**Transcription of the interview with Corsino Fernandez garcia (by dr. Alicia pozo-gutierrez)**

**(42 minutes 25 seconds)**

Transcription by Claire Hield, University of Southampton

****

OpenLIVES LLAS Centre, University of Southampton

**NOTE: sections in red, or marked ‘XXXX,’ indicate areas where the recording is unclear, or identifying information has been removed.**

**Alicia Pozo-Gutierrez:** So we were in Marseille, yeah? And you were talking about the American friends there, this comité, was looking into…

**Corsino Fernandez Garcia:** The Quakers

**P:** The Quakers…

**F:** The Quakers of Philadelphia, I think my last question was, how did you feel after 5 years away from Asturias, from your family, your home?

**F:** Well…you know I …I don’t think I had any definite feelings I was just going along with whatever…you know, I was kind of young so …

**P:** Had you made friends by this time?

**F:** Oh yes I had friends in the college, you know, but we moved, each time we moved there were different children there so you know I couldn’t keep any friends for a long time, you know…Every place, like I said, I moved maybe four or five times and, just different children, different groups…I had friends there but then I lost them, you know…

**P:** And by this time you were about 12? You spoke French?

**F:** Yes….I spoke French, but not any more [laughs]

**P:** Not any more…

**[someone speaks over them]** Don’t you don’t remember anything? Nothing? Can you say anything in French? No…

**F:** Parlez-vous Français [laughs]

**Someone says:** repeat it please. [F hesitates] Do it again please.

**F:** Parlez-vous Français.

**Someone says:** Can you say my name is Corsino and I’m 12 years old ?

**F:** No…not in French.

**Someone says:** Je m’appelle…

**F:** [laughs]

**P:** Do you remember the French school and things that you learnt there?
**F:** Well…didn’t really, didn’t really go a long time to any one school, you know…I guess the most…time I went to French school was in XXX where we all went, walked to the town nearby XXX to French school, you know, and …What I remember the most about that school was not about what I learned, but a happening there and it was winter time and of course there were Spanish students with my group and there were…most of the kids were French…[laughs]…it was winter time and I got into a snowball fight with some of the French kids, you know, throwing snowballs and I was the only Spanish one throwing snowballs…but four or five French kids, you know, and…there was only one that was my size, so [laughs] you know…I got mad, I had a temper and I got mad because I was losing, I was only one against 4 or 5 so I rushed to the other kid and I pushed him, you know, and the teacher was looking and she saw what happened and she came over and grabbed me by the hand and took me inside [laughs] and made me stay inside during recess, during the recess…but…

**P:** How did you get on with the French children?

**F:** …The Spanish children did not really associate with the French children too much in school. At recess Spanish children would play by themselves and the French too, you know, [laughs]…and they didn’t associate very much. And we didn’t get along *bad* but we just did not associate very much with the French children. We had some games that we would play with some kind of huesos, bones, you know, we threw them…I don’t know what you’d call it…

*[someone says something in Spanish in the background]*

**F:** and that’s what we did at recess but they were just the Spanish children and not the French children.

**P:** Do you remember becoming aware of the Spanish civil war having ended at all? Did anybody tell you…

**F:** well, vaguely, you know, I remember, it must have been around 1939 or somebody mentioned it,…that’s to me, did not make too much difference, you know.

**P:** Any of the children, did they start going back?
**F:** Yes, yes…

**P:** Did you notice that…

**F:** Yes, first time I remember when we were in Ecully near Lyon, it must have been winter time, it must have been obviously pretty close to 1939, or a little after the war was over, the they had a cart [motorbike goes by], that was pulled by a donkey and they put a lot of children’s suitcases on it and… then we walked…the cart was pulling the suitcases of children that were going back to Spain. Even though we were not all going back to Spain, we all walked together to the town, you know, and because those that went back to Spain, they left, and the rest of them walked back to the colony, you know.

