Germinal thinks farmers are quite interesting, how they don’t care for the city or for city people. Germinal considered himself a farmer: he would get on a horse and milk cows and do all the things farmers did. He and his grandmother went out regularly, not hunting, but for a walk by the river and to where the water would come up above his knees and they would jump from rock to rock. There were also a few dikes where they could go to swim. In spring, when the ice melted, the water became a torrent. Germinal had made a wooden shack against a tree at a place where the river forked and had made an island. In spring it all got carried away. When he had a little bit of money he used to go to the cinema in Hornel, a town about nine or ten miles away. He had a bike and was a boy scout. They sometimes had meetings on Thursdays from seven o’clock in the evening. He recalls that sometimes there were snowstorms where he couldn’t see a metre in front of him, but he would take his torch to get to the scouts meetings. He completely lost contact with other Spanish children, until about four years ago when he was back in Barcelona and someone called Teresa telephoned him from Asturias to get back in touch, over seventy years later. Germinal wanted to know how they had found him, and it was because he had an uncommon first name that they could find him in the phone book. They communicate through letter with his daughters, and so he hears news from them but likes to keep a little distance personally. It made him feel part of a group again, to be in contact with some of the other child exiles. Germinal had no photos of his childhood, because he had lost them all. Corsino had a few. Germinal shows the interviewer some of the photos – he more or less remembers the names of all the children. In one he appears with Eusebio and his brother Arsenio, who had travelled in the first group. Arsenio was Eusebio’s older brother, and their mother spoke with Germinal’s mother to see if Germinal could look out for the younger boy. Germinal recalls carrying Eusebio’s suitcase, as well as his own, and a folder where he kept his stamps and photos, and he accidentally left Eusebio. He remembers losing his folder after falling asleep in the train station in New York. Everyone was sleeping for hours, and the folder had gone. He didn’t have a single photo of his parents or of himself, and he had lost his stamp collection. So getting back in touch with the others years later was incredible. Germinal says that he experienced almost nothing compared to some of the others, like Felipe whose brother was shot. Germinal’s experiences are interesting, but nowhere near as tragic as what some of the other children went through.

[1:50.00 – 2: 00.00] Life in Venezuela and Finishing Junior High

After fifteen days of being in Venezuela, Germinal began to work. His mother knew a woman who was the secretory for the director of Panamerican World Airways, and she had told her that she had a son who was living in America who spoke French and English, etcetera. Germinal says it was incredible what his mother could do. He started off on a low salary, and he stayed in the job for two years. In 1950 he recalls telling his father that he wanted to finish his high school diploma, that he wanted to study engineering and build bridges, and his father said go ahead. Germinal moved to the United States again. He needed to complete a further two years of education to finish the qualification, but he achieved it between January and June. His teachers helped him a lot to do it so quickly. He graduated and almost got a grant to study at Cornell University, which was one of the best places to study agriculture. He went to speak with the dean of the faculty, and they had made him a member of one of the fraternities, which were really difficult to get into. But one day in May, before he was due to start at Cornell University in the September, he received a postcard from Valparaíso in Chile. It was from his father, telling him that the family were in Valparaíso but moving to Argentina. He hadn’t known anything about it, but they had decided to go to Argentina because that’s where his aunt Maria, her husband and Germinal’s cousin were. Germinal was not sure what to do. He chose to join the air force and moved to Korea. He still had Spanish nationality, but he had lived in America and he convinced them that he was North American. It was a moment where he wanted North American nationality, which was easy to obtain after serving in the army, but he also wanted to be with his family. He faced a dilemma. His family were moving to Argentina to be with his aunt, his mother’s older sister, in the outskirts of Buenos Aires. He worked for the summer, from six o’clock in the evening until six o’clock in the morning, working in a frozen vegetable factory, dealing mostly with peas. The harvest was short and lasted ten or fifteen days, and trucks would come in with the peas still in their pods. They were put in huge centrifuges, wheels that would spin really quickly and had lots of little gaps. The peas came out of the gaps, but they also used the waste material – nothing was wasted. They would work for fourteen or sixteen hours a day, and had a cellar below the factory where they could go to sleep for a few hours. Because the harvest was so short, they had to make the most of the time to work. That was between two towns called Alfred and Almount, near where he had lived previously with the Wilers and with the Thatchers. The school where he studied was called the Alfred-Almount Central School, and had mechanics and electronics workshops, facilities for sewing and home economics. He lived with the Wilers again. They always said ‘Jerry is our boy’, and treated him as their child. They loved him a lot, and he loved them too. He made a vegetable garden for them, using what he learnt about food in Europe. He used a string so that he would plant everything in a straight line. He remembers planting radishes, and a bit of everything.

