

Vicente Cañada

Your Excellency the Mayor of Southampton
Your Excellency the Ambassador of Spain
Your Excellency Lady Speaker for the Basque Government
Dear Ladies and Gentlemen

In 1937 I was part of that big group of Basque children who arrived on the Habana fleeing the Spanish Civil War.

Although a bit moved on my first adventure at the age of 7, I have to admit that I felt happy coming here and leaving behind all the fear spread by Franco's planes. I was hopeful that the situation would be better in England than in our homeland, where the enemy troops were getting closer and closer, with all the problems that that entailed.

The two years that I spent in this country I was truly happy, even though I missed my family.

After some difficult times in Southampton – especially, after the strong emotional impact that the news of the fall of Bilbao had on us – I was dispersed first to Dymchurch, then to Scarborough and finally to Bradford.

In each of those places I found wonderful people and I clearly remember a girl in Scarborough and a gentleman in Bradford whose names have become permanently recorded in my mind. I will never be thankful enough for their companionship and affection.

After those two years I returned to Bilbao and was greatly demoralised. Apart from the joy of seeing my family safe again (others were not so fortunate), it was very sad to see such precarious conditions. Relying on the rights gained by the use of force, those who had won the war did as they pleased. Although this was very demoralising in itself, the worse was still to come.

We had to endure scarcities of all kinds for many years. For example, lack of food, something that did not affect those who had power and money, two things that generally meant the same thing.

Those of us who went back struggled to adapt from a situation of abundance to one of total rationing.

This, together with the total lack of freedoms, and in many cases, the terrible repression that ensued, made us think constantly of the wonderful time that we had spent on British soil.

During the 1950s and 1960s things began to improve but we still had to put up with the dictator until God called him to his side, and the truth is that our Creator took some time to do so.

All that time, I harnessed the hope that my British friends and their allies would come to our aid. In Spain many lived with that hope that never materialised.

We followed the second world war step by step, as if it was our own war, and we endured the same adversities that you faced, as well as celebrating every success that you had.

At the end, when you celebrated your victory, we shared in your joy.

All those times are now behind and we are here again today to express our affection to this country that gave us so much at the time and which we will always carry in our hearts, as the thankful people that we are.

Thank you very much for your attention and all my best wishes to you all.