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Miren's Story: The Evacuation of a Child Refugee from the Basque Country in 1937

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* This article is dedicated to the memory of Miren Sesumaga Uribe-Echevarría (de) Alonso and her family in the United States and in Euskadi.

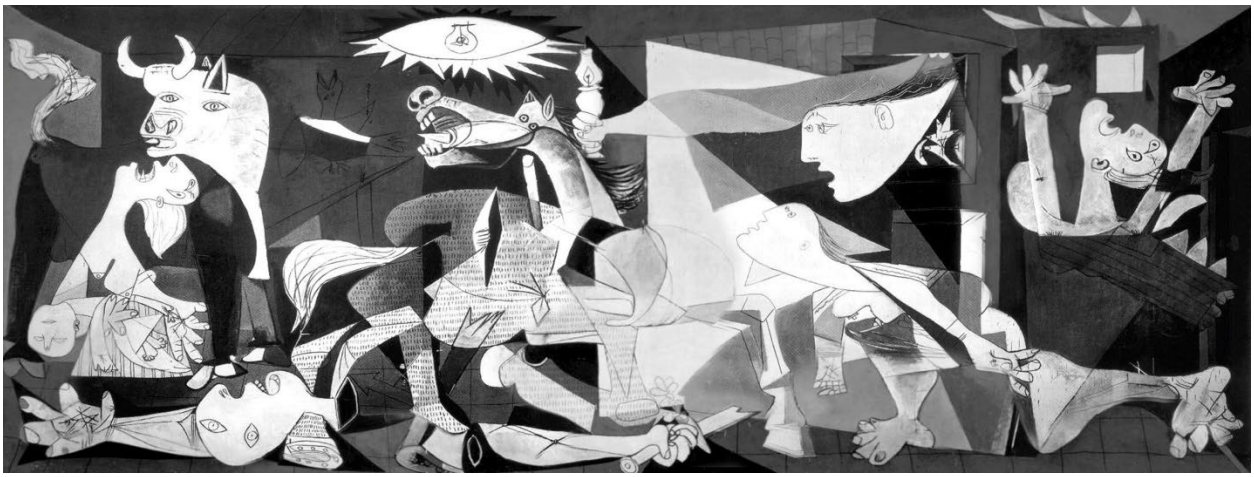

Image of Pablo Picasso's "Guernica" today on display in Madrid, Spain

While many people are familiar with Picasso's Guernica[1] and a few people know something about the International Brigades[2] that fought fascism in Spain, many aspects of the Spanish Civil War remain unknown to most people. An important, although far well less known, event of that war is the evacuation of Basque children by the Basque government to other countries[3] in order to save the children from violence, starvation, and death caused primarily by the aerial bombardment of the Basque Country[4]. "Parents do not readily separate themselves from their children at moments of acute danger or abandon them to the mercies of strangers in a foreign land unless they have cause to feel desperate."[5] This was a massive evacuation of children without their parents, who became refugees in order to be safe from the dangers of war in the modern era. In total, twenty-nine thousand

[1] Picasso painted *Guernica* in 1937 for the Paris International Exposition. The painting starkly captures the horror of the bombing of the Basque market town and ancient seat of government of the Basque people on April 26, 1937. Francisco Franco's Nationalist army allowed the German Condor Legion to bomb the town on market day and it is estimated that hundreds of defenseless civilians were killed in a three-hour span (Thomas, p. 419; Beevor, p. 232).

[2] The International Brigades were made up of soldiers from other countries who came to Spain to defend the legally elected Republican government from fascism. They fought from 1936-1938.

[3] Bell (2007) p. 37 identifies the points of departure for the evacuations by sea from the province of Vizcaya as Santurtzi, Portugalete, Barracaldo, Bermeo, and Guernica. Additionally, in Legarreta (1984), Appendix III (pp. 338-342) provides a detailed list of all embarkations from Bilbao, Santander, and Asturias from May 5 to August 25, 1937.

[4] The vast majority of evacuees from Spain during the Spanish Civil War were women and children, primarily from the Basque Country but also from Madrid. See Legarreta (1984) pp. 34-50 for a detailed explanation of the evacuation of women, children, and the elderly from the Basque Country. This article focuses on the evacuation of Basque children to England in May 1937.

[5] Bell (2007) p. 2

children were evacuated from the Basque Country to Belgium, England, France, Russia, Switzerland, and Mexico. Of these, almost four thousand children went to England.[6]

Eyewitnesses to the evacuation to England such as Yvonne Cloud, Leah Manning, and Richard Ellis[7] have published important firsthand accounts of the children's experiences. In addition, scholars such as Gregorio Arrién, Jesús Alonso Carballés, Dorothy Legarreta, Peter Anderson, and Adrian Bell have made significant contributions to this aspect of the Spanish Civil War. However, there is still work to be done. Historian James Cable wrote that the history of the evacuation concerns children and "cannot be completed without some indication of the repercussions on their adult lives. Did they or did they not have reason to be grateful for the efforts made on their account, if not always on their behalf?"[8]

While there are many thumbnail sketches and even some multi-paragraph first-hand accounts[9] of the child evacuees' experiences in England, to date there are almost no in-depth, deep studies of these particular children and their experience as refugees of war. Most of the scholarship on the Basque child refugees examines the experiences of those children en masse and largely focuses on those who were either repatriated (Alonso Carballés) or who stayed in the host country (Bell). Almost nothing has been written about the few Basque children whose lives ultimately took them to the United States.

The purpose of this article is to contribute a partial answer to Cable's call for continued study of this event and the ways it has affected the lives of those involved. It seeks to contribute to the scholarship about this particular aspect of the Spanish Civil War by presenting an in-depth investigation and report of the experience of one particular child refugee, Miren Alonso. She, along with her younger brother Fidel, was a child refugee from the Basque Country to England, one of almost 4,000 children evacuated to safety in May 1937. Her story eventually connects to that of Mark (Moisés) Alonso, another child refugee evacuated from Bilbao to England with his two brothers, who lived in the same *colonia* in East Sussex with Miren and Fidel. Separated at the end of the two and a half years when Miren and Fidel returned to Spain and Mark remained in England, Mark and Miren began

[6] Legarreta (1984) p. 50.
[7] Yvonne Cloud was a British writer and political activist who visited the camp near Southampton where the Basque children were first housed. Leah Manning was a British politician and activist who went to Bilbao to assist with the evacuation of the Basque children to England in 1937. Dr. Richard Ellis was one of two medical doctors sent to Bilbao to conduct pre-departure medical examinations of the children embarking for England.
[8] Cable (1979) p. 170.
[9] Natalia Benjamin, one of the founders of the Basque Children of '37 Association UK and herself the daughter of one of the *maestras* (teachers) who traveled with the children in May 1937, edited *Recuerdos* (2007) and *Memorias* (2012). These two volumes contain short summaries (ranging in length from a paragraph to several pages) of the experiences, narrated firsthand, by some of the adult *niños* or children who were evacuated to England from Bilbao or their children. There is a summary from Miren and Mark in *Memorias* (pp. 91-94). Domingo Eizaguirre's *Corazón de Cartón* 'Cardboard Heart' also records testimonies from twenty adults who as children were part of the group evacuated to England.

writing letters to each other and fourteen years after they last saw each other, and seventeen years after they met, the two were married. Unlike the majority of the *niños*[10] evacuated to England, whose lives were lived in either Spain or in some cases England, Mark and Miren's journey took them to the United States, where they lived and raised six children.

Miren's experience has been extraordinarily well documented and preserved with hours of taped interviews with her[11] and her husband Mark (Moisés), letters, photographs, newspaper articles, and a family memoir written by Mark's father, Narciso Moragrega. Mr. Moragrega, who would not see his youngest or middle sons for thirteen and seventeen years respectively, wrote an account for his sons of their life and family before, during and after the Spanish Civil War. The memoir is full of specific dates and events, as well as first-hand, eyewitness experiences. In an extraordinary turn of events, the first chapter of Yvonne Cloud's 1937 book *The Basque Children in England* is a collection of letters sent by Narciso Moragrega to his three sons in the North Stoneham camp in southern England[12]. In addition, there are multiple, extended interviews with both Miren and Mark about their experience as child refugees from Spain, in addition to letters, photographs, official documents and papers[13]. This is Miren's story.

Before the Spanish Civil War

Miren Sesumaga Uribe-Echevarría was born on June 29, 1926 in Sestao, a small town on the outskirts of Bilbao, in Euzkadi[14] or the Basque Country. It can be helpful to put the year 1926 into context by highlighting the births of well-known people and events that took place in the same year. Both Queen Elizabeth II and Carmen Franco (the dictator's daughter) were born in 1926. It is the year *Winnie-the-Pooh* was published by A.A. Milne. In

[10] The Basque children who were evacuated to England in May 1937 are referred to as *niños* 'children'.

[11] I (the author of the article) met Miren Alonso in 2000 when her son John Alonso learned that I was a Spanish professor and insisted that I interview her about her experience as a child refugee to England. I recorded a two-hour interview with Miren and later was given access to multiple interviews recorded with Miren and Mark by Susi Alonso, one of Miren's and Mark's daughters. The direct quotes attributed to Miren are taken from the interviews, as well as any paraphrases attributed to her.

[12] When the author Yvonne Cloud visited the North Stoneham Camp near Southampton, England, where the Basque children were temporarily housed in May 1937, camp officials introduced her to the Moragrega brothers, who then shared with her the letters their father had written. Two other authors, Dorothy Legarreta (1984, pp. 44-45) and Teresa Pamies (1977, pp. 109-111), also quote from Narciso Moragrega's letters.

[13] My deepest thanks go to Miren's daughter Susi Alonso, to Miren's niece Marina Sesumaga, and to Mike Anderson, historian in East Sussex, UK, for the volumes of information, documentation, papers, photographs, and help that they made available for the writing of this article. I would also like to thank Desiree Varga and the Bortz Library at Hampden-Sydney College for the invaluable assistance they provided in procuring articles and books related to this project.

[14] Euzkadi is the name for the Basque homeland in the Basque language Euskera.

addition, it was also the year that Florida was hit by the Great Miami Hurricane[15]. In 1926, Spain was governed by Primo de River, a dictator with close ties to the monarchy. There was a great and very unequal divide in quality of life for those who lived in Spain at this time. Life was relatively prosperous for the upper classes and the wealthy, while vast portions of the population lived at or below the poverty line, especially in the rural areas.[16]

This economic inequality and sharp division of social classes were just as common in Euzkadi as in the rest of Spain. Euzkadi includes four provinces in Spain (Guipúzcoa, Vizcaya, Alava, and Navarra) and three in France (Basse Navarre, Labourd, and Soule). While Alava and Navarra were more rural, in the nineteenth century, Guipúzcoa and Vizcaya experienced a high degree of industrialization with port cities such as Bilbao becoming sites of significant urbanization and economic growth as a result of iron mining, steel manufactories, and ship building.[17] Even so, the distribution of wealth in industrialized areas was heavily tilted in favor of the wealthy business owners and upper-classes.

