



**Gibraltar: Challenge, Change & Continuity**  
The Friends of Gibraltar Oral History Project (1930 to 1970)

**Mercedes Perriam interviewed by Mary Ingoldby on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2013**

Born 3.1.1934; went to Madeira when she was four years old, remembers that her mother didn't have a lot of money and was helped out by the government of Madeira;  
going to school.

***My Mum used to say I can't afford it. My grandmother used to send us some money sometimes, she was in England. We got our shoes from the government there, I remember that very well***

Mother didn't work because she was looking after her children

*Do you think it was a very hard time for her?*

Yes it was, even though I was small I can remember that it was hard for her.

*Earliest memories of Gibraltar?*

MP can't remember a lot about this

*Coming back after the war?*

***I was ten years old coming back, I started at school; I didn't like school I didn't learn a lot, my mum took me out of school when I was 13 because I wasn't learning a lot, she used to say to me well if you are not going to learn you can stay indoors and help me.***

*What was your life like then?*

***I carried on in the house helping my Mum; I started working in a shoe shop and in 1961 we came on holiday to UK with my parents, and I met my husband, my husband was a brother of a cousin of mine and I came here and I met him here.***

*What was the daily routine at home?*

***Washing up dishes, cleaning, my father didn't want me to go to work, so I stayed in the house helping my mother***

*What did you want to do?*

***Well I didn't know, I was happy in the house with my Mum, going out shopping with her and all that...Once I started working I didn't want to leave the job. In those days the money it was wonderful what you used to get***

And what about your friends?

**One of the neighbours the girl was about the same age as me, we used to go out to the pictures, but I never went out a lot because my father wouldn't let me go out at night. Specially when the army was there and the Marines, my father wouldn't let me go out a lot because there were too many of them in the street.**

Did your parents speak about the war?

**Not really I don't think so, I don't think they did**

Did you learn about England?

**Not really but I knew people in England were suffering more than we were in Madeira;**

Memories of the Bedenham explosion

**My Mum had two windows you could see the sea; I saw the boat when it exploded. My cousin came to the house and we were sitting by the window she looked outside and she said to my mother 'auntie look there is a boat on fire there', so of course we knew my brother was working there so off we went the three of us down to the dockyard, I remember the police stopping us not to go further down, and we turned around and another explosion came, and he put his hand on her head so we wouldn't move you know – I remember that so well because it was just opposite our window where the boat was.**

**So we came back to the house a piece of the ship had fallen on top of the roof, and broke all the crockery in the kitchen – when we came back we found out the kitchen was all down.....The fire brigade had to come and take the piece out of the top of the roof.**

Your father was quite strict?

**Not strict in a way, I used to be Daddy's girl, but because I was young and I didn't have a boyfriend or anything – even when I was working, because in those days the ships used to come to Gibraltar, and just on the other side of the road from the shoe shop there was a café, and he used to say I'm coming to meet you - you are not walking up the road on your own.**

When you came over to England and met your husband, what did your parents think?

We came over because my mother had won the lottery, and my dad always wanted to come to England and see some of the family, the side of my grandfather, we came and stayed with my cousin, this chap came to see us, and we met and then I went back home, and then he started to writing to me, in 1962 he had an accident on a motorbike, I came back for a week with my parents by then I was engaged to him, and then he came back home and we got married back home.

He banged his head they said he wouldn't survive but after a while he was ok after that – got married in Gib in 1965 – lovely wedding then about two weeks after we came back here to live, we lived in Wembley for two years in a room

only, by then he was trying to get his money from his accident and when he did we got the house

*What was it like for you leaving Gibraltar?*

I wanted to come here for an experience because I'd never been, but my husband wanted to stay. My mum she was happy because she didn't mind and we used to go every year back home; my dad came a couple of times here, when I bought the house they came to stay with us, they used to come every year

*Did he mind about you leaving?*

He was happy because he got on so well with my husband; he said he was a son to him

*Did Stanley (MP's husband) speak Spanish?*

***No, I tried to teach him, I think he understood a lot because sometimes I used to say something and he used to laugh, made you wonder.***

***Now I am with my brother all the time we speak Spanish – when Paul and Lilly come we always speak in Spanish – and with Pilar and Amelia sometimes I say something in English sometimes I say it in Spanish***

*What do you feel about yourself, nationality, culture?*

***I will always be Gibraltarian all my life, but married to an English fellow and I'm English but for me Gibraltarian because I was born there***

*What do you think about going back to Gibraltar?*

I think it is fantastic – in Gib if I want to go out I can go, here I don't like going out.