

[June Sharman, née Cornish, is 75 years old and is talking to a taxi-driver on the way from Malaga Airport, southern Spain, to her hotel. She is speaking in Spanish.]

Thank you! I haven't spoken Spanish for years. *[Pause]* Yes, it must sound strange. ... I lived in Cuba as a child. My father was a civil engineer – mining - asphalt. *[Pause]* People think Spanish is just Spanish, they don't realise - ...

I realised when I was 19. I was looking after refugee children - the 'Children of Bilbao' who went to England – 1937? The war – *your* war – the *Civil* War - ...

You know about them? The lucky ones, who squeezed onto the ships? ...

The British government refused to fund them. It was us volunteers who cared for them - in camps, all over the UK. I was in Somerset, a Quaker place, shoe-makers, Clarks. Quakers, you may have heard - ...? ... Never mind.

For a year or more. We helped them find homes ...

[Pause.] I'm sorry, am I upsetting you? I have a hankie. ... I always carry a handkerchief, ever since caring for those children.

You'd like to hear more? Honestly?

Yes, I know - they said it was best to forget. Only - ... you can't forget.

Then came the war – the Nazis' war, World War.

After I'd been with the child refugees, the peace people asked me to go to Paris. Because I

spoke Spanish, and French too. And again, I was with Spanish people. And again, the government wouldn't help. ...Vichy? Again, we found homes for them, where they'd be safe. Pablo Casals, the cellist, was one.

No, no, I was only a secretary. ... Yes, all right, I did help. We stayed in Paris as long as we could. Till the Nazis were at the gates.

You are all right? [*Traffic noise, honks*] Whoops! ... Yes, I'm fine.

Our convoy was the last to drive to south to Bordeaux.

Now we were refugees. All refugees. Lorries full, bikes, or walking. ... We were the lucky ones, in cars.

In Bordeaux, at the quay, there was very little food and water. But a Quaker – Edith Pye – what a woman! She managed everything. She'd brought chewing gum! Wonderful if you're hungry or thirsty.

Then came the ship – the *SS Madura* – diverted from its journey from South Africa to UK. We scrambled on - ... those that could ...

As we steamed away, the Nazi planes came overhead. *Poom. Poom. Poom.* The quay where we'd stood ... *Poom!*

I'm sorry! Does that remind you of - ... Guernica? Picasso swore he'd never go back, not till Franco was dead ... [*Long pause*]

May I make you laugh a little? That magnificent peace woman, Edith Pye – on the ship – she went to the Captain and said, 'There's only so much food, so we need a system to make it fair.' Captain says, 'Okay? Then you do it!' So she did. *We* did. And everyone had two meals each day, from the Bay of Biscay right into Falmouth.

[Pause] ... I have another handkerchief.

Oh! Are we here, at the hotel?

No, no! Thank *you* for listening!

Now – how much? Oh! Please! I must pay... Thank you. You are so kind. It was nothing.

The children, the refugees, they were in need, what else would anyone do?

June Cornish

Alison Leonard