



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

Amalia and Olegario Tavares interviewed by Mary Ingoldby on 14th March 2013

Track 1

Amalia

Family: Father was born in Gibraltar; AT thinks grandparents came from Portugal; mother came from Ronda in Spain and her family were all from Spain. Mother had three brothers and father had eight brothers and sister
AT born in Gibraltar but lived in La Linea for her first year.

The family was evacuated to Casablanca at the beginning of the war then brought back to Gibraltar for a couple of months and then stayed in La Linea.

I think we were supposed to go to Jamaica but from what I heard from my mum and other people they had a rough time and when they stopped in England they decided to stay in England and they wouldn't go to Jamaica or anywhere else because by the time they arrived in England they had no bread nothing to eat so they decided to stay in England and whatever happened happened.

AT was the eldest child in the family and her brother was born in the UK

MI: Who went to Casablanca?

AT: My mum, myself, auntie and Grandmother – father stayed behind in Gibraltar, he was a labourer.

MI: Did Gibraltarian men to enlist in the British Army?

AT supposed some did, some were working for the British Army. Her father was a fire warden/ fire watching.

MI: How long were you in England?

AT thinks about 4/5 years

MI: Any memory of it?

AT remembers being in a nursery and coming up the stairs to the seventh floor of the hotel, remembers coming in to the room with a piece of plasticine; and remembers older girls locking her in a cupboard. AT was about 2 years old; still feels claustrophobic.

MI: What did your mother tell you about this time?

She was very frightened, she was praying all the time; I remember I had a temperature and I was ill, my brother had been born, I must have been about 3 or 4, and my Mum was looking at a very tall window and she was looking outside and praying, how am I going to take this child downstairs to the shelter. I said there is a man standing next to you and he says they won't be coming tonight.

AT had a vision of her grandfather who she believes had come to reassure them.

MI: Has anything happened since, are you a psychic?

AT remembers another occasion when she saw a ghost as a child – her uncle had died.

MI: Extraordinary for the women to come from Gibraltar to Kensington? – did your mother work?

AT: No my mum never worked, my aunt and uncle had a little job, my younger uncle was only 16 and he used to box, and they used to call him nigger, because he was very dark skinned. We had photographs back home with boxing gloves and everything – when we were in Kensington. Other uncle joined a group who used to shows for the Gibraltarians; he used to play the mandolin

MI: Gibraltarians bought their culture with them?

AT: Yes – we have photographs of people during the war – looks for photographs (FOLLOW UP ON PHOTOGRAPHS)

Track 2

MI: Did your family talk about the evacuation?

AT: Mum used to – Dad came over for a holiday to see us once. Father probably sent them money;

MI: Did she enjoy being in England?

AT: Yes she didn't mind, she had lovely clothes when she got back; she used to make clothes for me from the dresses she had bought in England. She said they used to go to the cinema they went to see Bambi and Snow White, used to go out for walks to the shops.

AT tells anecdote about her mother going to a shop to buy some matches, and miming as she couldn't speak English.

My mum was here four years and all she could say was please and thank you and goodbye in English

She told me that I had the chicken pox and the ambulance came and took me somewhere in London to a hospital Mum never knew what hospital I was in because she couldn't communicate with anybody but she said that when they took me I had a lovely little coat and hat and that when I came back she wouldn't recognise me because I came with all the other children in the ambulance and she said she stood there at the door and thought - my God how am I going to find my daughter here, and then suddenly I started crying, and she said this must be my daughter...and I always said I hope you picked the right one, it wasn't somebody else's daughter!

MI: Were you sent back to Gibraltar or Ireland?

We just went to Liverpool and from there ..the first thing I remember going back (to Gibraltar) and that we were put into army trucks and we had vaccinations, chicken pox, and from there it wasn't far from where our home was and I can remember going up these stairs and I could smell and I didn't know what it was, it was cucumber. Every time I smell cucumber I think of Gibraltar.

My dad had this room with a table in the middle, a bit dark, and then the other room was lighter and my Dad had two tins of toffee with a girl giving an apple to a horse, and I still have that tin back home

MI: Had your little brother met his father?

AT – they met when father came over to England

My mum was supposed to have the baby in Kensington but that had been bombed that night so they had to bring her, with the police, all the way to Lambeth.

MI: Did you go to school?

AT: I went to the nursery – down at the bottom of the hotel and I remember they used to take us to the park and they had old fashioned pram, and I wanted to walk, they used to sit me there with the younger babies.

MI: Were they nurses?

AT: No just English girls. My mum said I never slept, I was always with the girls, and I used to imitate them smoking

MI: What did your mum do when you were at nursery?

AT says that her mother didn't work – perhaps because she had a young baby.