The interviewer asks if they can jump back in time a little to 1947 when Germinal was reunited with his parents again in Venezuela. It had been almost six years since he had last seen them. In the airport, in those days they opened up suitcases, and Germinal had brought with him his .22 rifle because he thought everywhere was like the United States, where everyone had a rifle. He didn’t even try to hide it, so it was confiscated which delayed him even more. They told him it would be taken to the Ministry of Defence, but he thinks it was a lie and that someone there kept it, so it was stolen. It took some time while they went through his suitcase. Then he saw a man standing looking at him, and Germinal knew it was his father, even though he looked a little shorter than he remembered him to be. Germinal said, ‘you’re my father, aren’t you?’, and his father went crazy. He had bought a watch for Germinal, although he was using it at the time, and he took it straight off his wrist and put it on Germinal’s wrist. Caracas was 1900m above sea level, and the airport was at sea level, so they had to walk up into Caracas. Germinal remembers that the weather was really good, really hot. His family lived in a small apartment in the Caracas valley, with a balcony and a tiny kitchen. Germinal estimates it would have been about 20msq. Everyone slept in one room. René was there, but Germinal’s other sibling hadn’t been born by this stage. René was six years old. His mother was shouting across the neighbourhood about her American son. There he made friends with other Spanish refugees – there were people from everywhere in Spain, from Asturias and the Basque country, all of around Germinal’s age. There were also a few Mexicans who were living in Venezuela. He recalls two Mexican brothers aged around 17 or 18 and their uncle, who was also young. Germinal used to catch a bus and go to play football with them on Sunday mornings. He considers these friends to be friends for life.

[2:00.00 – 2: 10.00] Venezuela to Argentina

Everything in Venezuela seemed wonderful to him. Caracas was known as the city of red roofs. They were all single floor or two storey houses with red tile roofs, and lots of vegetation. Back then, 150,000 people lived in Caracas, compared to now when there are over 3million. He used to go to the rustic supermarket in the city with his mother before he found a job, which didn’t take him long. He loved the city, and thought it was beautiful. The Venezuelan way of life is very caring, hospitable and generous. Germinal never experienced any problems and never felt like a foreigner there. There was a short time when some people referred to foreigners as ‘misiu’ (believed to be taken from the French ‘monseiur’ and used to describe Westerners), so there was a little discrimination, but generally Germinal felt that he was treated well. He started working for Pan American Airways and made Spanish and Venezuelan friends, but he used to socialise with different friends outside of work. One of the most influential people at work was a Polish man called Martin Desó. There was also a Spanish count called Hugo de Silva, and Frank Usmett, an Italian duke. Everyone was nobility, because the war had just ended and Pan American Airways needed people who spoke languages proficiently. Germinal started working in the booking office, on the phones. He had to fill in a little card with the passenger’s name and book them onto the flight, but he remembers that there were lots of problems with the system and it was very old fashioned. He then moved to the freight department, which he found interesting. He learnt all about international trade. For a time he was in charge of aerial exports, which was quite a small area. It mainly included exhibits, bodies for repatriation, spare parts and more urgent things like medicines. They started exporting Venezuelan orchids, which Germinal thought were beautiful. Now everyone has them, but at the time it seemed a shame for the government to allow it. The orchids were in test tubes and sealed with rubber so that the water wouldn’t leak and to make sure they lasted until they reached Chicago or Paris or wherever they were headed in the world, and then in a matter of hours they would be in the florist. There would also be lots and lots of wicker baskets being sent out on aeroplanes, and it was Germinal’s job to dispatch them. He had to be in touch with people, with the producers and the distributors, and that was the part of the job he really enjoyed. It was while he was in that role that he decided he wanted to return to the United States to study. It would have been more complicated to stay in Venezuela to study, but in the United States he knew he could study and work. He worked in a café and cleaned trays to get by. His parents were happy to support and help him to go back to education in the United States because he had worked since he had arrived in Venezuela. He later was reunited with them in Argentina, in a seaside resort called Mar del Plata, 400km from the south. They bought an old little hotel called ‘El Hotel Pacífico’, and when Germinal went to visit them they were knocking down the front part, the part that looked onto the street – they knocked down almost half of the hotel. Not all of the rooms had been ensuite, so they were making more bathrooms. It was on Bolívar Street, and they called it ‘Hotel Caracas’. One day the Venezuelan ambassador’s son came to visit. It became a bit of a meeting place for Venezuelans in Mar del Plata.

Germinal realises he has not mentioned that in this time, when they were still living in Caracas, his younger sister Olga was born. Olga was born in March of 1949. She now lives in Tierra de Fuego with her husband, who is a doctor, and Germinal’s nephew.

The interviewer wants to clarify dates. Germinal went to the United States to study from January 1951 until June of the same year, when he graduated. He then went to Mar del Plata, a little after Evita died. It was the Peronist era, and Germinal worked in the hotel. There he worked like a slave for the season, which lasted from November until April, which is the opposite to in the United States. There was no chance to rest, and once some people came and wanted to stay, but there was no room, so they put mattresses in the dining room. Germinal started working at around midday and worked until three or four o’clock in the morning, when the casino closed and he had finished all of the admin work. Germinal’s mother had the job of a maid, making all of the beds, and his father looked after the kitchen. The first year they made a loss. Germinal explains that his father was the backbone of the family, but his mother was the motor. After Olga was born, Germinal’s mother said to his father that she wanted to open their own business, a restaurant or something similar. His father was concerned that they didn’t have the money. They had a family friend called Barea, who was a printer like Germinal’s father, and Spanish. He lent Germinal’s father some money, and Germinal’s father then had some money, but not enough, so they bought a small restaurant in Caracas, on the corner of Santa Bárbara.

