

The Higgins Art Gallery & Museum, Bedford

Transcript

RW17_6

Name: Josepa Munoz

Gender: female

Date of Birth:

Place of Birth

Occupation:

Date of Interview: 23rd March 2017

Interviewed by: Collette Mcdowell

Length of interview: mins

Transcribed by: Heidi Seamark

Can you give me your name and Spelling please?

I'm Josepa Munoz, the spelling is Josepa Munoz

And I'm the interviewer and my name is Collete Mcdowell. The name of the project is Brass Oral History. The date is the 23rd of March and the Location is the Higgins Museum Bedford.

Right let's get down to business

***unclear** (paper shuffling)*

Lets start with the object because the journey is very little. We're not talking about me as an immigrant coming to this country, we're talking about the object.

So just to get the agreement between us, you're talking about the object and the history around the object and so we haven't got to worry about the journey

But there will be a journey. It will be our sister's journey.

There will be a journey part of it? Lovely. And a future? So object and future.

So today we're going to talk about the object.

Yes today [what] I have brought is a print of the object. The object is still at my mums in Catalonia, near Barcelona in Spain. It is a briefcase, a leather briefcase, an old leather briefcase that my parents always had in the cupboard. And as a child, I would be very inquisitive and open the cupboard and be fascinated by this briefcase, which I opened on many occasions and inside it was full of notes, money. And I never got the full story of what that briefcase meant in my family until very recently. What I knew when I was little and lived with that story was that the money that the briefcase was full of, was money that became completely valueless, during the Spanish civil war, which broke out in 1936. In 1939 when Franco's forces patrolled into Barcelona and finally took the whole of Catalonia, as part of the rest of Spain, the money became valueless. The people went to the banks, and depending on what serial numbers the

notes had, they could be exchanged for real money, otherwise it became, it was money that was from the Spanish republic and was never used again. The other story I got when I was little, from my mum who told me again and again, was that when her father, my grandfather, had that money and was keeping the money to buy something after Christmas, my grandmother said 'we could buy a doll for [Josepa's mother]' and he said 'no we need to keep this money'. And there was a big lesson my mother always had, because of course that money was valueless after Christmas and so they didn't have Christmas presents and they could have had.

But that was the only story. But recently that story became attached to the history of the country and the family in a very amazing way, that I never thought could happen. That briefcase...I'll tell the story of my grandparents. My grandparents lived in a small town, nr Barcelona, about an hour away from Barcelona. My Uncle, my mother's brother, he was studying medicine in Barcelona and practicing in the hospital, going to the hospital every day and he was also a great musician. When the war broke out, because my grandfather was mayor of the little town where they lived, he was also very supportive of the workers. There were several...there were three separate factories in that town and my grandfather had been very supportive of the workers. And so when the war broke out, the factory owners took the side of the fascists very quickly and so my grandfather had to escape and then their son who lived in Barcelona, called them and said come and live with me in Barcelona. So they closed the house and off they went to Barcelona. My Uncle, as I said, walked to the Hospital every day for his practical side of his medical studies and on the first day of the first bombardment from the fascist forces, from Hitler-Hitler was practicing his aerial bombardments in Spain, near Guernico-bombarded for the first time in Barcelona, my uncle died. They never found any traces of him, of his belongings. He had lost his ID the day before and therefore there was nothing to be found.

05mins

When that happened, my grandfather and the rest of the family had to go back to the town. They had...when all this happened as well the actual briefcase with the money inside which they had, as the only money they had, became valueless because the fascists had won, therefore then they had to go back home. But they didn't have any money not even for the train tickets. They found that they had to sell my uncle's two trumpets that he had, as he was a great musician and a clarinet. They sold those instruments, to buy the train tickets to go back home. And then when they went back home, he had all sorts of difficulties, but my grandmother was very resourceful and she soon decided she was going to open a B&B and so they opened a B&B and it became quite a flourishing B&B where musicians came and bands that were playing around there. My mother then had a very nice childhood after that. From the age of ten onwards. But that briefcase has always been a kind of symbol of that of something that was hidden because there was not many things we were told. People didn't talk about things to do with the war. And so I'm very happy to have this project because with that I have found out the family secret around the object but really the history of the time.