MI: Did you go back to original flat in Gibraltar?

They had lived in La Linea before evacuation. When they returned to Gibraltar her father found a flat with two rooms and a kitchen. Subsequently they moved downstairs in the same building.

MI: Were the houses taken by the British?

AT: It wouldn't surprise me

Short discussion about the relationship between British, The Military and Gibraltarians

MI: Infrastructure?

AT says it was fine, both herself and her brother returned to school.

MI: Gibraltar has changed a great deal – what was it like when you were growing up?

I had a very good upbringing, best years of my life apart from having my children. I used to go to school, I had plenty of friends, I had a good home, although my dad was a labourer, and he worked in the cinema in the evening so that we had a bit of extra money. My mum used to make my clothes, when I was growing up I only had two pairs of shoes, one to go out and one for school;

Track 3

Oligario Tavares comes into the interview at this point

MI: Did you meet in England?

OT tells the story of how he met Amalia, through their mutual friend Pilar. (see further on in recording)

AT: My dad was very happy but he went to the police station and made enquiries about what sort of family he came from but realised he was a good family so he agreed

MI: Do you think he would have agreed if you had not been Gibraltarian?

AT: I remember people in Gibraltar if they saw me talking to an Englishman, one of the servicemen, they go straight to my dad and say I saw your daughter talking to an Englishman and then there would be a lot of arguments because he never wanted me to marry an Englishman because he said I have to come to England and my mother used to say what if she married a Gibraltarian and they decided to

go to England, what then? Oh that's different he used to say because he's always got the chance that they will eventually come back, which we haven't

MI: Was there Inter-marriage?

AT: Oh yes there were and with Spanish girl from across the border as well, there were quite a lot.

MI: Evacuation, women and men separated – broken marriages?

AT: There were quite a few and there were a few who had lady friends in La Linea and some carry on when the wives came back,

MI: Children?

AT: Probably yes

Intro – Oligario Tavares – born in Gibraltar. Both parents Gibraltarians; mother born in La Linea.

My father was from Gibraltar, my mother is from Gibraltar but she was born in La Linea but registered in the British council in La Linea and could carry on as being a British subject.. We've been better off really by being in Gibraltar and not being run by Spain really, or else we would be in trouble, much better off no doubt about it.

MI: What happened to you during the war?

OT: We went to Morocco and we came back to Gib and then we came to England, and my mother – we went to the Ivanhoe hotel behind Tottenham Court Road -we left the hotel and we went privately, she found two bedrooms and a kitchen, somewhere around Russell Square, so not living with the rest of the Gibraltarians; and I was going to school, and when they evacuate all the children from the school I had to go too. They couldn't keep me in the house by law; all the children had to go to the country. They took all the children to Penzance and then what happened, my father was working as a carpenter over here, and my mother was working in the tobacco factory the Black Cat (in Camden Town), they were making cigarettes even though now it is not a factory any more and the two black cats they have been covered at the entrance of the factory with boards and painted over.

.MI: Was your father British, he lived in England?

OT: Well he came over, he didn't come with us but later he managed to pay the passage and came over as visiting but and he stayed with us and he got a job as a carpenter

MI: How many children?

OT: My sister was brought up with my uncle and grandfather because my grandfather he lost his wife and according to my parents they left my sister Margarita with them and of course we came to London and they went to Jamaica so we were never together until after the war really.

Oligario and his sister were the only children in the family. Oligario was five when he was evacuated to England Where were you in the family

MI: Because you had been separated was it difficult?

OT: Oh yes, because later on my uncle and grandfather did not want her to come to us, so we left it like that and we grew up separated, we could see each other every day for lunch but it wasn't living in the same flat

MI: Was it a strange thing to do?

OT: Yes but according to my mum she said it was because your Grandfather lost his wife and we offered to let her stay with them, but once she stayed it was forever, this is what happened so we were separated.

MI: She became the woman of the house?

OT: I suppose so

Track 4

Coming to the UK

Just |OT and his mother and then father, came with an aunty as well – she had a son and a daughter born in London and son born in N Ireland.

OT: When I was evacuated after three months we found out from the hotel that they were moving us to Ireland so then my dad had to claim me back to London – we went to Penzance, all I can remember is a big hall there and many ladies there and each one would say I could manage two children or three children or one to look after and we used to live in their home

MI: can you remember the family you lived with in Penzance?

OT: I don't remember their names all I remember is going to this big hall, and all the ladies etc. And we used to go to their homes and live with them

MI: Did you go with others?

OT: Oh yes about three with me

MI: Have you ever been back?

OT: Yes on our 21st wedding anniversary. We never went to the town hall really, they might have pictures

MI: How long were you in Penzance?