**P:** Did you wonder why you weren’t going back?

**F:** … No…see nobody explained anything to me, they didn’t ask me anything, and I don’t remember anybody, any of the adults asking me where I thought my home was or anything, you know. They only went by what was on the paper work, official paperwork, they didn’t ask me anything. They didn’t ask me if I wanted to come back or if I could find my home or anything, they didn’t tell me anything.

**P:** You didn’t ask either...

**F:** What?

**P:** You didn’t ask anybody…

**F:** no, no.

**P:** Okay, so, so how did you leave Marseille? What happened then?

**F:** Well… first time I [uh] realised there was something going on is that [uh]…the colony where I was a little distance from Marseille [alarm in background] and [uh]…two men came and picked me up in a car and went to Marseille itself and we went to before a judge and because they needed some birth certificate, you know, I didn’t have no paperwork, you know, so we went before a judge and [laughs] there was two guys that testified that they knew my family, obviously they didn’t know my family, but they testified that they knew my family and I was born in a certain place and my name, you know, and…so they drew up the paperwork, so I could, they could, so they could put me on the boat, they needed some kind of, like a birth certificate, you know.

**P:** Did they explain to you that they were going to do…

**F:** No, I did not, I didn’t know that what was going on, you know, but this was just short time…before we got on the boat. For some reason, when you’re very young, they don’t explain why they do things to you, you know, [laughs]…they just do them you know, they don’t say why we’re doing this, because we’re going to put you on a boat and go to the United States, you know, to me anyway, they didn’t say anything…because some of the other children, they had older brothers and in fact they had, some had parents in France so the grandparents knew what was going to happen…so the parents…but me they didn’t tell me anything alone, you know.

**P:** But you trusted [motorbike in background] these people.

**F:** yeah, you know, there was nothing else I could do but trust them [laughs], you know.

**P:** So then they took you to the boat? You remember that day?

**F:** Yeah, yeah I do. They took me to the boat and I don’t remember the name of the boat. Now some of the other children that came on one of the other boats they remember the name of their boat because most of them were older, a little older and of course some of them had parents that stayed in France, so they knew the boat but I don’t even remember the name of the boat that I was in. It was a French boat, you know, but... They put me on a boat and we stay on and, because it was summer time we sailed close to the coast of Spain, close enough that we could see the beaches of Spain you see and I think the reason they were close up there was war going on you know, against Germany. Because by that time the Germans had taken all of France over, or most of France, the southern part. We stayed close to the Spanish coast and what I remember about that, one morning you could see the beach, very bright like a gold beach, you know, of Spain, you know, and that’s when I started thinking that I wish I was back in Spain [laughs].

**P:** Because you know it was Spain.

**F:** Oh yes, I knew it was Spain. By that time I had been at school so I knew a little bit of geography [laughs] and of course some of the other children were older and they knew…we knew that it was Spain and we could see Spain.

**P:** And do you have with you any suitcase or…something?

**F:** A what?

**P:** any suitcase, luggage.

**F:** suitcase…very little, very little…because I didn’t have, I didn’t own very much but we could, I think we had a suitcase of clothes, you know…and I had a little notebook with some addresses, you know, I had the address of that Ascención lady, you know, her address, so…But yes we had a little suitcase [mumbles something]. So we went from Marseille to Orán, you know, in Africa, I think it’s Algeria and from there we had to stay in Oran just, just overnight I think and then we took a train to Casablanca. But, but that was a bad, bad ride [laughs].

**P:** You didn’t enjoy it?

**F:** oh, no, no…

**P:** Why?
**F:** Nothing to drink, hot, nothing to drink on the train, you know, just a lot of people and they’d shout, because the train would stop at little towns in North Africa and everybody would jump off the train to try to get some water, you know, [laughs], but everybody got really thirsty because it was summer time, hot, no water on the train, you know, just like but…

**P:** All the children form the boat were taken to Oran by train, from Oran to Casablanca by train.

**F:** Yes, yes, from my boat [traffic noise] the other group of children went one month before, they did not go to Oran to…by train to Casablanca. The children that came on the first boat one month before, they went straight from Marseille to Casablanca by boat.