Miren's father Anastasio came from a farming family and loved flowers and gardens. When Miren was very young, Anastasio worked as a gardener and chauffeur for a prosperous British industrialist named Eduardo Earle. Earle owned a metallurgical factory in Bilbao, named Eduardo K. L. Earle, which manufactured industrial equipment made from copper, bronze, aluminum, and alpaca silver.[18] Advertisements for the company from the 1930s offer copper and steel tubes, metal sheeting, moldings, and railing. The Earles were exceptionally wealthy. A photograph of Eduardo Earle's office in the 1940s, published in a special book celebrating the company's "Bodas de oro" or 50-year anniversary celebration, is revealing. We see a spacious, wood-paneled room with its own conference room, Oriental rug, enormous desk, chandeliers, and a large tiled fireplace.[19] On the outskirts of Lejona[20],

[15] In the unusual way that life often works, each of these people or events touch Miren's life in some way. Miren eventually lived in England for two and a half years, arriving soon after the coronation of Elizabeth II's father, King George VI. In England Miren lived just a few miles from the Hundred Acre Wood, featured in *Winnie-the-Pooh*. Much later in life Miren went to live in Florida, on Anna María Island. Carmen Franco, the dictator's daughter, lived a very privileged life, enjoying a high degree of comfort, safety and abundance of food which stands in marked contrast to the deprivation, violence, and separation from her family that Miren experienced.

[16] See Beevor (1982) pp. 6-10 for an excellent summary of the vast economic inequality that plagued the country.

[17] See Legarreta (1984) pp. 2-3 for an excellent summary of the history of the Basque Country's political and economic development.

[18] For a look at one of the company's advertisements from that time, see the following link: ppios 1900-cartel-siemens schuckert-bauunion-pr - Compra venta en todocoleccion

[19] The following link contains a digitized version of the booklet created for the company's fiftieth anniversary and includes a photograph of Earle's office: file: Eduardo K.L. Earle, fábrica de Lejona (Vizcaya) : bodas de oro, 26 de oct. 1898-26 de oct. 1948 (bizkaia.eus)

[20] Lejona (Leioa in Euskera, the name for the Basque language), is one of the municipal districts on the right bank of the river Nervión that eventually leads to the city of Bilbao.

the Earles had a beautiful, multi-storied home with gardens, flowers, and fruit trees. Earle had married a local woman, María Ángeles del Solar and they had five children, four girls and one boy.[21]

Anastasio and his family lived within walking distance of the Earle family home. Miren would often be invited to the Earle's children's parties because she was close in age to María, who was three years older. Miren even made her first communion in a dress borrowed from María. After Miren, came more siblings. There was José Mari who died as an infant. Then came Fidel, who was four years younger than Miren. The birth of her little brother Fernando, a year after Fidel was, and then three years later baby sister Olga. During these births, another infant son named Antonio, also died. For Anastasio, the education of his surviving children was a matter of great importance.

Miren described how impressed her father was with England because of Eduardo and the fact that Eduardo sent his children back to England to be educated. Anastasio also loved music and appreciated books, and placed a high value on British music and books. In his role as chauffeur, Anastasio took Mrs. Earle and her friends to the theatre, the opera, and different places in Bilbao frequented by the wealthy. But times were hard for the working class in Spain in the 1920s and Anastasio was one of hundreds of thousands of the Spanish working class who wanted a different Spain; a Spain not controlled by the wealthy, the elite, and the church but a Spain in which wealth and opportunity were more equally distributed. Constancia de la Mora, writing of her privileged aristocratic upbringing in Madrid in the first part of the twentieth century aptly described the great social, political, and economic divide in Spain at this time this way:

> Within the Spanish aristocracy there was a certain democracy –and beyond it none whatsoever. For no middle-class child walked on the Castellana[22]. No middle-class mother dared challenge the iron barrier between her small child and a de los Andes or de la Mora. Spain's comparatively tiny middle class stayed in its set place –and under it, smoldering in starvation and discontent, were the peasants and the workers, the feared, hated poor people.[23]

Socialist leaders such as Indalecio Prieto with his message of hope in a more democratic and egalitarian future won Anastasio's confidence and vote. When he was driving Mrs.

[21] See the following website for more information regarding the Earle's children and birthdates: http://www.euskalnet.net/laviana/gen_bascas/earle.html

[22] A major street in a wealthy section of Madrid where the children of the upper class walked with their nannies when de la Mora was a child in the early 1900s.

[23] de la Mora (1939) p. 7; For firsthand, graphic descriptions of the agonizing level of poverty in which the poor lived in Spain in the first third of the twentieth century see de la Mora pp. 67–70 and Orwell (1986) pp. 55- 56, 80-81, 133.

Earle and her friends to the opera or the theatre, and he overheard their conversations criticizing the socialists and describing how dangerous they were, he spoke openly to them about the injustices in Spain, and the difference in life between the small number of wealthy and the masses of working class and the poor.

Anastasio spoke in support of the Socialist party to such an extent that Mrs. Earle warned him not to continue to do so or he would lose his job with the family. It should not be surprising that the Earles were not in favor of a Republican Spain. An advertisement from a few years later in 1938 describes Earle's company as a *fábrica militarizada al servicio de España* 'a militarized factory in the service of Spain'. At the time the advertisement appears in 1938 Bilbao was already under the control of Franco's troops, which makes this a very public statement of Earle's political leanings.[24] Anastasio, however, saw how the rich lived, he saw the factory the Earles owned and all the things that they had, and he continued to speak in support of socialism and the benefits it would bring such as better housing and medical assistance for the working class and the poor, some of whom lived in extreme and abject poverty. Working conditions were so poor and housing at such an abjectly poor level, that it is estimated the life expectancy for the men working in the mines surrounding Bilbao was a shocking 19 years of age (Escudero and Pérez, 2010).

Anastasio's zeal for socialism and openness in speaking about it meant that he eventually lost his job as chauffeur and gardener to the Earles. When he lost his job as chauffeur, however, Mr. Earle[25] gave Anastasio a job in the factory. The family had to move from their much-loved home in the outskirts of Lejona, and at the same time, Miren's mother Presentación and one of her sisters opened a small restaurant to help support the family.

From 1923 to 1930, Spain was under a dictatorship, that of Primo de Rivera, which maintained close and supportive connections to the monarchy and the king Alfonso XIII. However, in 1931, when Miren was five years old, many people in Spain were ready for change. There were those, who like Anastasio, wanted to see a more equitable Spain, politically, socially, and economically. They were ready for significant educational reform as well, as many believed that the level of and unequal access to education provided by the Catholic Church was grossly inadequate.[26] They wanted a far better quality of life than they had. The country voted in a Republican government, a popular front made up of Republicans, socialists, Basque Nationalists, communists, and anarchists. Alfonso XIII abdicated the throne, and Spain, under the Constitution of 1931 entered a new phase in its politics and government, one that promised change from the old system favored by monarchists, the Catholic Church, wealthy landowners, and the traditional military.

[24] See this link for a photograph of the advertisement: https://www.todocoleccion.net/coleccionismo/ano-1938-guerra-civil-publicidad-eduardo-earle-fabrica-metales-lejona-bilbao~x161861906

[25] Despite their political differences, Eduardo respected Anastasio's work ethic and was apparently concerned for Anastasio and his family.

[26] See both the first part of Hugh Thomas' *The Spanish Civil War* (1961) titled "The Origins of the War" and Part One of Antony Beevor's *The Battle for Spain* (1982) titled "Old Spain and the Second Republic" for detailed and immensely readable explanations of the historical context that resulted in the legally elected Spanish Republic, the composition of the popular front, and their expectations for the Republic.

When the legally elected Spanish Republic took charge of the country, those who supported it were hopeful that the new government would bring substantive change to the masses of people who lived at or below the poverty level. There was increasing unrest and conflict in the country, however, especially after the results of the 1933 elections when the conservative party La Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas (CEDA) won a parliamentary majority, which for many heralded a distressing shift back to policies and decisions that pre-dated the Republic.[27] The resulting miners' strike in Asturias, which attempted to impose a more socialist form of government on that region, provoked a violent, destructive response from the Spanish government, which deeply fractured the country and the fledgling Republic.[28] These fractures ultimately led to the Spanish Civil War, which began on July 17, 1936, when the military, led by five generals, used the army to lead an uprising against the legally elected Spanish government.

As the *sublevados*[29] began their "conquest" of Spain, one of their tactics to win the war was to bomb civilians, in addition to attacks by means of artillery and infantry. In addition to the military, Franco also had the political and military support of Hitler in Nazi Germany and the fascist dictator Mussolini in Italy in the form of troops and weapons, including warships and warplanes.[30] Despite the fact that twenty-seven countries, including Great Britain, France, Germany, and Italy had signed a Non-Intervention Pact[31] on August 23, 1936, which declared that they would not provide aid to either the Republic or the *sublevados* in the Spanish Civil War, Germany and Italy blatantly broke this agreement.[32] The first bombing in Euzkadi was on August 28, 1936, at the town of Eibar in the Basque province of Guipuzcoa. The insurgents began to bomb Bilbao on September 15, 1936. The bombing of defenseless civilians by both the German Condor Legion and the Italian *Aviazione Legionaria* created a powerful type of psychological terror, leaving many different kinds of victims in its wake[33].

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[27] See Chapter III "Franco and the Second Republic, 1931-1933" and Chapter IV "Franco and the Second Republic, 1934-1936" from Paul Preston's *Franco: A Biography* (1994) for an excellent explanation of the disruption and conflict that arose in the country during the Republic.

[28] The Spanish government put two generals, one of whom was Franco, in charge of suppressing the rebellion in Asturias. The generals decided to send in their Moroccan troops, who committed many atrocities in their attack and ultimate suppression of the strike. Hugh Thomas(1961) provides a detailed explanation of the circumstances of the strike (pp. 79-85). Leah Manning's *What I Saw in Spain* (1935) provides a startling, very pro-Labour , firsthand account of the violence committed against the Asturian miners.

[29] The term *sublevados* means "rebels" or "insurgents" and commonly and appropriately used to describe the military revolt led by General Franco and four other generals against the constitutionally elected government.

[30] Preston (1994) pp. 214-215; Thomas (1961) pp. 214, 218

[31] The Non-Intervention Pact was an ill-fated attempt to prevent an intensification in the Spanish Civil War by outside countries providing help to a favored side.

[32] See pp. 3-4 in Bell (2009) for a more detailed explanation of the Non-Intervention Pact, as well as an explanation of the military aid given to the *sublevados* by Germany and Italy. Preston (1994) includes many specific details regarding Nazi aid to Franco (pp. 203 – 207). While the Soviets did send some military support to the Republicans, both Great Britain and France maintained a more neutral stance in this regard, defending their decision based on their signing the Non-Intervention Pact.

[33] See Bell (2009) pp. 13, 28, 35, 42-43 and Cloud (1937) pp. 34 and 41 for discussion, examples, and consequences of the psychological and violent, physical trauma that the children endured from the bombing.

In Euzkadi, the *sublevados* achieved relatively swift victories in Alava, Navarra, and finally, despite heroic fighting by the Republican troops and the International Brigades, Guipúzcoa fell to Franco's troops in September 1936.[34] Two significant events occurred at this time that were to have an impact on Euzkadi. The first was that in the war to gain total control of Spain, Franco's troops moved away from the Basque Country and focused on the siege of Madrid further south, resulting in a six-month decrease in fighting for the province of Vizcaya.[35] The second event is that in October 1936, the Spanish Republic granted Euzkadi regional autonomy which allowed the Basques to form their own government, have control over their finances, and make decisions independently of the Republican government.[36] José Antonio Aguirre was elected president of the newly formed Basque government and he and his government immediately went to work to protect Euzkadi and set up services for the refugees pouring into Vizcaya from Guipúzcoa.[37]

In January 1937, Franco ordered a naval blockade of a 150-mile stretch of northern Spain[38] that included Bilbao. Still focusing the majority of the rebel military efforts on the siege of Madrid, he wanted to prevent food ships from reaching the people in Bilbao and the surrounding area[39]. However, when the rebels faced setbacks by the Republicans and International Brigades to their siege of Madrid, Franco re-focused his attention again on the 150-mile stretch of northern Spain. The insurgents' attacks were launched by land, air, and sea[40]. The aerial bombardment, led by the Nazi Condor Legion and the Italian *Aviazione Legionaria* was to prove to be especially lethal.[41]

The bombing of the little town of Durango on March 31, 1937, signaled the insurgents' renewal of their war on Vizcaya. It was a vicious aerial assault. The planes arrived in the morning catching the townspeople by surprise[42]. Two-hundred and fifty people were killed in the attack, while attending mass or simply going about their regular activities. Over one hundred people died later of injuries sustained in the bombing. [43] Then on April 26, 1937, came the bombing of Guernica, which provoked Picasso's powerful and shocking painting. This attack so stunned the world that it is the event and image most known and first thought of when one thinks about the bombing of Euzkadi.

