



The family invite you to join them for refreshments  
after the service at The William IV,  
786 Harrow Road, London NW10 5JX.



Donations in the memory of Helvecia can be made to  
**The Macmillan Nurses**  
or **Oxfam**  
and can be made via  
The Co-operative Funeralcare  
18 Tudor Square, West Bridgford, Nottingham, Nottinghamshire NG2 6BT  
Telephone: 0115 981 7444

A Service to Celebrate the Life of



**Helvecia Hidalgo**

18th January 1923 - 18th April 2014

West London Crematorium  
Tuesday 6th May 2014 at 3.00 pm



**MUSIC ON ARRIVAL**  
Songs of the Basque Children  
sung by the choir of the Spanish School London

**WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION**  
Peter Jones, Humanist Minister

**HELVECIA'S LIFE AND FAMILY MEMORIES**

**TRIBUTES**  
Natalia Benjamin – Basque Children of '37 Association UK  
Herminio Martinez

**QUIET REFLECTION**

**COMMITTAL**

**FINAL WORDS**

**MUSIC ON LEAVING**

**Celebrating the life of**

# **Helvecia Hidalgo**

**"Helvecia - Mum - Grandma - Great Grandma"**

**18th January 1923 - 18th April 2014**

**Kensal Green Crematorium**



**Tuesday 6th May 2014**

**Ceremony conducted by**

## **Peter Jones**

**Funeral Minister BHA**

**15 Silver Close**

**Harrow**

**Middx**

**HA3 6JT**

**Tel 020 8428 9552**

**07785 545242**

Music : CD track - Choir of the Spanish school - "Songs of the Basque Children

\_Procession by mourners.  
Coffin brought in.

**Good afternoon everyone and welcome or Bienvenido** - to this special ceremony, where we are met here as family members and good friends - with some friendships going back many, many years --- to honour and pay tribute to the life of **Helvecia Garcia Hidalgo** known to everyone , I believe, as **Helvecia-or Mum , Grandma or Great Grandma** and to express our love and to celebrate her good life.

Music is very powerful isn't it - it breaks down language barriers - and touches us all - and that lovely music we heard to commence our ceremony was , appropriately, the choir of the Spanish school here in London - singing "Songs of the Basque children" - and a few of the original basque children of 37 are here today.

They say that all funerals are about loss - and today is no exception as we mourn and try to come to terms with the loss of a lovely lady with whom you have been privileged to have shared your life with. In the physical and relationship sense, we have lost **a wonderful mother, grandmother, great grandmother, sister and, of course, loyal friend** - whom we shall now treasure in our hearts and memories.

Saying goodbye to someone who has lived a long life - 91 years - and seems to have always been there - is probably one of the hardest things we have to do in life - **but** there is a lot to be thankful for - as will become clear from our tributes later in the ceremony.

Having lived for **over 70 years** here in London, she decided in October 2008 to move up to Nottingham - to be near **Susana and Roy**.

With all her mental faculties still in good working order, she remained strong willed - and generally managed to live very independently in her retirement flat until her last few weeks.

She would insist on preparing and cooking a hot meal for herself each day and her banana puddings for Roy are legendary - not to mention the apple pies.

So she has done remarkably well - and after spending the last 3 weeks at the City Hospital in Nottingham - passed away peacefully - on Good Friday - the 18th of April 2014 .

Today our thoughts and deepest sympathies are especially with all her immediate family. Though, I know, you are **all** deeply saddened by her departure, and take some comfort in the knowledge that she is no longer suffering and is now at peace. We give thanks for her good life -- which now lives on in you.

In the comforting words of Helen Steiner Rice

"After the clouds, the sunshine.

After the winter, the spring.

After the shower, the rainbow.

For life is a changeable thing.

After the night, the morning.

Bidding all darkness cease.

After life's cares and sorrows.

The comfort and sweetness of peace".

Helvecia was not a religious person as such - and so it was decided more appropriate to have a secular ceremony is - a celebration of her life which began on the **18th of January 1923** in a mining village called **La Arboleda** just outside Bilbao, in the north of Spain. Here she grew up as the 4th in a family of **seven** children - and of those 7, is survived by her brother **Elvio** - here today.

After the bombing of Guernica - the ancient capital of the Basques, by the German Condor Legion on the 25th of April 1937 - plans were made to evacuate children from the Basque region.

As a result, on Thursday the 20<sup>th</sup> of May 1937 **Helvecia** - then aged 14 - boarded the liner "Habana" with her brother **Elvio** who was aged 10 and

her 8-year-old sister Delia.

They left Santurce - the port town of Bilbao, along with 3,800 Basque children - squeezed into a vessel which normally accommodated just 400.

Crossing the Bay of Biscay - they hit a dreadful storm. It was a terrible journey.

With great relief, they arrived in England on Sunday the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May 1937 at Southampton harbour and then went on to a camp at Stoneham in Eastleigh, Hampshire - just outside Southampton - where they lived ten to a tent.