OT: I think about three months – we received order that evacuees going to N Ireland my dad wanted to get me back, he had a bit of difficulty, the man in charge was the inspector for the train, he looked after me until we reached Kings Cross, I remember meeting British and American sailors, I had a sticker with all my details and every time the train would stop the inspector would stay with me, until he brought me here to Kings Cross and my father was there and mother and then we went to N. Ireland and we were there for about 2 years

Mi: What can you remember about N Ireland?

OT: We were all the time running up and down it was like a holiday for us really, sometimes upsetting the farmers really, we used to knock down stone walls by climbing, and the farmers were very upset. Nissan huts – it was alright we had a good supply of coal for the fire

MI: Some of evacuees had a hard time?

OT: For the grown up maybe they had a hard time but for us we had no idea if it was rough or not, we had a teacher as well, but he had an argument with a mother and they started fighting and they held a meeting to resolve and then the teacher resigned, he was the only teacher, he was Gibraltarian and we had no teachers until we came back to Gib

MI: Were you speaking in Spanish or English?

OT: Oh yes Spanish, I remember in my school days, the Christian Brothers used to say talk English at home, now a days they do it but not in our time.

AT: We were taught the same curriculum as in England but when I went home with my mum being Spanish we used to speak in Spanish all the time, when I worked in Liptons people thought I was Spanish because I had my mums accent. A gentleman came to me and said why are you working here, because I have a job here, yes but you are Spanish you are not supposed to work here and I said but I am not Spanish I am Gibraltarian, I was born and brought up in Gibraltar so I have the right, he was furious because I was working in the shop because he thought I was Spanish working at the shop because at that time Spanish people were allowed to work in Gibraltar but not work as a shop assistant, they were supposed to clean or work as maids now it is different but at that time they weren't allowed to

AT comments that there wasn't conflict between the Gibraltarians and the Spanish. Talking about accents – you could tell the difference between and Gibraltarian and a Spanish accent.

AT: Yes there is a difference, I never had a Gibraltarian accent because my mum was Spanish and I had her accent and I used to spend a lot of time in La Linea.

Track 5

Northern Ireland – Oligario

Discussion about photograph (from history compilation) which shows young Gibraltarians protesting in N Ireland.

OT: Oh yes yes always demonstrations and things like that

AT - the people who went to N Ireland were the people who had no family in Gibraltar to reclaim their property. That happened to my aunty and cousin - they had no one so they weren't allowed to go back which was wrong I think because if you were Gibraltarian and you wanted to go back you should have been allowed, to go back to your own place.

Amelia's father had to act as guarantor for the family.

Shortage of housing meant that many Gibraltarians went back to live in Nissan huts or Prefabs

OT - in my case my father rented our house to a Spanish man, so my aunty had to go after him and get him to leave, when he left she could prove there was a place for us to go to

AT: if you didn't have a place to stay they wouldn't sent you back to Gib

Discussion about displaced people after WWII;

MI: Do you remember coming home?

OT- Oh yes I do remember coming home, the army was there waiting for us they were with Land rovers, the soldiers went onto the boat to get our baggage and they took us back to our houses.

Amalia

Continue about Oligario's house – thanks to my aunty got rid of the man in O's house and then they could go back

MI: *How do you think your family kept sense of Gibraltar alive?*

AT: *At the hotel I presume we all spoke Spanish – Gibraltarian which is a mixture of English and Spanish, my grandmother didn't speak a lot of English either, we were still in the Gibraltarian community and everyone talked the same way and did the same things*

MI: *Did you have a sense of who you were?*

OT: I don't think it mattered much to me

MI: *What was it like for you growing up in Gib in the 1950s?*

OT: *I think nowadays in a way people live more independent than before. Before we were all in these patios one toilet for about 15 houses and all that plus what happened the women used to fight because of the children and there was always arguing and that really got me upset all the time arguing, everyone talking about each other. And then we moved to these new flats and we were better off there, everyone had their own door, and not in the patio whether you want it or not you had to mix with all of them, nowadays it is much better.*

One of the things I wanted for her over here is that she had a garden for herself to hang her clothes and everything, and over there they used to say today's my washing day, arguments about washing day/- you had to share so much.

MI: *How old were you when you decided to leave Gibraltar and come to the UK?*

OT says the British army was being scaled down in Gibraltar and the family were worried that there wouldn't be enough work. OT's father was a foreman and OT was a carpenter.

OT: *We panicked and said let's go to England..... We are going to loose our jobs – quite a big thing to do really, now I don't know why I decided to do it instead of waiting to see what happens*

Discussion about Gibraltarian culture when everyone sticks together.