**P:** And these were Spanish Children? Asturian children? Where were they from?

**F:** Spain, but not all, not all from Asturias, you know, all parts of Spain, you know. There were a lot of Asturian children but there were children from Barcelona, Madrid, all kinds of Spain, you know, all parts of Spain.

**P:** What happened when you got to Casablanca?

**F:** We only stayed there one night, we stayed there one night and the next day, they put us on a boat, a Portuguese boat and in a Portuguese boat, I found the sailors had come from Portugal, Lisbon, where they had a lot of Jewish children, they were evacuating Jewish children too, but they were, first the Jewish children were taken to Spain and then from Spain to Portugal.

**P:** [in background] and from Portugal to Casablanca.

**F:** And from Portugal they load, put on a boat that went to Casablanca, from Lisbon to Casablanca. By the time we got on the boat, there were a lot of Jewish children already there. In fact there were more Jewish children than Spanish children, because I think there were only 17 on that boat, 17 Spanish children. And the first boat I think there were 23…so we were put on the boat the Niasan, they called it Niasan, the Portuguese boat and and off we went to [laughs] to…

**P:** To America

**F:** To America. We landed in Bermuda first and [uh]…

**Someone says:** Have you ever returned to Casablanca?

**F:** No, no, I’ve never been back to France

**Someone says:** no

**F:** No. Some of the other children went back to France later because some of them left their parents in France, so later…some of them went back to meet their parents, you know, but I had no reason to go back to France, you know.

**Someone says:** Would you like to?

**F:** Would I like to? Well…the only thing I would like to do is go back to some of the colonies I was in to see what they look like now, you know, [laughs]. But as far as people, I had no reason to go back and see anybody in France, you know, just the places I were, just curiosity of what they look like if they’re still there, you know. That’s the only reason I would want to go to France.

**Someone says:** When you [P starts speaking too] Ah sorry, when you watch on TV images of France, or even Casablanca or Oran, do you remind the places where you’ve been?

**F:** Well yeah, they never show the places I’ve been [laughs]. I mean the colonies are no longer there, you know so, [laughs]. They were just temporary colonies for children.

**Someone says:** Do you feel that you have any special connection with France? With Marseille or Lyon, or Paris or Casablanca or…

**F:** [Uh] no, not particularly…I really did not enjoy my life in France really very much [laughs] so, you know, so I read XXX honestly, sure I would like to go see where I was, if it’s still there, but it’s nothing like I wanted to come to Asturias, you know…

**P:** Do you remember the journey on the boat to the US?

**F:** Oh yes, yes, yes…

**P:** How long did it take?

**F:** Well…we left Marseilles by the 6th of the month and we finally got to Baltimore in the United States by the 30th of the month, you know, so it took almost about 3 weeks,…

**P:** And what was it like?

**F:** The boat?

**P:** The journey, yeah

**F:** It wasn’t bad [laughs] I had a lot of fun actually because I used to go down to the kitchen in the boat, and there were Portuguese men, you know, because of the Portuguese boat. They knew Spanish, they could understand Spanish so we could talk and I helped peel potatoes and stuff like that and they would give me eggs, raw eggs, not cooked eggs but raw eggs, you know, and I’d take them and later on in the day I’d break a little end of the egg and go ‘oop!’ [laughs] raw eggs, you know. But I, that trip was pretty good.

**P:** Did you have a cabin this time?

**F:** No, not a cabin, no, it was not…

**P:** All together, the children

**F:** They had the area with the bunk beds, you know, and there was no separate cabin, no.

**P:** Who looked after you? Who was in charge of the children?
**F:** Well, there were two, two adults and they were from this American Friends Service Committee, I think it was a man and a woman and they kind of looked for us, looked after us but, but we could do almost anything we wanted to do on the boat, you know, we could run all over the boat [laughs].

