



Gibraltar: Challenge, Change & Continuity

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

Pilar Bautista – interviewed by Mary Ingoldby on 14th March 2013

Track 1

Family: paternal grandparents, grandmother from a village in Malaga; father descendant from Italians from Genoa

Maternal grandparents – grandfather was Maltese but Mother was Gibraltarian

Both parents born and bred in Gibraltar

PB was the second child – spread out family because of the war

Born in 1939

Brother born 1936

Sister 1946

Sister 1953

Memories of London

Remembers going to Kensington Gardens with her aunt and going on the swings

The rest is what she heard from her mother

Her mother always used to say that the best days of her life was here (in London) during the war; Great social life; they went to dances in the different hotels

PB's family lived in Kensington Palace Mansions Hotel. PB thinks that they had the top floor.

Great grandmother, grandmother, aunt, mother, brother and herself. Two years later her two of her uncles came over.

Father was back in Gibraltar – (he was one of four brothers). After the war one of the uncles returned to Gibraltar, and another uncle came to the UK.

Her father was about 28 at this time, he was an electrician and worked as the head Gunga for REMI – they built the hospital inside The Rock, he was in charge of the other electricians – Gunga is an English term; he couldn't be the foreman because he wasn't in the army; couldn't be the foreman above because wasn't in the was the army so he was beneath them – he must have been about 28; Father no accepted into the army as he had something wrong with his spine.

Was there a conscription of younger men (Gibraltarians) into the British Army?

No but they had to stay, they couldn't leave. Civilians under the British Gov.

More memories of London

Mother went out to work, children were put in nurseries. Some Gibraltar men came over with their wives; her mother worked in a factory; they came over August 1940, and returned to Gibraltar in August 1945.

When you went back – were you taught about the war?

No – probably learnt more than what happened in Malta

PB's mother had never been out of Gibraltar before; PB speaks about the children who were very badly behaved in the hotels in London.

The children were jumping over the sofas in the posh hotels, and the mothers they just let them do what they wanted, they weren't controlled at all.

They were living in little rooms – they used to play out in the street in Gibraltar, in London they couldn't do that

In Gibraltar Mothers stayed at home to look after the children, they only started working after the frontier closed in the 1960s.

Where was the school?

PB thinks it was in the hotel itself

The majority of evacuees were Catholic, but PB thinks some may have been Jewish. Generally the evacuees who went to Madeira has more money.

Track 2

PB tells a story about her mother trying to locate her grandmother (presume not the same grandmother who was staying at the hotel) she had arrived and been taken ill. She was taken to a hospital in Bristol. It was very difficult to locate here because her mother spoke very little English and had never learnt how to write. She eventually found her and went to see her, the grandmother died the next day; there was another daughter (mother's sister) who was in North Wales and she never got to see her mother before she died.

When PB's future husband arrived in the UK he was put into a Barnardos Home.

Barnardos children were evacuated to the country and the Gibraltar children moved in – they put us in the centre of London with the bombs raining down. The day we left a bomb fell on Kensington Palace Mansions, still some people there, nobody was killed. My uncle who was on the 6th floor in bed with his partner, and they fell on the bed right down to the ground floor.

The English people used to say Gibraltarians were lucky, keep me close to the Gibraltarians because they are always safe.

PB says you never hear about the Gibraltarians in London

Did a lot of people have affairs?

Of course they did, that's why my Uncle who was single and handsome.....

PB speaks about Gibraltarian culture and, marriage.

My father would not have liked me to marry an Englishman, not because he was English but because he would take me out of Gibraltar

A lot of marriages were broken because men were left alone in Gibraltar for four years; the Spanish came across the border. I know of two children who were born

PB speaks about her Uncle's affair in the UK

She was a married woman, she had a child and she had an affair with my uncle and had a boy and a girl then the war was nearly finished – she was sent to Ireland, she had the boy and was expecting, he went to Ireland to give the child his name, and I think he used to go to Ireland to visit her and the children and then the relationship broke up.

Her mother took her child from her first marriage and took him to Gibraltar – she handed him over to his father and his mother never saw the son again, the son was told his mother had died during the war, and he didn't even know he had a brother and a sister. She stayed over here.

PB speaks about her uncle always looking for these children

The woman died and the son (Tommy) went to Gibraltar looking for his brother, he met his nephews and niece and he asked about his father – eventually met his father. PB met Tommy at her uncle's funeral. – Tommy was the baby that was with them when they fell six floors when the hotel was bombed during the blitz.

PB CONTINUES to tell the story of Tommy. Recently there was an extraordinary coincidence. PB met a Gibraltarian woman at a local health clinic who turned out to be Tommy's wife.

PB says that now there is no official community of Gibraltarians in London; some Gibraltarians stayed in Fulham after the war. PB's family settled in Lewisham because a member of their family was already here.

Track 3

PB's family never went to Ireland, they went straight back to Gibraltar, via Liverpool where they waited for 15 days for a boat. PB's mother remembers the Liverpoolians as being lovely people, very friendly.

PB tells a story about another of her Uncles who had been going out with a Gibraltarian in London, and met her again on the boat going home, they eventually got married in Gibraltar.

Did your father come and visit when you were in London?

Yes he came for a month – PB doesn't remember but her brother did.

I remember seeing this man who I had never seen before, I always used to think I have never seen my father, even when we arrived in Gibraltar, we never asked my father why he was different, because of his spine, but my sister asked him. He had hurt his back because he used to carry a lot on his back and at the time they couldn't do anything about it

Her father used to send money every month, PB thinks the Government took the money out of the wages.