[2:10.00 – 2: 20.00]

In Caracas there were no street names, just names of street corners. Germinal says that there are still places in the old part of Caracas where it is still like this. Their restaurant was between Maturín and Santa Bárbara. When it came to sleeping, the family would move one of the tables, and underneath was the door to a cellar. Germinal recalls that there were rats, and that is where he and René slept in one bed. Olga hadn’t been born at this stage, but his mother was pregnant with her. His parents worked flat out, and Germinal carried on working for Pan American Airways. When he got paid he kept a little aside to be able to go to the cinema, but the rest of it went to his mother. That was just the way it was. They had a little money and the guesthouse. In the end they had three boarding houses, and Italians, Portuguese and Spanish all stayed there. They were immigrants that had come over to work. Germinal’s family gave them somewhere to cook their spaghetti and wash, and they paid silly money for it, not at all relative, but that’s how they could make money. That’s when Germinal told his father he wanted to leave. Then Olga was born. Germinal has lost the photos like he lost the other photos. She called him ‘Tetenai’ – ‘tete’ meaning ‘brother’ and ‘nai’ from ‘Germinal’, and she carried on calling him that, and still does even though she’s in her fifties. That’s when Germinal left for the United States and his parents moved to Argentina. They didn’t own the restaurant and the guest houses all at the same time. First they owned the restaurant, which Barea lent his parents the money for. The owner of the guesthouse in the Plaza de España that the family rented had a French owner who tricked Germinal’s family because he had known for a number of months that they were going to knock the buildings down but hadn’t said anything to the family, so they had to leave. They didn’t have enough money to buy their own property. Then Germinal went to the United States and his parents went to Argentina, and then Germinal went to work in Argentina. He tried to go to the National University of La Plata, that was called the Eva Perón University at the time, but he had no legal proof of his grades. The university recognised that he was good at maths, very good at chemistry, that he had a good understanding of Argentinian society and literature – four or five subjects which was all great, but they couldn’t accept any of it because none of it was authenticated. He should have gone to an Argentine embassy in the United States, but he didn’t know that that was what he had to do. He sent the papers off and waited for months, and in the meantime he prepared for the other classes. He used to go in really early to see a professor of Argentine studies. He was still working at this time, although not in the winter. In winter people came to play in the casino, and they didn’t really need any staff because his mother had a woman who helped her to make the beds. The staff came in during the peak season. They even had singing waiters in peak season. All kinds of people stayed at the hotel, middle class working people and professionals mostly. But they also had some high class guests, such as a woman from Seville, Mrs Carmen, who owned an Andalusian ballet and flamenco school, who had been famous in her time. She was around seventy years old. It happened to be that she had a student called Margarita Morales who was very advanced and danced almost to a professional level. They were clients at the hotel, and she became good friends with Germinal’s mother. They didn’t have much reason to be there other than to see Germinal and his family, and Mrs Carmen and his mother wanted Germinal and Margarita to become boyfriend and girlfriend. He used to take her to the cinema, and says he could have behaved better. She once told him that he looked interesting in profile, but it was because he never looked at her. She was attractive but he didn’t like her. Time passed, and he went to visit Mrs Carmen in Buenos Aires, and Margarita, before going the 400km on to Mar del Plata, because Buenos Aires was the airport he had to fly to. When he got there, Mrs Carmen’s old secretary was there, and she told him that Mrs Carmen had died, but that Margarita was working at the theatre in Corrientes Street and she had changed a lot. Germinal went to the theatre at night, and everyone there was male. Most people sat in the front rows, but he sat back a little, thinking it was pornography and half ashamed to be there. Margarita came out wearing a short skirt and carrying a little basket of flowers and singing. He waited for her, and as the lights were off she didn’t realise until the end that he was there. It took a while for her to get ready afterwards, as she needed to wash, but afterwards he walked her back to where she lived. She told him she was with a man from Uruguay because he looked after her and she needed the money, and that the following morning she would be leaving early for Cordoba as she had a contract there, singing in a cabaret. He no longer recognised her as Margarita, but now as Margo, like the line in the tango ‘ya no sos mi Margarita, ahora te llamas Margó’ (You’re not my Margarita, now you call yourself Margo). Germinal didn’t like it. He still felt attracted to her, but she was a really educated woman, very clever and skilful. She had a spark, a way with people and got involved with everyone, and Germinal was not like that. Germinal thought people would say ‘look at that idiot with a girl like that’, and he didn’t like it because she didn’t fit with who he was. She was much more open and lovely to everyone, and he was more introverted.