**P:** What nationality were they? Were they American? The carers?

**F:** [uh] well…I didn’t know at the time I found out later that one of them was actually a German

**P:** Okay

**F:** And I think the other one was American. I think one of them was German.

**P:** You remember their names?

**F:** No not, I think I have it in a paper someplace but I don’t remember it in my mind, no. At the time I didn’t know their names, no. [traffic noise] I just found out their names later from the, I did a lot of research out there, you know, but started about 5, 6 years ago, I started researching and that’s when I found out their names, but I don’t remember them now. I’m sure I got it on a piece of paper somewhere. Because out there, about 5 or 6 years ago when I started researching I wrote to American Friends Service Committee and got as many records as they let me have, you know, so I still got the, the, whatever they sent me.

**P:** Do you remember arriving in the US? You said you arrived in Bermuda first?

**F:** Yeah, oh yeah I remember arriving…we landed in Bermuda and we only stayed there one day, but they took us off the boat to have a picnic on that little island, a little island and they took us for a picnic for one day on the island and they put us back on the boat and then went back to, we got back on the boat and we went to Baltimore.

**P:** Baltimore.

**F:** Yeah, yeah.

**P:** And what were your first impressions of the US?

**F:** Well [laughs] it was a little strange [laughs] it was all different than France but our boat went to Baltimore but the first group the month before went to New York City, you know, they and but they took us off the boat in Baltimore and again they gave us some refreshments and something to eat, you know, and they took us to some camp close to New York City, I don’t know where it was, I don’t know…it was close but it was a camp where they had American, American children too and …the way they taught us English is that they had one American boy, one American boy paired with me and we would go together…started teaching me English…

**P:** Like a buddy.

**F:** Yeah, that’s right. And so that’s how I learnt my first English, is from this American kid that was there, you know, we’d go together and said that’s a car or that’s a tree, you know [laughs].

**P:** And you repeat it?
**F:** Yes [laughs] so, we learnt English pretty fast. Children learn a language very fast not like old people like me [laughs]. So we stayed there about a week or two and learnt a few, a few, a little English and then they took us to the Bronx. The Bronx is a suburb of New York, part of New York City, the Bronx. And…

**Someone says:** Do you know if this place is still working?

**F:** No…

**Someone says:** Not anymore

**F:** Not anymore, no… that was a place operated by the Edwin Gould Foundation. Edwin Gould was an American philanthropist and this place was for orphan children and all for American children and they put us there temporarily and but it’s not there anymore, it’s something else. The buildings are there but it’s not for children… A few years ago I researched it and got in contact with a man that belongs to the historical society of the Bronx and he told me that now it’s an apartment, an apartment building, it’s not, it’s not for children anymore, just an apartment.

**Someone says:** But the foundation is still working.

**F:** The what?

**Someone says:** The foundation of …

**P:** [in the background] It’ works.

**F:** I don’t think so, no. I think, I think…

**Someone says:** You don’t think? I think so…

**F:** The Edwin Gould Foundation. I don’t know.

**Someone says:** I have seen their website

**F:** I don’t know if it’s still working or not…

**Someone says:** Have you tried to take some documents or, do you have any documents of this period of… I mean in New York? They wrote some…They checked you in some way? Name, nationality…

**F:** Oh yes, I have a…a few years ago when I started the research I got in contact with The American Friends Service Committee Quakers from Philadelphia and I got a list of the children that were in different boats, you know, and that’s where I got most of my information. But I tried to write to the Edwin Gould Foundation and I never got any answer.

**Someone says:** Nothing.

**F:** No, no information from the Edwin Gould Foundation.

**Someone says:** I will try to do it.

**F:** What?

**Someone says:** I will try to do it.

**F:** Oh you will try to do it, but I would never get any information from them. And like I said the buildings were…now they’re apartment houses.

**Someone says:** mhm.

**F:** so…[uh]… Like all the information I got was from the Quakers, The American Service, The American Friends Service Committee, they’re still in Philadelphia, you know.

**P:** I have a question.

**F:** Sure.

**P:** Going back to the arrival, in the boat, do you remember if there was, on land, any journalist or any television filming you, on the ship?
**F:** Do you mean when I got to America?
**P:** Yes.