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[34] Both George Orwell (1986) and George Steer (1938), British journalists, provide riveting and detailed firsthand accounts of the battles against the rebels in Republican-held territories. Steer describes the battle for San Sebastián and Irún in Guipúzcoa in late summer 1936, while Orwell describes his experience fighting in Catalonia from December 1936 to June 1937.

[35] See Legarreta (1984) for a summary of events leading to this lull in the fighting in Vizcaya.

[36] Bell p. 3 and Legarreta p. 17

[37] Legarreta (1984) p. 18

[38] This 150-mile area that was held by the Republican troops at the time ranged from coastal Gijón in Asturias to a point just east of Bilbao in Vizcaya. See Bell (2007) p. 3 for a summary of these geographical positions.

[39] Cable (1979) p. 39 and Legarreta (1984) p. 23

[40] Bell (2009) p. 26

[41] Legarreta (1984) pp. 28-34

[42] See Legarreta (1984) p. 28 for several firsthand accounts of the bombing.

[43] Legarreta (1984) p. 28

The day began as a typical Monday, a market day, in this small town of 7,000. With peasants from the surrounding area arriving to go to market, it is estimated that there were 10,000 people that day in Guernica, the ancient seat of government for the Basque people.[44] The air assault began at 4:30 p.m. and lasted for three hours. As the planes passed over the town in successive waves, they dropped both explosive and incendiary bombs, destroying most of the town.[45]

"Eyewitnesses described the resulting scenes in terms of hell and the apocalypse. Whole families were buried in the ruins of their houses or crushed in the *refugios*; cattle and sheep, blazing with white phosphorus, ran crazily between the burning buildings until they died. Blackened humans staggered blindly through the flames, smoke and dust, while others scrabbled in the rubble, hoping to dig out friends and relatives."[46]

The German and Italian pilots methodically targeted and machine-gunned those who attempted to flee the town trying to find a safe place.[47] The Basque government estimated that over 1,600 people were killed in the attack while almost 900 were injured.[48] Yvonne Cloud recorded an interview with a young boy named Imanol from Guernica. He described how prior to April 26, the bells rang when the planes would pass over Guernica, simply flying over on their way to bomb Bilbao. However, that Monday Imanol remembered that Guernica was crowded with people and animals because it was market day when suddenly there were bombs and fire. He ran with his friend and his uncle to a factory. His uncle then suggested they run to the fields. Imanol continued:

> (the uncle) started off across the street. A plane swooped down and he fell on his side with blood spurting from his head. There was nothing to do and we were frightened, so we left him. Later we both ran out through the orchards and up to the hills where we sheltered under a tree. It wasn't much protection, but it saved our lives. The planes, five of them, circled round us for about twenty minutes on and off. We heard the machine-gun rattle, but they didn't hit us. We saw terrible things. One man near us had been hunting. He ran across to take shelter in a hut and we saw the planes kill both him and his dog. We saw a family of people we knew from our street run into a wood. There was the mother with two children and the old grandmother. The planes circled about the wood for a long time and at last frightened them out of it. They took shelter in a ditch. We saw the old grandmother cover up the little boy with her apron. The planes came low and killed them all in the ditch, except the little boy. He soon got up and began to wander across a field, crying. They got him too. It was terrible; we were both crying so much we could not speak. Everybody was

[44] Preston (1994) p. 243
[45] Thomas, (1961) p. 419; Beevor (1982) p. 232
[46] Beevor (1982) p. 233
[47] Preston (1994) p. 244; Beevor (1982) p. 232
[48] Thomas (1961) p. 419; Preston (1994) p. 244; Beevor (1982) p. 232;

> being killed, there were bodies all over the fields. We had to pick them up in baskets afterwards. A lot of them.[49]

The bombing of Guernica[50] acted as a catalyst, compelling governments from other countries to act on behalf of the Basque people. Moreover, Franco's attempt to blame the Republicans for the bombing only increased international support for the Republic and the Basque people.[51] The same day that Guernica was bombed, the Basque towns of Eibar, Gerrikaitz and Arbatzegi, Markina, Ziortza-Bolibar, Arratzu, Muxica, and Errigoiti were bombed as well.[52] This is important to know and understand, as it adds needed context and depth to the day we associate with the bombing of Guernica. There was not just one assault; there were multiple attacks. These bombings resulted in massive waves of refugees seeking refuge in safer places. However, Bilbao, a city already bursting at the seams with the addition of so many people fleeing the violence, was also the target of aerial bombardment.

The bombing of Bilbao by the German and Italian legions would begin at daybreak as the planes would come and go up to a dozen times a day[53]. Sirens would warn of the bombings and when their shrill, ear-piercing alarms sounded, citizens ran to the bomb shelters or even railway tunnels. Miren remembered hearing the sirens and running to the bomb shelter. She said:

> The bombs were terrible. My mother and I were almost killed because we went to the bomb shelter and there was not enough room for us there. Our *refugio* was in a factory close to where we lived and it was underground. So maybe you are sleeping early in the morning and you hear 'Wooooooo', one long one, and that means alert. So you have to start getting dressed, just in case, because it looks like some planes were coming.

Two blasts of the siren was an even more serious warning. It meant that the planes had been sighted. Miren continued:

> Three blasts meant 'Run, Run, Run'. The planes are overhead. "You'd run just as fast as you could. One morning my mother (who had a restaurant) said, 'Oh the children didn't have breakfast yet; I'm going to bring them something to have breakfast and

[49] Cloud (1937) p. 57
[50] George Steer (*London Times*, *New York Times* April 28, 1937) and Noel Monks (*Daily Express*, May 1, 1937) wrote detailed accounts of what they witnessed in Guernica. Monks was an eye-witness while Steer arrived hours after the bombing had taken place.
[51] Bell (2007) p. 7; Cable (1979) p. 100
[52] Irujo Ametzaga (2020)
[53] Bell (2007) p. 27

> some cookies.' We went into the *refugio* and here comes my mother behind us and this big bomb fell right in front of the place where the underground was and she remembers the wind, the warm wind that went around and everybody was saying, 'We knew something happened because we heard a noise'. And people were saying, 'Oh don't worry, nothing happened. It's very far away.' And my mother said, 'No, it just happened. It almost got me.' [54]

Richard Ellis, one of the two medical doctors sent to Spain to lead wellness checks of the children being evacuated to England, also paints a realistic picture of the grim set of circumstances faced by those living in Bilbao. Ellis writes that in spring 1937 on a visit to a hospital, which was short of critical supplies such as anesthesia, "a little boy of five was brought in from a neighbouring (sic) village with eight machine-gun wounds in his belly. He died a few minutes later."[55]

By the summer of 1937, the bombings in Bilbao were so frequent that many families stayed in the shelter most of the day. It is estimated that in one month alone there were one-hundred fifty-nine air raids by the rebels, with more than one hundred planes in action[56]. Life was not only disrupted but also extremely chaotic. Bell writes that "schools were closed; there was next to no public transport; families lived in overcrowded and makeshift accommodations; hotels had been converted into hostels and dining rooms for refugees and orphans, the old and the poor; strict food rationing was in force and still there was perpetual queuing for what little was available".[57] Carballés' black and white photographs of masses of people gathered to eat in *comedores sociales*[58], women and children waiting out the bombings in *refugios*[59], and families walking east towards safety carrying bundles of household goods offer stark reminders of just how chaotic and disruptive the bombings were to civilians and especially the vulnerable.[60] The impact of the bombings, violence, and death on the children cannot be underestimated.[61]

By mid-1937, the *sublevados* had almost entirely surrounded Bilbao by means of a blockade of the sea, by land, and by air.[62] With the stranglehold tightening, the Basque government

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[54] From an interview with Miren Alonso (MA). Not all of Miren's quotations are presented literally as recorded because of interruptions, pauses, or an occasional unintended phrasing. In the interviews Miren often uses the historic present, where she narrates a story from the past in the present tense. In some instances when quoting from the interviews, I have slightly rephrased the sentences so that they retain the original meaning but render a smoother, more comprehensible text for the reader.

[55] Cloud (1937) p. 20
[56] Legarreta (1984) p. 30
[57] Bell (2007) p. 26
[58] Lit. "social dining rooms" or places where refugees could go for free meals.
[59] A bomb shelter
[60] Bulletin No. 4 of the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief (March 19, 1937) online at Warwick University's digital archives has additional details on the brutal reality of the food shortage and resulting starvation in Bilbao.
[61] See "Warfare of Today: Bombing of Bilbao Suburb" in the *Belfast Telegraph*, May 24, 1937, for specific details of the bombing and the desperate nature of the situation in Bilbao.
[62] Bell (2007) p. 26

had begun to send evacuees abroad as early as March 1937. The first evacuation organized by the Basque government carried four-hundred fifty children and twelve teachers to France on March 20, 1937.[63] Four more trips carrying women and children to safety were made throughout May and June[64]. Many of these trips, including the voyage that would carry Basque children to Great Britain, were made aboard the Habana, previously a luxury liner carrying up to 400 passengers to New York from Spain.[65] The ship's original rooms and accommodations had been removed to make room for as many passengers as possible to be carried to safety[66].

Up to this point, the British government had been reluctant to accept any refugees because of the Non-Intervention Pact. However, the bombing of Guernica was the catalyst that finally moved Great Britain to agree to receive almost 4,000 Basque children in response to numerous requests by the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief as well as requests from the Basque government.[67] The British government originally agreed to receive 2,000 child evacuees. Daily radio broadcasts from Bilbao announced the May 21 evacuation to England. However, due to pressure from the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief (NJCSR), the British government finally agreed to take 4,000 Basque children. The NJCSR and its sub-committee The Basque Children's Committee (BCC) were required to find churches, groups, and individuals who could sponsor the children while in England. The British government would not contribute financially to the children's care, because of their participation in the Non-Intervention Agreement.[68]

Financial support for the children was raised by churches, trade unions, groups of citizens and even individuals. The British government agreed to accept children between the ages of five and fifteen and insisted that there be an equitable representation from all of the political parties, including the *franquistas*.[69] Before permission could be granted to join the group evacuating to England, each child was examined by a medical teams sent from England. Drs. Richard Ellis and Audrey Russell found that the majority of the children they examined were overall very healthy although many were suffering from the early effects of malnutrition. Ellis wrote:

> For many weeks the people have been living on beans, rice, cabbage, and 35 grammes a day of black bread. Owing to the evacuation of the surrounding farms and villages, eggs, meat, milk, and butter are almost unobtainable. There are small supplies of oranges and

[63] Legarreta (1984) p. 40
[64] Cable (1979) pp. 10-13, 115, 129-131, 136
[65] Benjamin and Kirkpatrick (n/d) p. 3
[66] Cloud (1937) p. 24; For a detailed description of the Habana, its history as a luxury ocean liner (including photographs), and its journeys to carry Basque children to safety in other countries, see Natalia Benajamin's and Cliff Patrick's article "The SS Habana: The Journey from Bilbao and Arrival in Great Britain " at the Basque Children of '37 website: The SS Habana: the journey from Bilbao and arrival in Great Britain (basquechildren.org).
[67] Cable (1979) p. 102
[68] Bell (2007) p. 8. See also p. 10 of this article for an explanation of the Non-Intervention Pact.
[69] The *franquistas* were those citizens who supported Franco and the insurgent or rebel troops. See pp. 108-114 in Cable (1979) for an explanation of the British Foreign Office's policies in these matters.