Language problems, majority of Gibraltarians didn't speak English; PB speaks about the younger generation not being able to understand Spanish. – now.

When we were in the playground we used to speak Spanish, once we got in the class it was English

The generation that came over – hadn't been to school so didn't speak English, my mother knew how to read but she didn't know how to write, she read Spanish and English, somebody had to teach us how to spell our names, couldn't write in Spanish either; Only the well off could

Father left school at 10 – he loved learning, he carried on with his books and he wrote English and Spanish, he worked with English people, he was well educated, he educated himself, he used to have two jobs whilst he was an apprentice – he ran a café in the early morning and then went to his apprentice work

PB Tells story which connects to the Grandmother story in Bristol (track1) she describes how her mother had to visit North Wales to tell her sister that their mother had died.

My mother used to get friends to write for her, so people used to know our business

Any racism?

There must have been, my mother used to say though they had great fun, they worked together

Track 4

Gibraltar after the war

PB and family returned in 1944 – she was 5 years old.

We went to school straight away, they got a building, then they built some Nissan huts and that's where we went to live, I loved it, but my mother would never settle.

We went to an hotel first of all, right in the middle of Main Street, the hotel was packed....a lot of people had come back and they had houses, but my mother lived with my grandmother, some lived in Spain, people didn't want to live in Spain. Slowly they started building, Nissan huts....Then they dried The Lagoon and built Nissan huts there, dried what we called The Glasses they build houses, prefabs,

PB Describes Nissan huts

You walked in to your right there was a toilet, a bit further up there was the living room and two bedrooms and on that other corner was the kitchen, and we had a little front where the kids could play

Then they built The Humphreys, they were the best houses that they ever built in Gib, but by then we had moved to Town Range – two rooms and a kitchen and there were 6 of us in two rooms sharing the toilet so we applied for The Humphreys and they gave us a flat – it was beautiful, I loved it there. That was on the 6th floor, we had a balcony, we could see the sea – was my mother happy? No. We moved from there to another house under the stairs because she was petrified of the wind,

This was about 1949; the last house was in Castle Rock, where my younger sister was born

Relationship between Gibraltarians and the Military?

We didn't see much of them, I got to know them more when I worked in Liptons – got to know the wives

Did they seem very English?

Oh yes, very – we were very friendly with a Chinese girl and she used to say that they didn't like her, my father was very much with the English because he worked with them.

Speaks about her family moving to England in stages.

What were the British like?

We didn't mix, they had their own houses, they had the best really, they had their own swimming pools, things that we weren't allowed, they had the NAFI, my father used to get on because he was working with them, the foreman invited us to afternoon tea which was really nice – only my father and myself because my mother had left because my father had worked in the same job for 31 years

Was Gibraltar quite poor after the war?

We didn't have anything, we don't produce anything, Spain didn't have much either, so yes and our wages were very poor

What about the women after the war?

Back home again, they didn't work, they were always talking about the good old days, to them it was the good old days

PB Speaks about her cousin who still cannot see an old war film because she didn't like it in the UK, she had a hard time because she was too young and had to look after her younger brothers and sisters. And then they went to Ireland

What about your mother – did they talk about how free they were?

Yes they had freedom, can you imagine – back in Gibraltar - living in a house where there was extended family - all she did was work in the house, she was spotless, cleaning the house – and then coming to London and having that freedom

Were people unsettled?

They must have been – my mother always wanted to come back to England but my father didn't like it, he didn't like England but he made a sacrifice because my brother became an electrician and he said he was coming to England. My father used to read all the English papers and he tried to stop him but he said when I am 21 I am off.....My father put it to the vote – who wanted to come, and silly me, my mother talked so much about England and I thought alright lets go. He (my father) gave everything up and came over and he only lasted 13 months he was never happy. And then my brother what did he do? – he went to Australia.

The whole family had to go?

Because my father couldn't; leave his son and he said he could keep an eye – he used to have the Daily Mirror once a week but we got all the daily papers, even the Sundays and they came all together with an orangey yellow cover and he used to have all of these – Tit Bits, Reveille – and all the scandal – and he didn't want his son to be there, if he is on his own God knows what would happened to him but if he had his family – so that's why we came

The family came to Lewisham – PB was 20

When I got to England and I didn't see shutters on the windows, I nearly died, I thought people could get in the house, to see the shutters was security. I wanted to go to Seville but my father said no

PB speaks about the light and the weather

I came in November, the fog I remember crossing Putney bridge 1959.

Did you meet husband here?

No I met him over there, he was Gibraltarian and he left his mum and his sister and he came over for me

Were a lot of Gibraltarians moving to England?

No – a lot of them came over but the gradually and slowly loads went back

Discussion about size of Gibraltar

PB's boyfriend came over first; he lived in her mother's house with her. I slept with the girls he slept with the boys, they were more like brothers than brothers in law

PB speaks about her father.

Two years before we got married – got married in 1962 – my father had died by then, he had a heart attack and he went to the hospital and the sister said to me if he survives for three weeks and then he had a chance, the last day of these 3 weeks was when he died, I was getting ready to go to work and there was a knock on the door and it was the police to tell me he had died.

I got on very well with my dad. I got married we got ourselves a room, then my brother married in Gibraltar and brought her over and then went to Australia – but when my husband died my younger sister came and lived with me, I brought them up, I had my children, one was 4 months one was three years.

I wouldn't put a step father to my children

Discussion about step parents.

How often to you go back?

Very often if I can, last year I went three times

Who do you think you are?

Gibraltarian, British

Gib has always pulled me back, it is that bit of rock, it's in your heart and most of the Gibraltarian feel that.

*Compiled: December 2013
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