**F:** Oh yes, yes.

**P:** It was crowded, the port? They were expecting you?

**F:** Yes, yes. We got…when I started my research, I got, gathered as much information as possible and there are some Jewish organisations in New York and they had a lot of records and they had, newspaper clippings and they sent it to me and and… So the newspapers wrote articles in New York, in New York newspapers. In fact, you know, our group we wrote a book and, in the back, of the book, there’s a copy of the newspaper clipping that we used, you know, I think the New York Times wrote articles about our, our arrival [traffic noise drowns him out]…some of the children [traffic noise] XXX together on the boat.

**P:** Corsino, would you like to take a break?

**F:** Whatever [laughs]

**P:** How do you feel? We can take a break…yeah would you like that?

**F:** Yeah that’s okay with me.

**P:** Okay. You’ve been talking and talking a long time, do you want to stretch?

[Some talking in Spanish about organising themselves for the next part of the interview]

**P:** Okay then we have got to the States and you were taken to a place in the Bronx, in New York, what happened then?

**F:** Well [uh], because we were in this Edwin Gould Foundation facility and, over a period of time they were trying to find homes for the children throughout the United States and…I stayed there, about a year.

**P:** So you arrived in 1942, you remember which month?
**F:** July.

**P:** July.

**F:** July 30.

**P:** mhm.

**F:** We arrived in the, we arrived and I stayed there, in the Bronx, Edwin Gould Foundation about a year.

**P:** What was that place like?

**F:** Well…it’s a, you know, it had, several buildings, two storey buildings, several of them and, it was just a place where…it was almost like an orphanage, where they put children who had no families. It was also for American families, American children you know, and just, for us it was just temporary, we were not meant to stay there a long time, just long enough for them to find American families for us, and…I stayed there about a year or so and then a boy and I were sent to San Antonio, Texas, his name was José Fernandez. I’m a Fernandez too but he was a José Fernandez, he was from Bilbao and we stayed with a family in San Antonio for a month or two until…. This woman’s husband was in the army, American army in Europe, and he didn’t like the idea of two teenage boys staying with, with his wife. So they had to find another place. And…so they took me to another American family and I don’t know what happened to him. I’ve never been able to find out what happened to him. And, so I went to live with the Kivlins, that’s how I got the Kivlin name, I went to live with the woman, lady, and her husband was also in the army in Europe so I stayed with her until he came back, the war was over in 1945, the year was, he came back and they had difficulties with each other…and they were gonna get a divorce, so they had to do something with me [laughs]. So they put me in an orphanage.

**P:** Okay…

**F:** yeah, so they put me in an orphanage and they eventually got a divorce and I was in an orphanage and, of course I was going to school, high school, and as I got to high school…this woman had moved to Colorado and she asked me if I wanted to go to college in Colorado and, I said of course. So, I went to Colorado, near Denver, the Capital of Colorado and…Well I didn’t do, I didn’t like college too much, I had… everything was strange…, you know when you XXX into college, after one year I left college and I went back to San Antonio and then started working and I met my wife.

**Someone says:** But before that, sorry interrupting, before that, I mean, what were your reactions each time that you move from one place to another, from one orphanage [F laughs] to, with this guy from Bilbao, then separated again...

**F:** Well you know…

**Someone says:** What kind of reaction did you have at this time?
**F:** Well…you know, after a while you get used to it, after a while you don’t expect to stay in one place [traffic noise] it’s just something that happens, you know. Uh…you don’t like it but yet again you’re not mad about it, you just, you’re just used it, moving from one place to another.

**P:** Becomes normal.

**F:** Yeah, becomes normal because I had been in five colonies in France, you know, and then…so having to leave one family more, you know, almost like you know [laughs]…

**P:** Do you remember making friends in the US?

**F:** Yes, yes. …this woman I, her name was Mildred Kivlin, that I lived with, you know the one that her husband was in Europe, in the army, her sister lived right around the corner, nearby and she had two children, teenage children…a boy and a girl, and of course we became friends, very good friends. Because I used to go play with them all the time and even after I was put in the orphanage, in San Antonio, on the weekends I’d take the bus to their house so we could play together again [laughs]. And we invented all kinds of games, you know.

