

This book is a good read for those of us with an interest in Spain and its people.

## For sale

All goods are available from Tony Armolea: 85 Summerleaze Road, Maidenhead, Berks SL6 8ER; tel: 01628 781525; email: [sales@basquechildren.org]. Please note that we have opened a branch of the shop in Spain, and if you live there, you can order more easily from: [tienda@basquechildren.org]. Prices include p&p.

### Commemorative envelope

● Franked envelope with special stamps marking the 70th anniversary of the arrival of the Basque children, £6.

### Books

- "Recuerdos" edited by Natalia Benjamin, £16.10.
  - "Only for Three Months" by Adrian Bell, £11.10.
  - "Leah Manning" by Ron Bill & Stan Newens, £5.
- The following book can be ordered via the IBMT: [www.international-brigades.org.uk].
- "Poems of War and Peace/Poemas de Guerra y de Paz", by James R Jump (International Brigader who married one of the *señoritas* on the *Habana*), edited by Jim Jump, £12.

### CDs & DVDs

- "The Guernica Children", Steve Bowles' documentary film, now available in a bilingual English/Spanish edition, £15.
- "Songs of the Basque Children", songs from the book used by the *niños* when performing, plus the reissue of the original 1938 Parlophone recording, £9.50.
- Southampton anniversary event, £4.50.
- Danzaris at Southampton, £4.
- Montrose blue plaque, £6.50.
- CD-EP "Solo Por Tres Meses", written and performed by Na-Mara, a duo composed of musician Roberto García (son of *niño* Fausto García) and Paul McNamara, £6.

## Obituaries

We very much regret to announce the deaths of the following:

- Maisie Armolea
- Primitiva Clements (Rojas Mendizabal)
- Gordon Cox
- Antonina Lepera Sagarduy
- Joaquín Sánchez

# How I befriended Pirmin Trecu and other Basques

by Fay Jacobsen (née Donaldson)

On 12 May Natalia Benjamin spoke to our local branch of the University of the Third Age (U3A) in Ulveston about the Basque refugee children who came to this country in 1937. I had no idea how many memories this talk would evoke or how powerfully they would affect me.

We lived in Abbey Wood, south London, directly opposite the woods. In 1936 at the age of five I asked my mother why the colour of our milk bottle tops had changed. (I was especially interested in these, as I had learned at school how to use them to make pom-poms). Ours was a very politically active and aware household, and it was carefully explained to me that our milk supplier, the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society (RACS), was charging a ha'penny more for each pint of milk and this would help to bring to safety children who were being bombed by the fascists. I knew who the fascists were and had had that reinforced by a Unity Theatre pantomime the previous Christmas in which Hitler and Mussolini featured as the "wicked uncles" in *Babes in the Wood*.

Some time after this, either for a May Day or a march demonstrating against the Spanish Civil War, I remember Mum dressed me in Basque national colours with my head swathed in red ink-stained bandages to join the march in a pushchair. A woman confronted us and accused Mum of exploiting, for political purposes, a child who couldn't possibly know what the issues were. I can remember clearly feeling very angry, as I knew well what was happening to the Basque children.

A few months later, some Spanish children came to Abbey Wood and lived in Shornells, a guesthouse owned by the RACS about a half a mile away through the woods. My mother took us up to introduce ourselves to the adults in charge. Subsequently my older boy cousins and I would walk up the hill to the house and, while my cousins played football with the older boys, I made friends with the youngest child there, Pirmin Trecu. He came to our house to play and have tea quite often and once accompanied us on a seaside holiday. For this we had to get the sanction of a Miss Duffy, who seemed to be viewed by the Spanish children with an awe verging on terror. I don't recall there ever being a language barrier between us children.

Our family left Abbey Wood for the Isle of Sheppey soon after the blitz began, and we lost contact with Pirmin. But in 1950, when I

had moved to London to begin my nursing training, Mum sent me a cutting from the *Daily Worker* about Pirmin's success as a dancer with Sadler's Wells Ballet Company. I wrote to him care of the company and found that he was living within walking distance of our nurses' home! So our friendship was renewed.

Through Pirmin I was introduced to some of the Basque community, which centred on a house at 12 Upper Addison Gardens, Notting Hill. Here Pirmin's sister Eli lived with her husband Fernando and their children. It was a large house, three stories and a basement I think. It must have been a grand house before the war and probably is again. The rooms were very spacious and subdivided by wooden partitions into at least two sections. Thus a family could live in one sectioned room with a degree of privacy. (Finding anywhere to live in London at that time was a problem.) Cooking was done in a primitive improvised kitchen on the landing and was shared by several families. The owner and his family lived in the basement.

Despite of the cramped conditions, I was always welcomed there with great warmth and hospitality. The food was wonderful and someone always seemed to be strumming a guitar. It was a joy and a privilege to be part of the social events of this Basque community. The spontaneity, the accordion music, the rhythmic hand clapping, the foot stamping, the guitars, the *olés* – they were all very exotic to an unsophisticated, country girl. I widened my circle of friends there and met, amongst others, Vale and Rafa Flores and Herminio Martínez.

The Flores family spent a couple of holidays at my mother's house in the Kent countryside. They kept in touch with Mum at Christmas each year, even after they returned to Spain, until she died in 2003. Last year, when I met the man who collects my grandson from school twice a week in Finsbury Park, I discovered that he was one of Vale and Rafa's sons!

I lost touch with all my friends when I married, became immersed in having a family and subsequently moved away from London, but now here we are again. Sadly some are no longer with us. Knowing of my past connection with the Spanish community, my younger daughter sent me a link to The Guardian website where Pirmin's obituary was printed. That made me sad. Others too are dead, but my hope is that I will be able to exchange news and views with those who are still around.