During August 1937 Helvecia, Elvio & (D) elia went in a group of 22 children, 3 young women and a Spanish speaking English matron to "**The Oaks**" in Carshalton Beeches, Surrey. Helvecia described this as a lovely big farm and Mansion house - where they lived in what had previously been the servants' quarters.

They were educated by one of the young women - who was a teacher - and the other 2 young women assistant helpers - along with a Spanish speaking English matron where they all had jobs on a rota and looked after the younger ones.

**Helvecia** and her siblings were taken care of by **George and Barbara Cadbury** who became their legal guardians, lifelong friends and their second family. In March of 1939 the Cadbury's arranged for them to go to Saffron Walden boarding school in Essex and they would return to **The Oaks** during school holidays to be with their Spanish friends.

At the end of the summer 1940, Helvecia left school to go to secretarial college in Birmingham to obtain qualifications to get a job. She went on to work at the Spanish Institute in London where she met a Catalan Jose Hidalgo - known as **Joe** and they married on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 1946.

They made their home in Mill Hill, Middlesex and in March 1948 their daughter **Susana** was born. She remembers fond memories of having a long garden shared with chickens and rabbits where she would play.

In March 1952 the family was completed when **Michael** was born and 18 months later, they moved to Acton, West London where later when Joe left his job at the BBC, they had a shop for a number of years. The house

in Acton remained the family home where Susana and Michael grew up until they left home.

During this time in Acton - Helvecia did a lot of work supporting the local Labour party particularly around the time of elections. Helvecia and Jose parted and Helvecia moved to Ealing near to where Susana and Michael's families were living.

She followed her mother in being good at sewing and knitting - until her later years when her arthritis made it difficult. Helvecia produced a spectacular butterfly outfit for Susana for a young dance class performance. Michael recalls taking his daughters to ballet classes in their pink ballet cardigans Helvecia had knitted and there were pram covers and jumpers, some of which have passed down to and are still being used by Helvecia's great grandchildren.

Family wise - she was a mother-in-law to **Roy and Margaret**

Grandma to **Matthew, Christopher, Jessica, Alexa and Louisa**

and Great Grandma to **Chloe, Lola, Tyanna, Luna. Amelie and Autumn** - with a 3rd great granddaughter expected in July.

In September 2006 Helvecia wanted to visit and show to her family - the village where she was born and areas of Bilbao - so with **Susana, Roy, Michael, Margaret and Alexa** a trip was arranged. She was happy to have visited her father and uncle's graves, the village where she was born and to meet cousins again.

In addition to other gatherings throughout the year, the community of the basque children who travelled together to England 77 years ago this month - an annual lunch would be organised by a small committee including Helvecia.

In November 2002 the **Basque Children of '37 Association UK** was formed by **Natalia Benjamin and Manuel Moreno** in collaboration with **Helvecia** and she played an active role in the early work getting it established and remained as **Honorary President**.

The Family would like to invite - **first Natalia Benjamin** - as a friend and colleague from the association - to share her memories of **Helvecia** and afterwards **Herminio Martinez** for his reflections.

[Natalia Benjamin's tribute](#)



My name is Natalia Benjamin and I am the Secretary of the Basque children of ' 37 Association. I have been asked to say a few words about Helvecia`s contribution to the organisation.

The Basque children of ' 37 Association was founded 12 years ago. I had initially become interested in the story of the Basque children because my Spanish mother had worked with the children at the Langham colony near Colchester. I wrote a letter to "Saga" Magazine asking if anyone remembered my mother. I had a good response, including an invitation from Helvecia to the annual lunch of the Basque children in London, so that I could lead to more of them. I realise that the story of the Basque children was virtually unknown in this country and that valuable memories were being lost to posterity. I determined to change this and that is why the Association was set up in November 2002.

Helvecia was intimately involved in setting up the organisation – and I think it is fair to say that without Helvecia`s help, they would not have been an Association. We had no idea of where to start and she was generous in supplying names and addresses of the nonos. We were subsequently able to send information about what we hope to achieve. There have been attempts in the past to create associations, but they had floundered. However, we were determined that the children shouldn't be "los olvidados" (the forgotten ones) of the Spanish Civil War and that we would use the association to increase public awareness of the children's plight.

From then began a felicitous collaboration between the Basque children of ' 37 Association and Helvecia – which was for me personally the beginning of a warm friendship. Within the association, she was immediately given the status of Honorary President. And then she launched what almost amounts to a new career. She frequently appeared in public and gave talks and what it had been like to live through the Civil War and how she had adapted to life in a strange country. I'm sure that she never imagined that at her age (she was 80 years old at this time ) she would have a new role in life as a spokesperson for this group of former refugees !