> olive oil, but only a minimal amount of fresh vegetables. There is no coal, and owing to the air raids, little opportunity for cooking. In many cases it is obvious that the women have starved themselves to provide for the children. . . Perhaps the most surprising feature of the examination was the good health of the group as a whole, in spite of the conditions of deprivation, anxiety, and overcrowding in which they had been living for many weeks.[70]

The Basque government called the children *expedicionarios*[71] and issued each a passport and a small cardboard hexagon stamped with an identification number. This was attached by string to the child's outer clothing. In addition to the children, the steam liner Habana was also to carry 96 teachers, 118 *señoritas* or helpers, and 15 priests.[72]

On Thursday, May 20 in the early evening, families took their children to the train station at Portugalete, where the children were transferred 600 at a time to the port at Santurtzi[73] where the Habana waited. Miren boarded the Habana with her six-year-old brother Fidel. Her five-year-old brother Fernando and two-year old sister Olga were too young to go on the ship to England and they would soon accompany their mother Presentación to France and then to Switzerland. One of Presentacion's last words to Miren was "Watch out for your little brother."

With Miren and Fidel were Pilar and Begoña Sabatel whose father was Anastasio's current employer. When Bilbao had begun its armed resistance to the *sublevados*, Anastasio had left his job at Earle's factory and had been hired as a chauffeur by Sr. Sabatel, a city official. When Anastasio learned that the Sabatel sisters were evacuating to England, he decided to send Miren and Fidel. He also wanted his children to have an English education, to be educated in the way that the Earle children were educated. He saw England as an opportunity not only for safety but for education and learning.[74]

Of the boarding of the Habana to go to Great Britain on May 20, 1937, Dr. Ellis wrote:

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[70] Ellis (1937) p. 1303

[71] "Those going on an expedition". The choice of name is telling. Instead of labeling the children "refugees", the term *expedicionarios* indicates a mission and purpose and bestows an agency on its bearers.

[72] See "Basque Children for Britain" in the *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, April 30, 1937, for an idea of how the arrival of the children was typically presented in the British press.

[73] Portugalete is one of the small towns west of Bilbao. It sits on the left bank of the Nervión River. Santurtzi is a port town to the immediate west of Portugalete and is situated on the *ría* or estuary into which the Nervión flows. The train station at Portugalete brought the children directly to Santurtzi, where the Habana was docked.

[74] Anastasio may not have realized that the Basque government had organized the sending of 96 *maestras* 'teachers' and 118 *señoritas* 'younger female assistants' so that the children would be able to continue their education and maintain their native language. This was the reason they were assigned to *colonias* 'colonies' in order to be able to live as a small community. Most of the evacuated children did not receive a British education. Miren reported very little formal learning when she attended a British school for a short period of time although she did absorb a great deal of information about British cultural norms and society on an informal level while in England.

> The children were taken down to the ship in trainloads of six hundred, and filtered down to every inch of accommodation in the ship. The partings from their parents made pitifully clear the overwhelming faith that the Basques have in England. Many of the fathers must have known they might not be alive to welcome their children back, and everyone that the future was utterly uncertain.[75]

Bilbao was being bombed as the children were boarding the ship. While the Habana itself was not hit, the danger was real and eleven children waiting to board were killed[76]. As a safety precaution the Habana immediately set sail from Santurtzi without the full number of waiting children to board. They left behind a group of children who then boarded the yacht Goizeko Izarra,[77] which was headed to France with a cargo of evacuees.[78] Because of the threat of attack from Nationalist destroyers[79] in the Bay of Biscay, when the Habana left the three-mile territorial limit and set sail on the high seas, she was met and accompanied by several British warships. These included the HMS ROYAL OAK and the HMS FEARLESS, the latter accompanying the Habana until it reached the Isle of Wight two days later[80].

The Habana's crew helped disperse and situate their passengers throughout the boat and fed the hungry children white rolls and sponge cake, but on the way through the Bay of Biscay there was a storm and most of the children became sea sick with vomiting and nausea. This resulted in a general mess all over the ship. Nieves Arranz, one of the *expedicionarias*, recalls: "The passage was really bad, with nausea and vomiting. Everyone wanted to go back, but it was impossible. The delicious smell of baked bread on the boat and the abundant food that they gave us, including hard boiled eggs with a purple color that I will never forget".[81]

Miren did not retain many memories about the boat but she did remember being seasick and throwing up "all the time." Eventually the storm ended and the discomfort of the seasickness eventually passed; the ship's crew cleaned the boat and in the morning many of the children were eating again, running around the ship and exploring.

Black and white photographs of the ship and its precious cargo show a ship designed for four hundred to five hundred[82] passengers, filled to over-capacity with children. The children stand shoulder to shoulder on the deck, some clutching bags or cases, others simply huddled and waiting. Aboard the Habana, Miren stayed in her group with her

[75] Cloud (1937) p. 24
[76] Benjamin and Kirkpatrick, p. 4
[77] In Basque *Goizeko Izarra* means "morning star."
[78] Benjamin and Kirkpatrick, p. 4
[79] The term Nationalist is used to refer to the rebel forces (*sublevados*) led by Franco during the Spanish Civil War.
[80] Bell (2007) p. 50
[81] Eizaguirre (1999) p. 35
[82] This number is cited in Dr. Maurice Williams' "The Arrival of the Basque Children at the Port of Southampton" in the *British Medical Journal*, June12, 1937.

teacher Carmen Merino, Pilar and Begoña Sabatel, and her little brother Fidel. Her mother had given her a small suitcase with two very pretty dresses that she had sewn for Miren. Pilar had brought a basket of lemons. There was so pitifully little that the children could bring with them. These few possessions were a reminder to them of their homes and families in Bilbao and for that reason very precious to them.

The Habana arrived in Southampton on the evening of Saturday, May 22, 1937, and the children disembarked the following morning after another medical check. This time the check showed that Miren had lice. She had never had lice before and never found out how she got it but she was separated from Fidel for treatment. Dr. H. C. Maurice Williams, one of the doctors conducting pre-disembarkation inspections that day, wrote:

> On completion of the examination each child was dressed by a health visitor and passed on in the queue to a sanitary inspector, who stamped the identification card attached to each child, indicating that he or she had been medically examined. In addition he also tied a coloured tape on the child's left wrist, which served as a code to destination. White tape indicated "clean," and allowed the child to proceed direct to camp; red tape indicated "verminous" and the wearer was sent to the Corporation baths for de-lousing.[83]

When Miren's treatment for delousing at the baths was finished, she finally arrived at North Stoneham camp. However, she was no longer in possession of her suitcase with her dresses or her little brother.

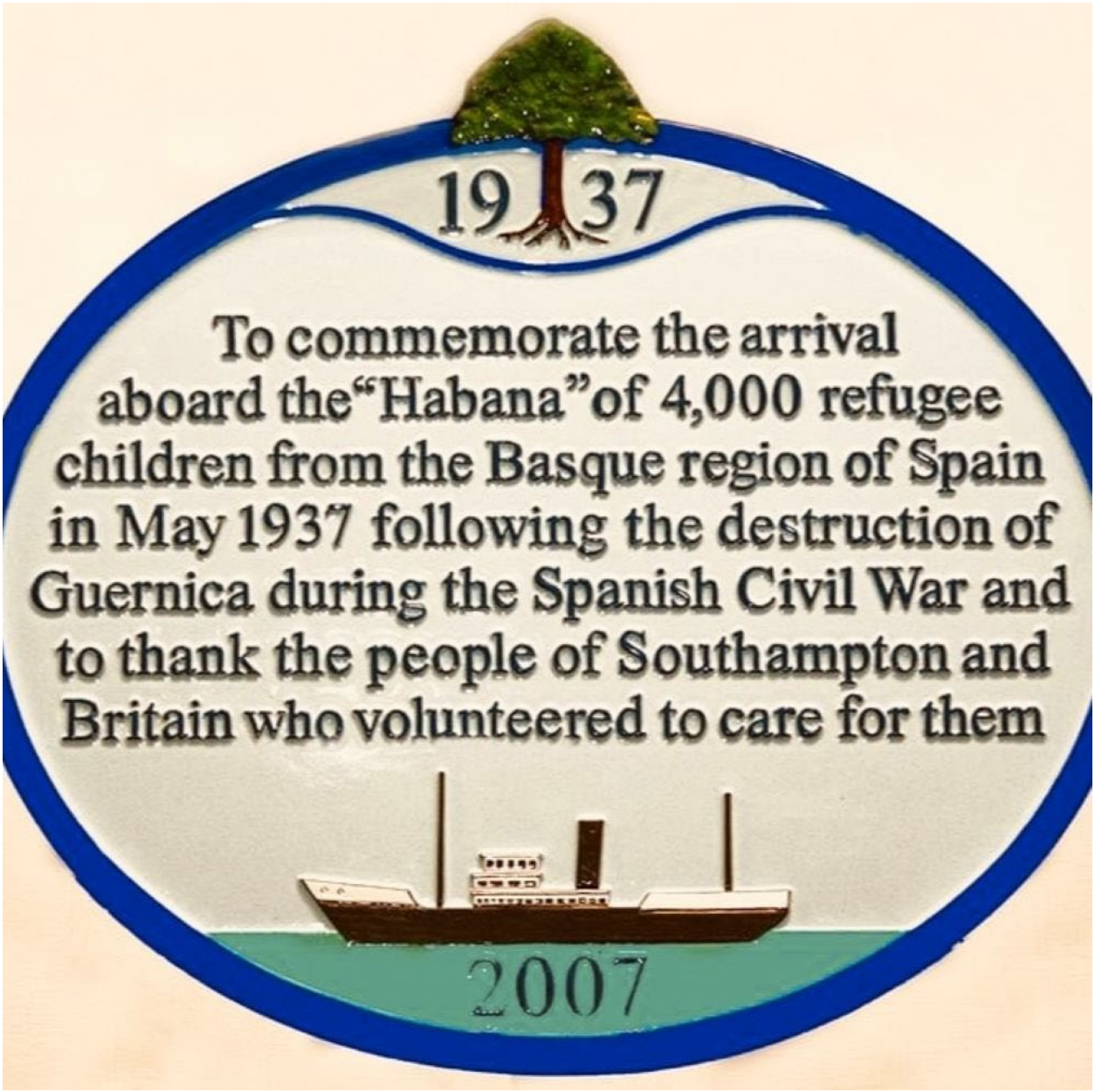
The camp at North Stoneham

In response to the immediate need to house, feed, and care for almost 4,000 children and their teachers and caretakers, the Basque Children's Committee (BCC)[84] had come up with a plan to create a large temporary camp near Southampton, where the children had disembarked. The 36-acre camp was constructed on land owned by a local farmer. In the week preceding the children's arrival, local citizens, college students, and Boy Scouts had worked a small miracle to set up 500 tents and build latrines for the 3,862 children and

[83] Williams (1937) p. 1210

[84] The Basque Children's Committee (BCC) was formed in 1937 as a sub-committee of the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief (NJCSR) which was formed at the end of 1936. The BCC was tasked with overseeing all aspects of the Basque children's arrival and stay in England, including raising money for the children's room and board, as well as overseeing their eventual repatriation or re-homing in England. For further explanation of a history of the formation of the NJCSR see p. 176 of Sheila Heatherington's *Katharine Atholl 1874-1960*. For further explanation of both committees and how they relate to each other see Legarreta (1984) pp. 100-103.

their caretakers.[85] There were larger tents for dining and medical stations and smaller tents where children in groups of eight slept under the care of a *maestra* 'teacher' or *señorita* "young woman'. [86]



Plaque in Southampton

Miren remembered her first reaction to seeing the camp. She said, "Southampton was a beautiful place. They had just finished celebrating the coronation of the king and queen of

[85] Cable (1979) p. 131
[86] See "The Basque Children's Camp", *Wessex News*, June 1, 1937, for a typical article regarding the arrival of the children and for more details about the camp.