**P:** Like what? Can you remember one?
**F:** Oh yeah, baseball games, cardboard, you know, with the dice, and everything, all kinds of games. Baseball games, golf games, you name it we invented it for ourselves, you know, and we played. Every weekend I’d go there with the bus and we’d play most of the day, you know, until it was time for me to back to the orphanage, you know. Get on the bus and drive back, you know. And because the bus only ran one time every hour, there was an airport nearby so the bus, to go to the airport once an hour so I’d have to catch the last bus [laughs] and go back to the orphanage, you know.

**P:** And what was life like in the orphanage?

**F:** Well, not too bad because, you know, after a while you get used to living in an orphanage, you know, so it wasn’t bad because I was going to high school and by that time I was one of the older boys in the orphanage, most of them were younger and I was in high school. And I got, you know, most of the time I was in school and so I played sports in school and so I could do, I was pretty free to do what I wanted and, I had a part-time job too, you know.

**P:** Doing what?

**F:** I was doing…in a laundry.

**P:** Okay.

**F:** They had a laundry and, that laundry they had a service where people would drive up and with their dirty clothes, we would take them out of the car and take them inside and write the ticket, you know, and then when they came back they’d pick the ticket up, I’d take them back out to the car, you know. I don’t know anything like that, I didn’t work inside, I was helping customers take the laundry I and out, you know. And that was when I was in high school, that’s after school. I’d walk from the school to the place because I had no car, no bicycle or anything so I’d walk, so… it was pretty good, you know. As orphanages go [laughs]

**P:** Did you have your own room there?
**F:** no, no, no.

**P:** You shared a big dormitory with other kids?

**F:** yeah, yeah, yeah. You never have your own room in orphanages. There’s always one big room for the boys, one big room for all the girls [laughs].

**Someone says:** did you usually think why you were there? I mean, did you usually think about what were you leaving behind you?

**F:** Well, I don’t know how to answer that [laughs] …after a while you don’t start, you don’t really think too much, you just take for granted what happens, you know,…In the back of my mind, I always wondered what happened to my family in Spain, you know, but there was nothing I could do about it. You know, until much later, but [uh]…after a while you just take what happens, you know, that’s just normal [laughs]. You don’t think “oh, I feel sorry for myself” or something like that, you know, I don’t feel that way, you know.

**Someone says:** Mhm. But what about your remains were still alive while you were growing as an American.

**F:** Well,…I guess, you know, the only thing I can say is that I always wondered what happened to my family, growing up, you know, and I knew that someday I had to try to find them you know, but I was too young, there was no way I could do anything then. The… when I was living with the Kivlins in San Antonio, she told me, the lady, her name was Mildred, told me that they had told her that my family had been killed and I don’t know why they had told her that and I had no way of knowing whether they had been killed or not, you know, so… but I knew that someday I had to find out.

**Someone says:** When did you decide to do it?
**F:** [Uh]…

**Someone says:** long after…

**F:** Oh yeah, it was long after, in fact, it was actually after I retired the first time, that’s when I felt I had the time and enough money that I could make the trip. I thought that the trip would be very expensive and so I had to save money and didn’t think I could, I think I would probably be useless, I didn’t think I would find anybody over here but… it was something I had to do, come back and look.

**Someone says:** So there was something inside you…

**F:** Yes

**Someone says:** But you were going on with your life, right?
**F:** yes. But I always wondered what happened to my family over here, because I didn’t believe that everybody was killed, you know, even though they told me that, I didn’t see how everybody would have been killed, you know. They were always talking about Guernica and things like that, you know…I thought there was bound to be someone alive over here, I just didn’t know where.

**Someone says:** Okay we need to change the tape so…