MI: *Would you have preferred to stay in Gibraltar?*

OT: *Sometimes yes but it is more peaceful for me here and I feel happy*

MI: You've got privacy

OT: Yes that's right

One of our cousins that has been coming here said to me once, over there you get tired of seeing the family all the time every day and over here it is so peaceful you don't see nobody.

AT: I am completely different I like to have all my cousins and all my family all around me, I am happiest at Christmas. I used to have three cousins here but they have all gone back home now. There used to be about 18 of us in that room over there, I don't know how we managed it but we did. With my parents, they used to come every Christmas and spend Christmas with me and my brother. And when I used to go in the room and saw them all round me, that was the happiest day.

Track 6

Amalia and Oligario talk about how they met. Oligario was in England; Pilar had a photograph of Amalia and suggested that he write to her. They wrote to each other; Amalia came over to the UK, and they got married in Gibraltar. They have been together for fifty years.

MI: *What did you parents feel when you came over here?*

AT: My dad was glad that he was a Gibraltarian, and the poor thing died hoping that we would go back. My mother would have liked me to go back, but she used to come over with my brother and I used to go in the summer and stay 6 weeks

Amalia speaks about the culture shock of coming to England.

AT: I was depressed for 17 years – because I liked my family with me, and being here I was on my own with him. We used to live near Tottenham Court Road and Pilar was here (in Lewisham), we didn't have any contact, no phone or anything. I was on my own, I didn't work because he didn't want me to work until the children were grown up, I was in the house all day, I had no friends nobody, I was really really lonely. I used to cry a lot and I am still crying. It took me 17 years to get used to England.

His dad died soon after we came so I never met him and his mother used to work and she re married so used to live around her, married and Englishman. We saw her on Sundays we used to come over to her place, during the week I was all on my own

Oligario says that his Mother lived with them for a short time; Amalia remembers that one of her children was born on the same day as Oligario's father's funeral, and the day that England won the world cup.

They moved to Lewisham in 1967.

Oligario speaks about his mother during the war

OT: About my mother, I don't know how she managed it, she used to work in the cigarette factory, at lunchtime she picked me up and we went to Camden Town and we ate in the café and at 2 o'clock she took me back to school – during the war. Some times the air raid would go, and we went into a butchers shop and everybody

was kneeling down, she'd say - come on lets kneel down and pray here like all the others. It would have been better if she left me there at school with the other boys.

MI: *Did she adore you?*

OT: ***Yes too much, she spoilt me – I was here and she was in Jamaica with grandfather and uncle***

MI: *Do you still see your sister?*

OT: Yes she is in Gib now; we don't talk much about these things.

Mi asks if they think that their mother's had an extraordinary experience during the war?

AT - My mother used to talk to me about London, what happened to me in the cupboard, and seeing the Grandfather. Mother in law no never spoke anything about during the war to me.

I remember my grandmother she used to call – down through the lift so I could come and pick her up, I remember that

AT speaks about the layout of the hotel and where they live

Air Raids and Underground Stations

OT: Yes in Warren street station we used to stay some nights there

AT: ***My mum went only once and my brother ran away and she couldn't catch him and she panicked because he nearly ran on the rail and she said I'd rather die by a bomb than do this again.***

At speaks about using the shelter in the basement of the hotel

My mum used to sleep on the top and my brother and I underneath in the basement, all bunk beds – my mum didn't put it up properly and I got hit by part of the bed, I still have the mark there somewhere.

OT: we used to stay in bunk beds in Warren Street

MI: *Do you remember being frightened?*

OT: as a boy it was all fun for me, my parents they were the ones who suffered and they knew the danger

MI: *Did you ever see anything awful?*

OT: Coming out from the shelter you could see the bombed buildings and they were still on fire

AT remembers her mother telling her that a flying bomb landed on the hotel opposite and it was reduced to rubble and their hotel only had the windows shattered

We were lucky really – our building was saved

Yes I remember my mum saying that people who were living around where we were living that people used to come to our hotel and stay there because they said we were lucky.. ...Only a handful of Gibraltarians died by bombs

MI: Identity?

AT: British Gibraltarian – that's how I feel; the Jubilee we had this year, I really feel very proud of being British and also very proud of being Gibraltarian born in And brought up in Gibraltar with the mixture of English Gibraltar Spanish. I don't consider myself Spanish, I do like Spain but I don't feel anything about Spain, no feeling at all, another country like America. But what really pulls me is England and Gibraltar.

OT: I've always considered myself as a British man really, before it was a British subject but then they said me no more British subject, British , alright. Let's be honest we've been very lucky really for many years, by being British, we been lucky. Even the Spanish man used to say the only difference is that you've been born here and I've been born on the other side and you've got all the benefits.

*Compiled: December 2013
Copyright Reserved FOGHS*