England and they had all these cups that had a picture of the king. They were just beautiful."[87] The camp was so big and there were so many children, it took Miren three days to find Fidel. She undertook the task by herself as there was no one else to help her as busy as things were. She finally found her little brother sitting on the ground playing with a toy. He seemed content where he was and wasn't even looking for Miren. She was so relieved to find him. She asked him, "What are you doing?"

Bell writes, "This was the largest single contingent of child evacuees ever to enter this country. The enterprise had been undertaken in desperate haste, with limited resources, and against a back-drop of persistent government resistance".88 The difficulties of managing and running the camp were apparent during the first few days.89 It was challenging to organize the feeding of so many people, and also to keep the children entertained. To make matters worse there was a severe storm in the first week, something Miren also recalled over sixty years later. The challenges were eventually overcome by thoughtful, logical responses to the needs of the children by those in charge and the days began to take on a routine. The children would get up at 8:00 a.m. to music playing on the loudspeakers and the residents of each tent would clean and organize their area. In a few days, the teachers began to give open-air lessons to their students.[90]

The camp administrators eventually decided to divide the camp into sub-camps (Anarchist, Basque Nationalist, Communist, and Socialist) representing the political parties of the children's parents, information which had been documented when the children were being registered for evacuation.[91] The understanding by the camp administrators was that keeping the groups separate would help keep order in the camp, resulting in fewer possibilities for provocations and arguments. Miren, unsure of which political party she belonged to, had to keep asking Begoña's older sister Pilar, "What am I, Pilar?" Pilar would answer, "*Socialista*." Miren's four cousins, Carmen, Bea, Leonor, and Julián were also at the North Stoneham Camp but they belonged to the Basque Nationalist sub-camp and for this reason, Miren only saw them occasionally. Her four cousins were eventually transferred to a different *colonia* from the one she and Fidel were sent, and they lived in England for ten years before they were able to return to Spain.

Miren vividly recalled the big tent where the children ate their meals and remembered drinking milk out of porcelain cups from the Coronation of George VI just a few weeks before on May 12, 1937. She said:

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[87] From interview with Miren Alonso (MA).
[88] Bell (2007) p. 62
[89] For an idea of just one of the many challenges facing those overseeing the camp, See "Terror in Basque Children's Camp", *The Yorkshire Evening Post*, May 24, 1937, for a summary of the children's fearful reaction to being bombed again caused when a British squadron flew over the camp.
[90] Bell (2007) p. 63
[91] See Bell, p.63, Cloud, p. 36, and Legarreta p. 111 for further explanation of the division of the camp according to political affiliation.

> We had breakfast in this big tent. They call you, it's time to go and eat. Then we have lunch. We all went to this long, long, long table. And we had all the cups made for the Coronation. The King and the Queen were there, you know, these cups they are heavy. Did you see those? Well, I guess when, they had the Coronation, they must have had places where they got together and there were these dishes. We didn't have paper dishes like today; these dishes were heavy. And if you didn't feel well, you had what you called the *Enfermería*[92], where they have a place for you to get well. And it was very, very nice.[93]

The access to wholesome, delicious, plentiful food was an understandable source of delight and wonder to the children. Much work had gone into the planning of the menus and the kinds of food that would be served and the children were able to eat all they desired. Dr. Gibson writes that "a popular feature was the Horlick's tent and the children were allowed as much *leche malteada*[94] as they could drink each day".[95] Many children took the rolls and pieces of bread and hid them in their pillowcases because they wanted to save them to give to their families when they returned home. Yvonne Cloud wrote:

> Food is, of course, a matter of keen interest. The children's delight in English white bread was so great that many of them scraped off the butter and hid it in their palliasses[96], crammed as much of it as they could into their pockets and under their jackets (as was revealed in the course of Medical inspections), and generally behaved in accordance with the declaration of one little boy who said: 'I never knew there was so much white bread in the world. We are going to eat all of it!'[97]

Miren also recalled the morning routine of camp life and the prizes awarded for the cleanest tent:

> Every morning, this music would wake us up and it went (she hums), you know, this music, I will never forget it. And everybody started cleaning the place, because a nurse, and a doctor, they will make the rounds, coming around each place. About four people or five will come and you had to clean it all well, make it really pretty and whoever had the cleanest place around would win a prize, maybe candy or something like that. That's what they give you. They have a big intercom, you know, *altavoz*, that the whole camp can hear. And they would say *Atención, Atención,* you know in Spanish. *El premio*, *the primero, tanto* and Wheee! Everybody was so happy, also, whoever won the *premio*, you know. It was amazing. It was very

[92] The tent where sick children received medical care.
[93] From interview with Miren Alonso (MA).
[94] 'Malted milk.' Horlick's is a well-known British brand of the product.
[95] Gibson (1937) p. 1094
[96] Straw mattresses
[97] Cloud (1937) pp. 28-29 See also "Basque Children Hoarding Bread", *Dundee Courier*, May 27, 1937.

> exciting. And the doctor, the nurses, they would look at your eyes, to make sure you were okay, that you weren't sick. That's why they came to see how everything was. It was very well organized.[98]

In the first days of being in the camp at North Stoneham, Miren remembered going to a big tent full of clothes to pick out dresses and shoes. While she was there, she found clothing for herself and for Fidel and even found the little suitcase with the dresses her mother had made. That was a very happy moment.

There were at times difficult, even heartbreaking moments for the children in the camp. Almost a month from the day that the children had boarded the Habana, Bilbao fell to the *sublevados* in the pre-dawn hours of June 19, 1937. This was something that had to be relayed to the children but the question was how best to announce the distressing news. There had already been rumors in the camp that Bilbao had fallen, creating an atmosphere of distrust and anxiety for some of the children. There was, therefore, much concern by the camp's administrators over how best to announce this to almost 4,000 children without creating a situation that could lead to disruption, despair, and chaos. The decision was finally made to announce the news to the children in the evening.

When the Basque priest read the announcement in Spanish, the children's immediate reaction was one of screaming, crying, and despair.[99] Miren vividly recalled the distress, chaos, and upset that took over the camp for the next few hours. Another young girl, Josefina Savery, noted, "One of the priests read the news that Bilbao had fallen –and he tried to do it gently –but it was bedlam because we just didn't know what to do. All of a sudden our whole world had collapsed. What had happened to our parents?"[100] Some of the boys reacted by hurling stones at the loudspeaker, while hundreds of children ran away from the camp into the adjoining countryside and woods to cry and wander about, almost inconsolable.[101]

The children's terror and fear for their families back in Bilbao is understandable. These are children who had witnessed death, violence, and destruction on an almost daily basis; they had endured months of bombing, hunger, and disruption of life in general. They had been separated from their parents and did not know if their families were even alive. The distress and mourning continued into the night. Camp officials, *maestras*, and *señoritas* worked hard to comfort the children, while volunteers searched for those who had fled the camp. Eventually, the outward violence and disruption of this storm passed as well. By

[98] From interview with Miren Alonso (MA).
[99] Gibson (1937) p. 1092
[100] Bell (2007) p. 107
[101] Cloud (1937) p. 46

morning, all the missing children had been found or had returned on their own, and the camp slept. The next morning was one of quiet, deep sorrow. "An air of deep affliction and great sobriety hung over the camp all that day." [102]

Black and white photographs of the camp are important historical documents of this stage of the children's evacuation to England. Arrién, Bell, Cloud, Eizaguirre, and Legarreta have collected and published many of these in their respective books. The photos show children eating at the long tables in the tent, studying their lessons outside with their teachers, and working at various chores, including washing clothes, peeling vegetables, and carrying out other camp work. About her time in the camp Miren said:

> I think we were there about a month. Or maybe a little more than a month. And also before I forget, like you say, children as long as they have food and they treat you well, people, I mean, children are, you don't have to worry about children because they only worry about this moment. They don't think about what is going to happen tomorrow. They don't, we are very concerned about children and I think they are the ones who are the happiest.
>
> I have very wonderful memories. Like you see, you made your little friends and I had my little friend Begoña. She was my age. And we would see a big line, Where's that line? What are they handing out there? And maybe they are giving some kind of a drink and so you went in the line and you got that, in the middle of the day, you know. And we had, people come who did theatre. We'd ask ourselves, what are they going to have? And I remember a little young girl dancing; they put on a big show, which we went to see. In those years we didn't have television, but they did come and have shows for us. It was a lot of entertainment. You know, I only have good memories because the English people had such a beautiful place for us there in Southampton.[103]

Life at the Glade (2 ½ years)

Ten days after the camp officials announced the fall of Bilbao, Miren and her brother were transferred to the *colonia* near the village of Blackboys in East Sussex, two of a group of twenty children, that also included her future husband Mark (Moisés) and his two brothers. A report dated June 30, 1937, from the Basque Children's Committee Records shows the transfer of over 2,500 children from North Stoneham Camp to individual *colonias* by the end of June.[104] Miren and Fidel, along with Pilar, Begoña, and the other children (ten girls

[102] Cloud (1937) p. 48
[103] From interview with Miren Alonso (MA).
[104] Records from the Basque Children's Committee may be found online at Warwick University. The report "Statistical information regarding placement of children," June 30, 1937 shows that twenty children, a mixed

and ten boys) went with their teacher Carmen Merino to live on Pounsley Farm, a large estate with a working farm located near Blackboys. They lived in a newly built wooden house nestled in a forested glade that formed part of a small estate owned by Antoinette Campbell. Miren recalled, "We arrived and it was different; it was nice. It was in the summertime. Our cabin was in the woods and was built especially for us."[105]

Antoinette was married at the time to her second husband, Hector Sommaruga, an Italian musician. Antoinette had three college-aged daughters from her first marriage, Jocelyn, Madeline, and Cynthia. She and Hector also had a daughter, six-year old Lola, from their marriage. Like many in Great Britain, they responded to the BCC's pleas for help for the Basque children, by offering to house and care for them on their estate. Hector designed the spacious wooden house that looked a lot like a log cabin but was built with boards instead of logs. They originally called the house Gatefield but later referred to it simply as the Glade.[106] The house had two long rooms (a girls' wing and a boys' wing that formed large bedrooms) on each side of the house. These wings ran parallel to each other and were connected by a sizeable square room in the middle of the house that had the dining room and living area. The house also had a room each for the teacher and her assistant, as well as a small kitchen and bathroom with showers. While there was running water, there was no hot water and the children took cold showers each morning, even in the winter, something Miren clearly recalled more than sixty years later.

