

# A history of Edurne Cid Santibañes, her brother José Luis and sister Carmen.

By Edurne's son Iain Monaghan



**Edurne CID SANTIBAÑES (dob 17.2.1926 dod 5.11.2011)**

This is the story about how I and my two sisters came to be born in Scotland having a Spanish mother and a Scottish father .

My mother Edurne Cid Santibañez was born in Bilbao in the Basque region of Spain in 1926. She was the eldest of three, with a brother Luis and a sister Carmen.

They were the children of Francisco Cid and Fruttosa Santibañez. Francisco my *abuelo* (grandfather),, came from a wealthy wine growing family from the town of Viriones. His father, my great grandfather, had the unfortunate addiction to gambling, an addiction which rarely ends well and his case was no exception. He lost his wealth and estate, presumably paying off debts, while hoping to strike it lucky one day. Of course this did not happen and this sad and sorry situation resulted in his wife taking her own life. In stark contrast my *abuela* (grandmother), Fruttosa, came from a simple rural family from Pasajes De San Juan. The couple initially lived in Bilbao, where my *abuelo* earned his living working in a steel foundry. Bilbao was the main production centre for steel in Spain up to the civil war. Prior to the civil war in 1936 they lived in the district of Deusto.

Before my grandfather's capture both he and my grandmother had taken the difficult decision to ensure their children's safety by evacuating them to another country. My mother, Edurne, who was only 11 at the time, told me they discussed this plan with her. My mother said she wanted to go to Great Britain because she heard that they had lovely white bread!

Anchored in the port of Bilbao that day (21st May 1937) were three ships. One bound for the USA, one for Great Britain and one for the USSR. Sadly none of the refugees who went to Russia were allowed to return to Spain, all being told that their parents were dead. However 3 years after the death of Stalin, some of the children were allowed to return to their home country.



Edurne circled at the Camp at North Stoneham



Luis circled

My mother along with her brother aged 10, her sister aged 7 and two of her female cousins boarded the ship *Habana*, destined for Great Britain and the port of Southampton, and bid a sad farewell to their loving parents. It is unimaginable the fear, sadness and sheer helplessness the four thousand children on that boat must have felt. My mother remembered that whilst they were in the Bay of Biscay, a German warship had appeared at which all the children started screaming, fearing for their lives. The Germans ordered the Captain to return to Bilbao with his cargo. Fortunately there appeared on the horizon three British warships, which escorted the *Habana* safely into international waters and on to its destination Southampton. And so began my mother's life in Great Britain. She related to me the sight of the ready erected wigwam-like tents pitched for them all to sleep in. She remembered thinking it reminded her of being in some cowboy and Indian adventure.

Edurne, at the tender age of 11, now had the responsibility of looking after her two siblings, having to take care of them and all their needs. Again it is difficult to appreciate the impact this would have had on these children, away from their beloved parents in a country where they did not speak the language with people they didn't know, all the time wondering what would become of their homes in Spain and the lives of their families.

My mother and her brother and sister went first to London in the care of the Salvation Army at Clapton and Brixton and finally to a hostel in Brampton near to Carlisle in the county of Cumbria. It was here where my aunt Carmen was fostered by a family from Carlisle called Mr and Mrs Alford. Incidentally, the Alford's had a son who was a captain in an infantry regiment and was instrumental in the liberation of Bergen Belsen.

Eventually, Edurne and Luis were transferred to Glasgow. My uncle Luis was fostered by a family in Glasgow and my mother was taken in by the Monaghan family in Clydebank. She arrived there the day WW2 broke out. She remembers going through the Clydebank blitz of March 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> 1941. Walking home on March 13<sup>th</sup>, she was passing a tenement block, when suddenly, a German incendiary bomb landed a foot in front of her. An ARP warden, who was standing in the doorway to the tenement, ran out and grabbed her, pulling her inside the building. At home on that first night of the blitz, Mr Monaghan senior, ushered his family out of their tenement block and they made their way towards one of the washhouses which had been fortified as a bomb shelter. Realising that this building was full he led them to another nearby shelter. That decision saved my entire family as the first wash house took a direct hit killing everyone in it. Fearing another wave of German bombing, they left on the day of the 14<sup>th</sup> for a hut which they had in Carbeth and from there they watched the German bombers coming over to bomb Clydebank for the second time.