Helvecia was a highly intelligent woman. Towards the end of the Second World War in 1944, she had been appointed to the prestigious post of Secretary of Estervan Salazar Chapela, Director of the newly formed Spanish Institute in London. So she was used to organising and taking charge of projects and only left the post to bring up her children.



During the 1st year of the Association's existence, Helvecia and I both went to Madrid to attend a conference on the X silent children, where Helvecia had been invited to present a paper. This was followed by her participation in a colloquium held at the Canada Blanch Spanish school in London, where she joined 3 other Basques and an Oxford University Professor in putting forward her story and participating in a round table.

Subsequently she was invited to conferences around the country on the Basque children. She came to at least 5 of our blue plaque ceremonies and actively participated not only in the day schools organised by Oxford University but also in radio and TV programmes. In particular, she felt very strongly about one of the foremost aims of the Association: to preserve the memory of the experience of the Basque children for future generations. As an ambassador, she had no equal.

Helvecia had a remarkable memory and was very helpful in identifying the children portrayed in photographs and could usually tell you a great deal about them. She was a natural leader, having in the 1940s organised football games on Saturdays for a group of Basque boys from the Midlands. When students or journalists wanted more information about the children for their thesis or an article, she was always ready to speak to them to ensure that they got the facts right. I knew that I could count on her.

I feel it a privilege to have known and have worked with Helvecia. She always used to like it when I stopped off to see her at Ealing on my way to somewhere in London. There would inevitably be a lovely meal waiting for me and I would hear the latest stories about her grandchildren, of whom she was inordinately proud. I know that I can speak for all in the Basque children of '37 Association when I say that Helvecia will be greatly missed".

And now a tribute by Herminio Martinez

"Helvecia's life and mine have been interwoven from our early years in Spain. She lived in a small pueblo "La Arboleda" high up on the Hill above "El Regato" where we lived. Both names describe extremely well the lovely rural setting, some 10 miles from Bilbao. I remember Helvecia coming down to visit her uncle just across the stream from our house.

The main industry of the area was iron ore mining. The hillsides were dotted with mine workings. Many of the men worked in the mines. My father did.

The Civil War brought chaos, bombing and hunger to this part of Spain. The Basque government evacuated many children to other countries. Families were torn apart. Helvecia with younger sister Delia and brother Helvio came to Britain, while a sister, was evacuated to Russia.

Helvecia and her sister and brother were very fortunate. They were adopted by the Quaker family the Cadburys. From their first colonia at The Oaks Park. They were taken out to attend boarding school. Hevecia then went on to do a secretarial/commercial course.

I think what we, the Basque children value deeply and why we have held Helvecia with such respect and affection, is the way she employed the skills she had acquired through her education, to work for the common good of the "Nonos Vascos". While living in Birmingham with the Cadburys, she would organise gatherings of the older Basque children who were working and dispersed or the area. Some of them very isolated and lonely.

When she moved to London, she worked at the Spanish Institute where she again dealt with the welfare of the Basque children and other Republican exiles. In those very difficult years, she also helped them then the Spanish Republican ambassador, Pablo Azcarate. At the "Hogar Espanol": the Republican social and cultural centre, she was always ready to participate in as many activities.

It is largely due to Helvecia , that the deep bonds that have held together the Basque children as a family, have been maintained throughout so many years. Until recently, she would organise the yearly Reunion Dinner that brought us all together. All of us will feel the loss of such a friend.

We join Helvecia`s family in their sorrow".

We`ve been remembering with fondness -- a much loved character  
We thank her for the privilege of having been part of all your lives  
and for her wonderful contribution, support and friendship over the years  
I`m sure, she will be greatly missed -- but never forgotten.

Let's now pause for a moment to give our own personal thanks and say our own farewells -- according to our own beliefs

In love and appreciation we bid our fond farewell -- while continuing to hold

her in our hearts and memories. The final curtains will now be closed.

Music: organist to play own choice

Helvecia leaves a void which can't be filled and no one could ever take her place.

But we remember that the tide recedes  
and leaves behind bright seashells on the sand  
The sun goes down, but the gentle warmth still lingers on the land  
The music stops, and yet it echoes on in sweet refrains  
For every joy that passes, something beautiful remains

I leave you with that thought and thank you all for coming along today and sharing in this occasion. Some of you have travelled from as far afield as **Buckinghamshire, Sussex, Oxford and Nottingham** to be here. It is greatly appreciated. Well done everyone.

If anyone would like to make a donation in memory - it would be appreciated if they could be made out to either "**The Macmillan Nurses**" or "**Oxfam**" and donations can be made, if you wish, via the funeral directors - details in your programme

Where you can also see that you are all warmly invited afterwards for refreshments back nearby at **The William 1V** on the Harrow Road.

May I wish you all peace, strength and understanding as your own lives continue to unfold

As we end our ceremony, thanking our organist - who is about to play for us **Vaughan Williams' "Rhosamedyre"** which means love.

Music : organist playing - Vaughan Williams – "Rhosamedre"