By July 9, 1937, the children had been in their new home for about two weeks. An article about them in the *Sussex Express*[107] reported that the children were delighted to finally sleep in a bed after a month of sleeping in a tent at the North Stoneham Camp. There were plenty of adults to care for twenty children. Besides the teacher, Carmen Merino, there was her assistant, as well as a couple from Portugal who helped for a time. The husband led exercise drills for the boys while his wife helped with the domestic chores.[108] In addition, Antoinette's three older daughters, Jocelyn, Madeline, and Cynthia, spent time with the children playing games and even teaching them.

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group of girls and boys, went to Blackboys on June 29, 1937. For additional reports from the BCC with specific records for Blackboys, see BCC minutes from May 31, 1937 and June 10, 1937. A complete list of relevant BCC committee reports and minutes is listed in the Bibliography section of this article.

[105] From interview with Miren Alonso (MA).

[106] Pearce p. 21

[107] "Blackboys," *Sussex Express*, May 27, 1938. See also "Basque Children at Blackboys," *The Courier*, May 27, 1938.

[108] Little is known about this couple from Portugal. Miren remembered them and there is a photo of the couple and the other caretakers, as well as a photo of the husband leading a drill class with the boys, in the Friday July 9, 1937 edition of the *Sussex Express*.

There was a daily routine at the Glade. At 7:00 a.m. the children got up, breakfast was at 7:30, and lessons began promptly at 9:30. After lunch there were more lessons, then play time. Dinner was at 6:00 p.m. and 8:30 p.m. was bedtime. When the weather was nice, the children studied and ate outside at a long table. They had healthy appetites and ate good nutritious food such as fruit, vegetables, fresh salad, meat, and fish[109]. Part of the money needed to feed the children came from the Basque Children's Committee (BCC) but the Sommarugas also asked local residents to contribute to the children's food. In the July 9, 1937, edition of the *Sussex Express* Antoinette was quoted as saying:

> The Basque Children's Committee has placed the children here and is contributing towards the cost," said Mrs. Sommaruga. "We should be grateful to your readers if they would send contributions towards the milk and meat requirements. The necessity for this is apparent when you realise (sic) that the children have nine quarts of milk daily. Gift in kind will be welcome, and also regular gifts of money. If there is a good response, we may be able to take more children.[110]

In the summer, the girls wore outfits which at the time were called physical culture tunics. These look to the modern eye like loosely fitting cotton leotards and made it possible for the children to move freely and survive the heat of summer. In the winter, they wore corduroy pedal pushers and rubber boots.

The boys, as mentioned above, participated in exercise drills while the girls practiced Roman dance. Madeline would take a gramophone into the woods and lead the girls in dances designed to strengthen their bodies through movement and stretching. The girls also did sewing and household chores such as making their beds and sweeping the room. Each of the girls was responsible for taking care of one boy's clothing. For Miren, that was Fidel. She was responsible for mending his socks and clothes. The boys had outside chores to complete. In addition, all the children helped weed the gardens up at the big house from time to time. When they were not working, the children enjoyed spending time outside and loved playing with Dorian, Antoinette's and Hector's big golden retriever.

The estate was a beautiful place with impressive flower gardens that stretched from the back of the house, a great, ivy covered English Tudor with a deep sloping roof, peaked gables, and large mullioned windows. The back of the large house led directly to a lovely flower garden which descended in a deep stone terrace to flat ground with more formal

[109] The food was prepared at the Glade, the wooden home for the children, in the small kitchen. Miren remembered very well the cook, named Lena, who was Swiss and was in charge of preparing the food.

[110] The Sommarugas did not take in any more children at the Glade. Miren remembered that some of the children from the Glade began to be repatriated as early as the fall of 1937. The BCC report "Estimated Weekly Payment," June 16, 1937, records the estimated weekly payments and the different sources of this revenue for several of the *colonias*, including Blackboys. The weekly cost to maintain the *colonia* at Blackboys is recorded as 12 pounds a week, with four pounds of that total coming from the BCC.

gardens alternately bounded by tall, neatly trimmed hedges or by sloping stonewalls. Fruit trees were scattered throughout. To the left of the more formal gardens, there was a lovely rose garden next to a swimming pool surrounded by an inlaid stone walk with tall shade trees and a little gazebo on the other side. The estate had a barn with ponies and houses for the chauffeur and gardener. Beyond the gardens were fields with hay and the wooded area of the estate where the Basque children lived in their cabin.

In July 1938, a year after the children had arrived at Pounsley Farm, one reporter described her visit to the Glade this way:

> Go across the fields and you will find them in the middle of the wood." That was the fairy tale-sounding direction given me when I asked at Blackboys the way to the Basque Children's Camp. The day was hot and still, with everything warm and silent. There were wild roses garlanding the tops of the hedges, hay strewing the meadow path, an unseen cuckoo calling, and two fat ponies standing fetlock deep in marguerites. Then the wood rose up, dark as a wall, and as I opened the gate to enter I heard the sound of children's voices singing an old Spanish song. Round a bend in the woodland track, out of sun-dappled darkness, in a soft glow of colour – scarlet skirts, black boleros, white veils –came four or five little refugee girls from Eastern Spain. And they it was who, with many a polite greeting in soft Castilian, led me to the camp.[111]

The Glade is a woodland area that lies less than fourteen miles from Ashdown Forest, the woods that inspired A. A. Milne's Hundred-Acre Wood and it became for the children a similarly delightful and happy place. The summers felt deliciously long and warm with sunshine and hours spent playing outside in the shade of the forest or brightness of the open fields. Birdsong filled the air. Rabbits hopped through the underbrush in the woods to their little warrens. There were bluebells and other spring flowers in the woods around the cabin. Miren and her friends would make little secret gardens in the woods. The children gathered hazelnuts and fresh blackberries. In addition, the children helped with some of the gardening at the manor house. They also swam in the pool there.

As there were no lights or candles in the cabin, the children rose with the sun and as soon as it was dark, went to bed. In the evenings as they drifted off to sleep, the girls in a big room on one side of the house and the boys in another room on the other side, Miren remembers quiet conversations on the girls' side. These murmurings eventually stopped because everyone had fallen asleep and then the only sounds came from outside, from the forest around them including an owl that would call "Whooo, hooo," first faintly and then more clearly as he flew closer to the cabin before flying on in his nightly hunt.

[111] *The Herald*, Friday, July 1, 1938.

When autumn came, the leaves fell in mighty quantities, hiding the forest floor under new crisp, brown layers. Then came the winters with beautiful snow but sometimes terrible cold. Even though the children wore boots and jackets, the cold seemed to prevail, not only outside, but also inside the cabin, which was built as more of a summer residence and was not insulated. And there was only cold water for showers. Many of the children began to suffer from *sabañones* or areas where the skin became sore, itchy, and red from continued exposure to the cold temperatures. Most of the time the *sabañones* weren't so bad that they couldn't be endured, although one little girl had so many affected areas that she required more serious medical treatment. There were warm flannel sheets and blankets on the beds, but when it snowed they slept with the windows open, the idea being that exposure to the cold air protected the children from colds and other illnesses. Miren remembered the snowflakes blowing into the room on those cold winter nights.

Overall, the children were well cared for and loved at the Glade. Many people stopped by from the village to bring them treats or candy. Eventually, most of the children had a godmother or godfather who undertook the child's expenses. Although many of these *madrinas* and *padrinos* remained unknown, a few of them did come out to visit the children, often bringing gifts. The first Christmas tree many of the children saw was in the barn, set up there because the cabin wasn't big enough to display it. One year they were invited to a Christmas party in the town of Blackboys where there was a beautiful cake and the children were made to feel welcome by the generosity and attention from their hosts. When visitors came to the camp, the children often dressed in traditional Basque clothing, performed typical dances, and sang songs.

The town's children would come out to visit on occasion and bring their bikes, which were very popular with the *colonia* at the Glade. The Basque children later found an abandoned bike with the chain and pedals missing. It only had a seat but the children found a way to ride it, letting it roll down a hill and in this way, they learned to ride a bicycle. They showed the rundown bike to Mr. Milton, who was Narciso Moragrega's English godfather, when he came to visit. The next time he came, he brought Moisés a brand new bicycle. But the supervising adults took it away from him because the other children didn't have one and Moisés could only ride the bike at the times when it was possible for the other children to borrow one. Miren liked one of the town boys named Freddie Woodwell and one day he sent candy to Miren by way of her younger brother Fidel. All of this did not go unnoticed by Moisés, who still teased Miren years after they were married about her "little boyfriend." Moisés also had a young friend named Olivia. Miren always said he liked Olivia because of her bicycle.

On at least one occasion, the children were invited to a garden party given by a Mrs. King. At the party the Basque girls performed the Greek and Roman dances that Antoinette's daughter Madeline had taught them. Sometime after the party, Mrs. King invited the

children (there were ten at the time) for a vacation at her house. It was taste of luxury for the children. Mrs. King was generous as well as wealthy. Her large house was comfortable and there were servants to attend to the different needs of the children. The girls were given a big bedroom with a collection of smaller beds and a large canopy bed in the middle, complete with curtains that enclosed the sleeper. Miren happily chose the canopy bed for herself, something she found delightful. One of the pieces of furniture in the room had little drawers in which someone had placed eggs from many different kinds of birds. While the eggs were empty inside, the beautiful blue, yellow, and grey shells were intact. Their time there was quiet without very much to do. During the vacation, the children ate well and evenings were spent in Mrs. King's cozy living room enjoying the warmth and comfort of the home.

All four of Antoinette's daughters[112] were eager to spend time with the Basque children. Six-year old Lola, the youngest of Antoinette's daughters, was also the only child from Antoinette's marriage to Hector. As the youngest child of a wealthy couple, she had her own nanny, her own ponies, and much devotion from her far older half-sisters, Cynthia, Jocelyn, and Madeline. Miren remembered that every afternoon in pleasant weather, a maid would take a tray to the little gazebo by the side of the pool where Antoinette and Lola would have tea. When Lola's nanny left, Antoinette's youngest child would pick one of the Basque children to come up to the big house to play with her. The invited child would stay for the night, joining the family for dinners where only French was spoken. These times provided a lot of fun for the visiting children. The couple's wealth, generosity, and emphasis on education made an impact on them. The children called them Tía Antoinette and Tío Hector.

Lola's older sisters Cynthia, Jocelyn, and Madeline warmly embraced the opportunity to help care for the Basque children living at the Glade. Cynthia, not yet of college age attended a private high school, while Jocelyn and Madeline were in university, Oxford and Cambridge respectively. They were able to come home and help on some weekends. All of the girls spoke French and had traveled extensively, with vacations in France and skiing trips to Switzerland. Cynthia was a tomboy who loved to play with the children. Jocelyn and Madeline loved to tell them stories such as "Alice in Wonderland" and "Snow White." Jocelyn was an excellent story teller but her attempt to tell the story of Alice with minimal Spanish made Miren laugh. There was no radio at the house nor a television, so the stories provided a wonderful source of entertainment for the children. Occasionally the children would go see a movie in the village and on one of these outings, they saw "Snow White."

Madeline perhaps had one of the closest relationships with the children at the Glade. She was the one who took the gramophone into the woods and taught the girls the Roman and

[112] The daughters from her first marriage were Jocelyn, Madeline, and Cynthia. Lola was from Antoinette's marriage to Hector Sommaruga.

