**OpenLIVES Spanish Émigré interviews – Germinal Luis Fernández**

**PART TWO**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Interviewee: | Germinal Luis Fernández |
| Interviewer: | Alicia Pozo-Gutierrez and Inmaculada Colomina |
| Interview date: | 21st August 2008 |
| Location: | Madrid Autónoma University |
| Duration: | 00:24:31 |
| Countries of migration: | United States, Venezuela, Argentina |

**Synopsis:**

[00.00 – 10.00] Staying in touch with other child exiles

Germinal’s wife’s uncle was a bishop. He laughs at the fact that he was an anarchist’s son and had not been baptised. He was baptised when he was 26 years old, because he needed to be baptised to get married. Germinal and the interviewers are looking at photographs. Germinal reads out part of a letter sent to him by the Basque Children’s Association: “We’re sending you an article that was published in a Spanish newspaper about the child exiles, we hope you like it. Kisses” Germinal and the interviewers continue to go through the photographs. They come across a photograph of the group of 17 children that Germinal travelled with. The photograph was taken shortly after they had arrived in the United States, at the Gold Foundation. It was given to him by Corsino, and Felipe also gave him photographs since he had lost all of his own. Germinal has trouble finding himself in the photograph, but he soon finds himself because of his distinctive smile. In the photograph, the children are wearing ties. There are seven girls and the rest are boys. Germinal says he has something interesting to tell the interviewers to be put on record. Technically he did not exist in France: there is no record of him, as he was known as German Albert and they thought Luis was a forename. It was a mess. So when he came back to Spain, to obtain money like his friends, he had to prove that he had been in France between 1936 and 1939 and he couldn’t. He went to the French embassy, who sent him on to the department for refugees and displaced persons. They then directed him to the police in Montpellier, the Léro division, so he wrote to them in French. The response from the Office of Refugees and Expatriates was ‘we are sorry to inform you that after extensive searches in our archives, we have not found any documentation under your name’. The Léro police gave him the same response. In the end, Germinal went to visit Montpellier in person, and he spoke with people who told him they would continue looking. However, after some time had passed they wrote to him to tell him that he didn’t appear in any of the archives. This was recently, just a few years ago. Then there was a ray of hope when they then said they would look under the name ‘German Albert’, because he had been with the Albert family. As he had gone to school, he had hoped that Tomás had registered him in some way. Under this new search they could confirm that the Albert family was present in France during this time. This gave Germinal the sense that he had been right, he hadn’t made it up. He went back to Frontignan and everything there had changed. He visited the school, and while he was there he met the school’s historian, who also knew about this history of Frontignan, so Germinal explained the situation to him. They looked through the school photographs from 1946, but as it turned out the Germans had taken over the school and burnt the archives, so there was no trace of Germinal there either. He returned to Barcelona, but received a letter afterwards. Germinal reads from the letter. The letter says that after continuing to search and being in touch with various contacts, the historian had put out a plea for information in the local press. He had then received around five calls from people who knew about the historian’s interest in local history, and who, by offering up small pieces of information were able to offer the historian an idea of the bigger picture. He found out that Tomás Albert’s children lived by the beach in Frontignan before World War Two, and that the family who hosted Germinal were farmers who grew vegetables and melons. Germinal remembers growing melons and the watermelons when it was the right season. That morning the historian had met Dolores and her brother Jean. Jean was older and worked in the fields. They were country people but very pleasant. Tomás had died, Luis was in hospital, but Dolores was in good health and had a good memory. She was about a year older than Germinal and remembered him, but clearly she remembered him as a nine year old child. Dolores had no photographs, so the historian asked her if she could write to him to say how she knew Germinal and to sign the document, and then the historian could send it on to Germinal as proof that he had been in France.

[10.00 – 20.00] Germinal’s family

Germinal went to Madrid and he was given some photographs, which is all he has to show for certain periods of his life, since he was not only a refugee, stateless, but he was also inexistent according to formal records. It was important for him to be make himself known and to receive financial help he was entitled to under the law of 18th March. They continue to look through other photographs and there is one of Germinal’s daughter Natalia, who conducts three orchestras. She studied in Venezuela at the Insituto Universitario de Educación Musical. For just over two years she conducted the Falcón State Symphony Orchestra and then she said that she wanted to do a postgraduate course in London. She was accepted to the Royal College of Music where she specialised in opera. She conducted an orchestra in Lancaster. This was in around 1988-89. Her surname is Luis Bassa, because her mother’s surname was Bassa Rivella and Germinal’s wife wanted her daughter to have both names, but she is known as Natalia Luis. Germinal visits her a couple of times a year in London, and she sees him at Christmas. There is a photograph of another daughter who lives in Sheffield, in a town called Holmfirth. Germinal says it’s a pretty place, and his daughter lives in a stone house which she bought with money that would only pay for a room in a city like London. She sends him articles that she writes. She is in her early forties. She is happy in England. She has Venezuelan-Spanish nationality, because she was born in Caracas. Germinal shows the interviewer photographs of his wife when she was young. She was the daughter of Catalan parents living in Venezuela. It was her mother’s brother who was the bishop. His eldest daughter is Carolina who was 49 at the time of the interview. She has been accepted at the University of Barcelona to do a doctorate. In the September following the interview Carolina’s family were planning to live with Germinal. Everyone who was in Venezuela is moving over to Europe, because the situation is bad in Venezuela, not just politically but also with regards to personal safety. His other daughter Natalia has no children and Germinal says she is married to music. Germinal indicates that they are looking at another photograph and another of his daughters [name not given], who is married to someone called Roberto and has a child called Rodolfo who was born in Singapore. She studied chemistry and is a chemical engineer, and the company she was working for sent her to Singapore for just over two years. His daughter who is coming to the Central University of Barcelona is an IT engineer who studied for her masters in Venezuela. She is divorced. Germinal says he has one daughter who is single, one daughter who is divorced, and another daughter who is married.

[20.00 – 24.31] Looking through family photographs

Carolina has a sixteen year old son called Sergio, who has been accepted to attend a college in Girona close to where Germinal lives. She also has an 18 year old daughter, Laura, who will also be going to the University of Barcelona. Germinal shows the interviewers another photo with Gabi, Rodolfo and Roberto. Germinal got married in 1958, and would have celebrated his fiftieth wedding anniversary in July, but his wife died four years ago. She was in the San Pau Hospital for over a month. He brought her over from Venezuela and Germinal thinks that prolonged her life for a few more months. Germinal shows the interviewers a photograph of a holiday to Portugal, when they went to old Lisbon. He also shows a photograph of his father when he was in his twenties with Germinal’s grandparents, and another of his daughter Natalia playing the oboe.