The Monaghan family consisted of the parents and two sons James and Charles. My mother was to eventually marry Charles while James emigrated to Canada in 1948.

With their children safely transported to Great Britain Francisco and Fruttosa had not only the heartache of sending their young children away but also the fear and uncertainty of their future in Spain under a fascist regime. My grandfather being a loyal Republican began to run contraband and arms from Southern France into Northern Spain. His brother in law collaborated with the Franco authorities. As a

result of this family betrayal he was captured in an ambush by the *Guardia Civil*. During the gun battle he was wounded in his right thigh and a bullet lodged in his jaw, which remained there for the rest of his days. I remember him showing this to me, when I was a small child and I was fascinated by the idea of this bullet resting innocuously under his skin.

During this time my grandmother, Fruttosa, had trained and worked as a maternity nurse. She would tell me stories about life in Spain prior to the war and during the war. My grandfather, however, was less vocal about this time of his life, as indeed were many veterans of war, preferring to remain silent, perhaps memories too painful to speak about. My grandfather was imprisoned for ten years in Burgos Jail. One of the few stories that he ever told me was that the fascists under Franco would regularly execute batches of prisoners. Each day would pass and each day they would ask themselves if this was their last. When my grandfather was moved to a separate cell, known as the death cell, he knew his time had come and that the following morning he too would be executed.

The angels must have been watching over him that day as by some miracle a Swiss delegation of the Red Cross arrived, ordering the Fascists to immediately stop the killing. Being spared from this imminent end, my grandfather was transferred to a prison closer to the French border. Bravely he and a friend managed to escape from there, the two of them making the dangerous journey over the Pyrenees and into Southern France. It was here in Biarritz, 1948, that he was reunited with Fruttosa. She was living with her family who had gone through the horrors of the Nazi occupation, as she had, in 1941. Perhaps understandably after such a long absence my grandmother contemplated if she still loved this man. I believe she did as the couple had another 33 years of marriage ahead of them. My grandparents who were now living in Southern France wanted to come to Great Britain to be reunited with their children.

Eduardo, my mother was now married to my father, Charles Monaghan. Charles travelled to France with money hidden in a toothpaste tube to bring his wife's parents over to Great Britain as at that time only £5 of currency could be taken out of the country. The first attempt failed as he developed appendicitis and had to use the money for his operation. He went back again and eventually managed to bring my Spanish grandparents to Great Britain, where they were reunited with their children whom they had not seen for 13 years. How strange for them to see the 11 year old daughter who left on the *Habana* in 1937, now a married young woman. When my grandmother came down the gang plank she did not recognise her children.

Francisco eventually gained employment in Clydebank in an engineering works and my grandmother, Fruttosa, went to work in Erskine, the war veteran's hospital. They settled in Old Kilpatrick not far from Clydebank.

I have nothing but loving memories of my *abuelos* who brought the culture, the language and the food of their homeland to a small part of Scotland. My grandparents' house always smelt of garlic fried in olive oil.

This is a story which is one of many and I am sure the Spanish refugees can tell many more. My mother and her family were ever grateful and patriotic to their adopted country, which gave them sanctuary, freedom and the chance of a new life. My grandfather feared returning to Spain until after the death of Franco in 1975 when he finally had the chance to see his family for the first time in 38 years.

The irony and coincidences of this story were that I joined Cumbria Police in 1985 after leaving the army and at one point lived in Brampton and served in Carlisle. It was the same police station where my mother had to come and register as a foreign national during the war when she came to visit her sister in Carlisle.

Iain Monaghan 14<sup>th</sup> July 2020