



Gibraltar: Challenge, Change & Continuity

The Friends of Gibraltar Oral History Project (1930 to 1970)

Catalina Ridgeway interviewed by Mary Ingoldby on 12th July 2013

Track 1

Introduction

Mother from Spain; Gomez side are all Gibraltarians; family background; origins of name; anecdote about working in London – Gomez being a common name in Spain, Arabic origins; Catalina is known as Kitty which was also a very common name in London in 1940s.

CR Born 6 November 1922; parents got married in 1921; eldest of 6 children;

MI: What was Gibraltar like when you were a child?

The British were the owners of Gibraltar, they had all the best things in Gibraltar; We were second class citizens until the Second World War broke out

Importance of Gibraltar during the war; majority of people spoke Spanish but had to speak English at School; had to leave school at 14 years old.

MI: Did the British and Gibraltarians mix?

Yes; marriage between English and Gibraltarians;

MI: Where did you live?

In Police Barracks, my mother got married there; the water was rain water in cisterns in the basements; big tubs with wooden tops to hold the water; inspectors came to check the water; Big veranda in the police barracks with no gates in between so that in case of fire people could run from one flat to another; CR speaks about the Navy Fleet arriving, children not allowed to go out;

CR speaks about her health and her husband's fortitude during his illness; her sisters; mother's house; all the girls slept in one room and the boys slept with the parents.

Houses were so scarce that people lived in their room and kitchen, 7 or 8 people sleeping in one room...the neighbours were one for each other, you could rely on the neighbours;

Women helping each other out when babies were born; babies born at home; unusual for women to go to hospital; mother's sisters;

MI: What about washing?

The washing day, used to have taps and boards, CR never did that herself, sister used to help her mother; cooking all day long, two big meals a day; Father's work; getting good food from the market; always ate very well;

CR speaks about her skin; being healthy; wearing white pinafores; good behaviour at home;

MI: What did you do after school?

Women didn't go to work at all here in Gibraltar, to be truthful the only people that went to work were widows who were left with many children.

CR speaks about hospice for children where they were cared for by Spanish nuns;

To be an unmarried mother in those days ...oh my word...it made history in Gibraltar

Being shy; sisters.

Track 2

MI: Evacuation and coming to England?

They didn't give us any time at all they were working underhand preparing things, On the quiet... they gave us two or three days to pack our things as quickly as possible, and gave us a list of the things we had to carry with us.. mattresses, pillows, blankets, things for disinfecting bandages; the jeeps used to come and take it to the dockyard

I didn't do much packing because I used to tell my mother you've got to take this this this, my sister had started courting a very nice boy and my father had a brother who had a died, my father was going to stay by himself and he didn't even know how to make a cup of tea;

Mother and cooking; ***she was the boss in the house;***

MI: Father was left here?

My father was left here by himself in Police Barracks... imagine all the women and the men were left behind. If they had sons over 18 they had to stay behind if they were 17 they had to go to England...they played about with us like monkeys

When went to England we went in a convoy which took 18 days to reach England because the Germans were after us, we couldn't talk loud, we couldn't throw a little bit of paper, Old people...young people..the steps to go down the hold, imagine for old people to have walk down....to get the food and then come down...the rocking of the ship...the younger ones ate on top of the deck...the bread went all stale..and we didn't know where we were going.

We landed in Swansea, we were just getting near the quay when the siren went and they were going to bomb...after they had a check up that we were clean we landed there they took us to the train and put us in the train and we didn't know where we were going...it took about 12 hours to get to Fulham, they were waiting in army jeeps and they took us to The Empress Hall and we stayed for about a year – it was an ice skating rink in Lily Road...they had beds between the seats , used to eat on the ice rink...we had only been there for five days and they started saying we had to go to work because we had to work for the war

I went to the Labour Exchange asked me how old I was and what I did in school, I said I don't mind working but I want to stay close to the Empress Hall because I want to be close to my mother because if a bomb comes I want to run to her.

I used to make cakes, steak and kidney pies, sausages... work was awful for work England – I didn't mind it because I was very close to my mother...it was a very big factory and had to have a special pass to go in....

Working conditions in the factory; smoking; coupons;

MI: Did you mother speak English?

She could understand something, she used to go by herself and do the shopping; black market – **she used to get up at 6 o'clock in the morning to get a bottle of olive oil...Little things made me very very happy; I was the eldest and the last one to get married...they called me the second mother with my sisters;**

Reading the newspaper in London; majority of people spoke Spanish; finding out about what was happening in Gibraltar, from letters from boyfriends and father; censorship; father sent money and sister's boyfriend used to send some money.

After Empress Hall family moved to The York Hotel where they lived for three years, they had three rooms, cooking downstairs, Gibraltarian cooks in the kitchen downstairs; at first no food up in your room but later on it was allowed; mother brought bottles of milk and they used to have a hot glass of milk before they slept;

Social life; looking at sights of London; knowing London really well;

MI: Bombing?

The bombing, we didn't have a shelter, they must have had a basement but we had nowhere to lie down, only a bench to sit down; when we had a full moon we knew that nobody would sleep for a few nights (fantastic description) in the morning you would see some buildings that had been bombed; the noise of the guns

MI: Did you see anyone killed or injured?

No I didn't I knew an English girl who lost her sister; bravery of the English; praying

CR speaks about her health; eyesight; going to church; luck of Gibraltarians.

Track 3

End of the war; situation in Gibraltar;

When we knew we were coming home, if I tell you the truth I would have stayed in London because I loved it, but I had my Dad here

CR speaks about marriage and family; home;

From London they took us to Scotland for three weeks waiting for the ship; a day before pack up your things we are going back to Gibraltar; when we came back father living in a different house, a very nice house;

CR speaks about the occasion when there was a big fight with Australian servicemen in Gibraltar, her father was in the police at this time.

When we came back imagine we lived in London so nice and quiet...and coming back here you looked out of the window and you felt you were going to touch the other window...but that was the first two weeks, after that Gibraltar for us....I always used to say I am longing to go back to see my dad and my brother in law..and have Curos (pastries)..my father used to get up every morning and buy them for us...one girl used to say whenever I see a full moon I will always remember the war.. living four years there.

MI: Identity?

I feel Gibraltarian because I like English people and I like Spanish people.....

English people getting drunk; Servicemen in Gibraltar and the UK; anecdote about London and buying fur coats;

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