Greek dances. Because of the rural location of Pounsley Farm, itself over a mile away from the rural village of Blackboys, Miren recalled that their first teacher Carmen Merino left after a few months. After that, various teachers arrived but did not stay for very long and there came a time when there was no one available to teach the children. At this point, Madeline left Cambridge to be the children's teacher for about a year. Out of all the teachers the children had, Madeline was the one from whom the children learned the most. She was deeply devoted to the children and loved the Spanish language. She learned all she could to be able to communicate with them in Spanish. She became one of their primary caretakers, even sleeping in the cabin at night. She taught them about topics as diverse as animals and their habitat, geography and different countries in the world, as well as giving lessons in history and literature. She would put on plays with the children, who wore costumes made out of paper, and gave specific roles to each one, such as being the wind or a rose or a daffodil. She read poetry to the children and they even memorized some of the poems she taught them.

Madeline, who was seven years older than Miren, learned of Anastasio's wish that his eldest daughter learn to play the piano. Anastasio loved the arts and music and back home in the Basque Country had initially wanted Miren to learn to play the violin. Miren had had mixed emotions about this. Never having attended an orchestra, Miren's only point of reference to the violin were the blind people in her city who wandered the streets with a little dog playing the violin in the hope that people would give them some money. Miren could not help but see herself walking around with a little dog, playing the violin while people threw money at her. The thought put her in tears. When her father told her that he prefer she start her music lessons by playing the piano, that made a lot more sense to her. After all, there was a woman down the street from where they lived who played the piano. This was something known to Miren. So, when Madeline discovered that Miren's father had wanted her to learn to play the piano, she offered to teach Miren how to play. In all of these ways Miren and the other girls grew very fond of and close to Madeline. These were enduring relationships, with Miren and Madeline writing to each other for years after Miren had left England.

With the fall of Bilbao in July 1937 and the subsequent installation of a pro-Franco government in that area, there began to be an increasing number of requests by this government for the return of the Basque children who had been sent to England in May 1937. Some children were repatriated only a few months after their arrival. This was true for the colony at Blackboys where some of the children went back home as early as the fall of 1938. As the repatriations continued, there were fewer and fewer children left in the *colonia*. After about a year, the remaining children were so few in number that it seemed best for them to attend the local school instead of bringing in another teacher. They started attending the little, one-room school in the town of Blackboys most likely in the fall of 1938, although they were there for only one term. They walked each day to school. Miren

also remembered they were given gas masks at that time in the event of an attack.[113] At the little school in the village of Blackboys the language barrier was an issue. The children could not speak English fluently. Nonetheless, they were given books and could understood a few things. Much of the information or knowledge imparted to them, however, was simply not comprehensible. Miren was always grateful for how much she had learned from Madeline during her time in England.

[113] With World War II on the horizon, the evacuation of residents from British cities had already begun in September 1938. (Cable, p. 197)

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Repatriation and life under Franco

Repatriation of the Basque children was a complex and conflicted issue that became a political tug of war between various constituencies, both in Great Britain and in Spain. While there were many British who were deeply concerned for the children's welfare, other British citizens complained of the cost of maintaining the children and argued that the sooner they were sent home, the better.[114] To make matters worse, Franco's government considered the evacuations a kind of national treason and had widely denounced them in the press and to the British government, claiming that the children were being forced to evacuate against their will.[115]

However, the Basque Children's Committee (BCC) took their responsibility for the children's safety very seriously. They were concerned about the welfare of these children, sons and daughters of Republican enemies of Franco's government. Many of their parents, if they had survived, were either imprisoned under brutal conditions or had fled the country. Even if not imprisoned or a refugee, the lives of those who had sided with the Republic could be very difficult under Franco's regime, which punished those they considered enemies with seizure of their property and by refusing to allow them to work. These realities were alarming to those entrusted with the children's care in England. Although this article appeared after the end of the Spanish Civil War in April 1937, an excerpt from an editorial in the *Guardian*, April 5, 1939, titled "The War is Over" gives much-needed context to this concern over the repatriation to Spain of children whose parents had sided with the Republic[116]:

> The slaughter of human beings goes on, taking the form of daily executions. The so-called "Reds" are simply being exterminated – everyone suspected of having volunteered to serve the Republic in any capacity, whether civil or military, is classed as a "Red" and is fortunate if he is not executed but sentenced to 15 or 30 years penal servitude. The vast majority of those arrested are shot.
>
> This slaughter is not carried out only for alleged "reasons of State" – it is largely an act of vengeance, the outcome of a fearful hatred that is by no means confined to the authorities. In the greater part of the country the "Reds" are helpless and are hunted down like rats. But in some of the more mountainous and difficult regions they are still holding out and are often able to strike fiercely at their enemies.
>
> All the damage done, not only the destruction of Guernica but the devastation caused by Nationalist artillery and by German and Italian bombers in Madrid, Barcelona, and elsewhere, is attributed to the "Reds" in the most immediate sense,

[114] Bell (2007) p. 117
[115] Bell (2007) p. 117
[116] Franco's government often referred to those who had sided with the Republic as "reds" or communists.

> as though it had been their own shells and bombs that had caused the damage in the cities they themselves were defending. Official propaganda declares of every piece of destruction, no matter where it is, "The Reds did it."

The BCC made it their job to investigate each family situation individually before agreeing to the return of a child. They endeavored to verify the location of the parents and ensure that the parents were in agreement with the return of their children. They realized that in some cases, the new government had coerced parents into signing letters against their will, asking for their children to be returned.[117] The October 1, 1937, Minutes of the Executive Committee are replete with details that illustrate the incredible pressure being placed on the BCC to repatriate the children quickly and without a lot of information regarding the ability of the family to care for the children.[118] With the destruction in Bilbao and surrounding towns and the continuing food crisis and lack of employment, some parents preferred that their children remain abroad. Other parents eagerly sought the return of their children. And as the onset of World War II crept ominously closer, there was more pressure from within Britain for the children to be returned.

For Miren and Fidel, the facts were clear. Their family wanted them to return. In the fall of 1938, their paternal aunt Tía Encarna wrote to Antoinette asking for the children to be sent back. In December 1938, Miren, Fidel, and Narciso, the oldest of the Moragrega boys, returned home via a ferry in Newhaven that took them to France, where they took a bus through France to the border with Spain at Hendaye. Miren recalled seeing sandbag fortifications being placed around Paris, in preparation for war with Germany.

Because their mother had died and their father was in a refugee camp in France, the Moragrega family had only enough resources to take in Narciso, with the understanding that he was now old enough to work. When Miren, Fidel, and Narciso went back home, there were just three children remaining at the *colonia* in Blackboys, Moisés (13 years old), Javier (10 years old) and another boy Isaías. They were the last children at Pounsley Farm, and it was only a short time before they were sent to an orphanage in London.

Back in the Basque Country, Miren's mother Presentación, her little brother Fernando, and two-year-old sister Olga had evacuated to France soon after Miren and Fidel had sailed to England in May 1937. From France they went to Belgium, where one of Presentacion's sisters lived. But, tragically, during the trip to France, little Olga had became ill with

[117] See Bell (2007) pp. 122-139 for a detailed explanation of the BCC's concerns over the veracity and reliability of the requests being made by Franco's government for the return of the children. The teachers, helpers, and priests who had accompanied the children were considered traitors by this government and were warned that they would be arrested and jailed upon re-entry to Spain (Bell, pp. 141-142).
[118] The BCC reports cited in this article may be viewed online at the Warwick University digital archives.

measles and died. Back in Bilbao, when the *sublevados* took control of the city in July 1937, Miren's father Anastasio was arrested and imprisoned in Burgos, a notoriously grim place for jailed Republicans[119]. Someone had filed a false accusation against him reporting that he had threatened to kill people if Franco were to win the military victory in Bilbao and then escape to the mountains and die like a hero. The accusation had no merit and there was no testimony other than the accuser's word.

What happened to many Republicans, happened to Presentación and Anastasio. They lost everything, their home, their furniture, all of their belongings because people who had sided with Republic were often stripped of all their property. Those who sided with Franco and the *sublevados* were given permission to take possession of the property. The hard feelings created from these actions in a community, where families and neighbors had known each other for years, created wounds that lasted a long time. With their parents in Burgos, the only place for Miren and Fidel to go was to the *caserío* or country home of their paternal grandparents where there were other cousins living as well.

After three years, Miren's father was released from prison and he and Presentación came back to Bilbao. Miren's uncle Antonio, one of Presentación's brothers, was able to offer them a place to live. Antonio had achieved much success as a chef and owner of a very lucrative restaurant in Barcelona before the Spanish Civil War. He eventually sold the restaurant in Barcelona, investing his money in shipping and in investments in South America. He had retired in Santurtzi, the small port town on the estuary, famous for its sardines, where he purchased a great deal of land. He bought a big home with beautiful gardens that had been owned by a wealthy member of the Spanish nobility. The home had three floors where he made three apartments. He lived in one and gave one to Presentación and Anastasio, where they could live without paying rent. There was plenty of work for Anastasio, caring for the lovely gardens, which he enjoyed. He cultivated flowers, strawberries, as well as apple, peach, and pear trees, becoming quite skilled with grafting, so that one tree could bear two kinds of fruit. They also had a cow and a pig, so there was plenty of milk and fresh meat. The vegetable garden produced such a bountiful harvest that Presentación used to sell the surplus potatoes, green beans, and carrots. After Miren's family had been reunited, Presentación and Anastasio had two more daughters, Ana Mari and Mari Carmen. Miren loved her much younger sisters as they loved her.

Miren's mother began working in a restaurant with a popular bar, Kai Alde that Antonio had bought in Santurtzi. She ended up owning the restaurant and an adjoining pastry shop

[119] One can only imagine the horrors to which Anastasio may have been subjected in the Burgos jail. Marcos Ana's *Poems from Prison and Life* (2021) offer a firsthand account of the brutality of the conditions in the Burgos jail from one of the longest-serving prisoners of Franco's dictatorship. He was imprisoned for twenty-three years.

also named Kai Alde (Basque for "near the harbor")[120] and becoming a very successful and wealthy businesswoman. Many of Presentación's children and extended family members worked in the restaurant and bakery over the years.

Madeline and Miren stayed in touch with letters. When Madeline sent packages of clothes to the children, Miren distributed them to the children of the former colony at the Glade who lived in or around Bilbao. Miren and the other children also sent letters to their *tíos* Antoinette and Hector, although it became difficult at some point to keep in touch with the couple, who separated and divorced a few years after the children left the farm. The ties formed between the children in the *colonia* at Blackboys remained strong as well. Narciso, Mark's older brother, often came to Santurtzi to visit Miren and Fidel from his home in Bilbao. Unfortunately, Narciso became ill a few years after his repatriation. Miren's aunt sent her to visit him with strawberries and fresh vegetables from the garden. While they visited with Narciso, Miren mentioned that she had written to the *tíos* Antoinette and Hector but had not received a reply. After talking to Narciso, she decided she would write directly to Mark, who was still in London, with a request that he take a letter to the *tíos* personally. She sent the letter which Mark[121] delivered. He then answered Miren in another letter written just to her. By this time he was in New York in the U.S.A[122].

Mark's experience after Blackboys had not been easy. His mother had died of tuberculosis in a sanatorium near Bilbao in 1937 and his father had crossed the border into France, where he was interred in a concentration camp. While Mark's older brother Narciso was able to return to Bilbao to live with extended family in the fall of 1939, the family did not have the resources to care for the two younger brothers. Because they were unable to return to Euskadi, Mark, Javier, and another boy named Isaías were sent from the *colonia* at Blackboys to London to live in an orphanage in late 1939. Unfortunately, the living conditions in the orphanage were so brutal that Mark ran away and lived on the streets of London.[123] However, the strength and sense of community typical of the Basque diaspora came to his aid. On the streets of London, he eventually crossed paths with several Basque men who worked on a boat that did commercial fishing in the Atlantic. Mark was hired by the fishing boat and months later jumped ship, when the boat docked at New York. Thanks in large part to the Basque community in New York City, Mark was able to find a place to live and a job in a restaurant.

[120] The restaurant and bakery are still in Santurtzi today and very popular with the residents of the town.
[121] It was around this time that Moisés changed his name to the English "Mark."
[122] The full story of Mark's life after Blackboys is complex and fascinating. It can only be told completely in a separate article.
[123] Javier would never return to Spain to live. While many years later, he brought his father to England for a visit, he lived the rest of his life in England.

Marriage and life with Mark (Moisés) in the U.S.

When Mark immigrated to the United States, he and Miren started writing to each other regularly and it was through these letters written over the span of several years that Miren fell deeply in love with Mark. He could say a lot with just a few words. He proposed marriage by way of a letter in 1952 and she accepted. When he came to Spain in June 1953 to marry her, they saw each other face to face for the first time in almost fourteen years. They had last seen each other in December 1939, when they had both been thirteen years old. Mark was also reunited with his family. It had been sixteen years since Mark and his father had last seen each other on May 20, 1937, when the senior Narciso Moragrega had put his three sons on the train from Portugalete to Santurtzi, where the Habana waited to take almost 4,000 Basque children to safety in England.

Miren and Mark were married on July 28, 1953, in the Iglesia de San Jorge in Santurtzi with both families in attendance. Miren then moved to New York to be with Mark and it was there that they started their married life. Their first child, Virginia (Ginny) was born in October 1954 but soon after that Miren was diagnosed with tuberculosis. In April 1955 she went into a sanitarium for treatment along with her infant daughter Ginny. They were there for fourteen months and for much of the time Miren was separated from Ginny. Mark was working several jobs to support his small family but visited when he could. The hospital staff were very obliging and eventually allowed Mark to come and go when he was able to visit, even outside of posted hours.

After fourteen months in the sanatorium, Miren returned home but was not completely cured. At the time, surgery was the final option for tuberculosis but Miren sought to avoid this, having seen a friend who was also a young mother die after surgery in the sanatorium. Mark wanted Miren to go to Spain for treatment and had worked hard to save up a small nest egg to pay for the trip. However, Miren did not want to leave Mark, so he decided to bring Miren's mother, Presentación, to New York. When Miren told her mother about her tuberculosis, Presentación was distressed. She had not known anything about Miren's illness. Presentación left Fidel in charge of Kai Alde and came to the U.S. with her youngest sister, Mari Carmen. Miren's mother came armed with a homeopathic cure given to her by a *curandera* in Euzkadi who treated women with tuberculosis.[124] The treatment consisted of an assortment of herbs, white wine, and crushed snails. Miren also had to drink a glass of garlic water[125] each morning. After Miren drank the wine with the herbs, Presentación would put a compress of the crushed snails on Miren's chest. She did this for a month. Miren clearly recalled that when her mother removed the compress, it would be all black. It

[124] A *curandera* is a "healer" who uses homeopathic medicine to effect a cure.
[125] Made from boiling eight cloves of garlic in water.

seems that the compress extracted the mucus from Miren's lungs. Eventually the compresses began to come out clean and there was no sign of tuberculosis in her lungs.

A few years before Miren came to the U.S., her cousin Floren had married a U.S. soldier stationed in Belgium Floren and her husband had returned to the U.S. and lived in western Michigan. After Miren's bout with tuberculosis, Floren came to visit Miren and Mark in New York. When they met, Floren's husband offered Mark a job and in the fall of 1958 Miren and Mark moved their small family to western Michigan. Presentación had been to visit Floren in Michigan and told Miren how green and beautiful it was there. In Michigan Mark worked as a paver and in time owned his own paving company. He went on to start several successful businesses and in many ways, he and Miren realized the traditional American dream of owning a home, raising a beautiful family, and earning a good income. However, Miren and Mark did not want their children to grow up without a connection to their roots and family in Euzkadi. It was important for both Miren and Mark that their children spend time with their family in Euskadi and that they learn Spanish. Each of their children spent summers and sometimes even longer periods of time in Santurtzi, living with family and learning to speak Spanish. Both Miren and Mark traveled back home to visit regularly and hosted their relatives at their home in the United States as well. These visits between family members continue to this day.

One of the enduring legacies of Miren's and Mark's experience as child evacuees was a pronounced, deep love and concern for the welfare and happiness of children. Miren and Mark had five children of their own and later adopted a sixth child, a daughter, who had lost her father in a tragic accident. One well-known example of the Alonso family's love for children was Mark's tradition of icing the backyard of their home in Michigan during the winter, so that the neighborhood children could come and play hockey. Another, important legacy of Miren's childhood and heritage was her deep faith in God. She was a deeply devoted to both her faith and the Catholic church, joining a local congregation in western Michigan, where she found community and many lasting friendships.

At times in her life, Miren reflected on why she had left Spain to live in the United States, a decision she had made rather easily. Part of the explanation lies in what she had seen in England during the two and a half years she lived there. She had seen men pushing baby carriages. She didn't see them going to the bars, drinking wine, instead of going home to dinner prepared by a wife with family waiting, a scenario she saw far too often working in the family restaurant. She wanted something different for herself and her marriage and she found a lot of what she was looking for in the United States. Mark lived to be 87 years old. Miren lived to be 93, passing away in September of 2019. Although they lived most of their lives in the United States, their Basque heritage and experience as child refugees of the Spanish Civil War remained a fundamental and powerful part of their identity.

Conclusion

At the end of his 1000-page, detailed and meticulously researched biography of the dictator Francisco Franco, Paul Preston makes the final summary judgment of him as a general in the Spanish Civil War and later dictator of Spain for almost forty years:

> Judged in terms of his ability to stay in power, Franco's achievement was remarkable. However, the human cost in terms of the executions, the imprisonments, the torture, the lives destroyed by political exile and forced economic migration points to the exorbitant price paid by Spain for Franco's 'triumphs.'[126]

The Basque children evacuated to safety during 1937, and their families paid part of this bloody and exorbitant price and yet their history as evacuees from the Spanish Civil War remains largely unknown to most people. When conducting interviews with former *niños* in the 1970s, Dorothy Legarreta wrote that "It became clear that many of those evacuated had spoken very little about the experience to members of their own family. Even clearer was the momentousness of this period of exile in the life of the respondent . . . (b)ut this dramatic sojourn had been unreported, swallowed up in the subsequent mass evacuations of World War II."[127]

It is important to keep in mind that many of the repatriated Basque children simply did not discuss their experience and stories as child evacuees when they returned home. Many of their own children know almost nothing of the time they spent in another country.[128] Preserving the knowledge of these experiences is essential and rendered even more urgent because so many of these stories are disappearing; those who were child refugees during the Spanish Civil War are in their 90s at this point in time, if they are indeed even still alive.[129] The likelihood of discovering any more first-hand narratives about the evacuation is unlikely at this point in time, which is why such a well-documented story as Miren's, is an important contribution to our knowledge of this history. It helps us situate with more nuance and detail the events that culminated in the evacuation of these children to England and other countries and the consequences of those events on the children's lives.

The stories of these children touch so many parts of the human experience: refugees and displaced people, the vulnerability of children, the horrors of war and of fascism, and the often lonely, misunderstood experience of the immigrant. It is a story uncomfortably replete with the consequences of decisions made by those with power and how these

[126] Preston (1994) p. 786
[127] Legarreta (1984) p. 332
[128] See Legarreta (1984) p. 332 for a very poignant description of this point.
[129] A child who was ten years old in 1937 would be ninety-six years old in 2023, if still alive.

consequences play out in the lives of the young, the vulnerable, the innocent, and the helpless. Miren's experience as a child evacuee is also part of the story of the Basque culture and people, their resilience, and their strong sense of identity and community. Miren's story points to the importance of really knowing and understanding history and using that knowledge to learn from the past and keep from repeating the same mistakes. Sadly, there are so many ways in which the themes of this individual story continue to be reflected today in the massive disruption caused by war, the misuse of power, and the increasing number of displaced persons, especially children, due to war.

Miren's life story represents a single experience played out in thousands of variations in the lives of the Basque children evacuated from Euzkadi in 1937. The details of the individual experience should never be treated as less significant or of less historical importance than those of a group. For this reason, names of individuals are significant. Names remind us that these children were individual human beings. So many times in the research, the Basque child refugees are referred to en masse, as members of a large group. This is understandable. In many cases, it has been difficult to identify the individual names of children in the *colonias* in England. In some cases, the names have been lost. In other cases, the historical information being communicated is best relayed within group parameters.

Nevertheless, it is important and necessary to identify and highlight individual names when possible, as this view from the "other end of the telescope" helps us remember the impact of these events on individuals who were young, vulnerable, and so dependent on the adults in this world for the care they needed. Names are also exceptionally significant for the Basque child evacuees because many of those who were repatriated were recorded with the Spanish version of their name upon repatriation and not their Basque name. This is true for Miren. In the official list of names upon re-entry to Spain her name was recorded as María.[130]

Using information and photographs provided by Miren, it has been possible to identify fifteen of the twenty children sent to live at Blackboys and the corresponding identification number of their hexagonal paper card.[131] These are their names:

[130] Miren, of course, is the Basque name for María, as Iñaki is for Ignacio. This is not surprising, as Franco forbade the use of Euskera, the Basque language, as well as other dialects and languages with long histories and literatures in Spain. See the entire list of names of children who were evacuated to England I Apéndice 1 (p. 169) of Gregorio Arrien's *Niños Vascos Evacuados a Gran Bretaña* (1988).

[131] Gregorio Arrién and his fellow collaborators contributed in an extraordinarily important way when they compiled a complete list of all the children who boarded the Habana for England in May 1937, along with the specific identification number, city of origin, and city of repatriation.

María Luisa García Martínez (# 292);
Narciso, Moisés, and Javier Moragrega Alonso (# 4100, 4101, 4102);
María Angeles and María Begoña Orcajo Bayón (# 3007, 3308);
Trinidad and Mercedes Orruño (# 3321, 3322);
Pilar and Begoña Sabatel Puente (# 469, 470);
Natividad and Isaías Saíz Varona (# 3472, 3473);
Miren and Fidel Sesumaga Uribe-Echevarría (# 471, 472);
Milagros Zarate Villa (# 2866).

Miren's story connects to each of their stories, yet their stories, unlike Miren's, have not yet been told. This little *colonia* in Blackboys, which comprised twenty individual lives formed part of the group of 4,000 who were sent to England, themselves a small portion of the total 29,000 *expedicionarios* evacuated to other countries in 1937. This vast number of children, who unknowingly became such a significant part of history, remind us that a deeper comprehension of their individual stories is yet to be and sadly may never be fully known.

But the cruel war goes on
And these dramas mean nothing to it.
Thus, each family kissed its children,
And, with all haste,
Seizing their precious cargo,
The buses departed.
Some children were weeping and others
Were waving goodbye with their little hands.
Their white handkerchiefs seemed like white doves
That in tragic flight fled from the shell of the hunter.
And still the planes and the bombs
Seed terror and death.
The night of that day I went
To my humble attic window,
To my nest, bereft and disordered,
And wrote some words of counsel to my sons.[132]

[132] This is the English translation of a poem by Mark's (Moisés) father, Narciso Moragrega. He wrote it on the eve of his sons' evacuation to England in May 1937. It may be found in Legaretta (1984) p. 355.

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