So you were saying that about your mother, how do you think your mother feels about opening up that door?

I think my mother...my mother has always been very talkative and I think she loves talking about her past. She had a very happy childhood despite her brother dying and she was in awe of her brother because he was a medical student and because he played instruments, showed her around Barcelona, and she was in awe of him, but she had a very nice childhood because her parents were very resourceful and very good at finding new ways of succeeding.

I'm just think that the musical link was a lovely one when thinking about your family history

Yes it is a very, very revealing one. I knew he liked music and I knew he played a little bit of piano, but I didn't really know the extent to which he was attached to music. Because having two trumpets, a clarinet besides playing the piano, reveals something really important to do with music and when I think of my daughters, the only one that has taken the path of the music world, and they ask me where she gets it from and I've always said 'well it just comes from her'

unclear

I was just thinking as well that your grandma, the link of her choice of keeping the family going and I just think there is something about you saying- she did the B&B but also the music side

Yes, I mean my grandmother saved the family in a way, because at that point when my grandfather had to leave the town, he was a mayor that everybody loved and suddenly he was unloved. He couldn't go back to the same house, it was barred when they arrived back in the village, back home after being in Barcelona. He was not welcome. So he did go down in himself, perhaps he did go through depression, but it was a very difficult time. He didn't see a way out of that but my grandmother did and she would have found a way of doing business anywhere. She hadn't done anything before and suddenly she opened a B&B, that was actually very, very successful.

10 Mins

With the musicians?

Yes with the musicians. That's right and my mother is a piano player, she not very good at music but she can play by ear, because of her background I suppose.

unclear

So quite dramatic changes in your family?

Well yes because you always feel, in that kind of background, that the people that left, like my husband's family had to leave the country cross the Pyrenees Mountains and made it eventually to England are the ones that really suffered with a long journey of changes. But the people who stayed there also went through a horrible time. Having to hide wherever they were, or perhaps just having to avoid wherever the fighting took place and then eventually coming out of that hopefully unscathed. But there is two very separate and very strong views of that same history. Those that stayed and those that left, and sometimes there is quite a lot of conflict between them.

I was also thinking in your family you would have those that survived but had to change under the dramatic change

Yes yes, I know that my father was fined for speaking Catalan in the town. We're talking about a very small village where everybody knew each other, but then as soon as the fascists had won, there were certain people who took sides. They would be the spies who would tell on others, so you couldn't really trust anyone and probably that is the reason why there is so many secrets. Because my father wouldn't talk about the war at all, although he was obviously a child, but being a child, he still remembered things. But the only thing he did say when he were eating meals at home, we would have to eat all of the bread, we couldn't leave any morsel of bread. He wouldn't complain about leaving food but he would complain about leaving bread, because bread was something that was so scarce at the time. And food as well but I suppose bread becomes a symbol of all of it. Because they had to *unclear* the black bread *unclear*they produced bread for the people. Whereas the authorities had proper white bread.

So was it your father?

No, my father together with his family because we're talking about the grandparents generation and they were just very young when the war broke out 1936-1939. And of course those that crossed the Pyrenees Mountains, then from 1940 onwards it was the other way around. People from the south of France, all over Europe, crossed the Pyrenees, made it to Barcelona and then from Barcelona they would be sent to different places in the world, Israel or America.

So how did you get here? i'm trying to get your role.

Right yes that's another story. I was very interested in learning English. So I learnt English from someone who retired-a retired Scottish man who retired with his wife, she was a painter and he came to our village. They both lived there and he taught me English. And because it was one to one lessons, I became quite good at it and then I decided I would come to England as an Au Pair. So I came to England as an Au Pair and then I studied English at Barcelona. But along the cause of my upbringing, I met when I was five years old, my husband's family came to the village and wanting someone...

15 Mins

because his mother's family had left and crossed the Pyrenees Mountains and then eventually lived in England, they wanted to go over there and spend summers there, so they needed someone to build them a chalet so my father built them a summer house, so they could go every summer and that's where we met. But it took obviously years and years *chuckles* we were just friends when we were together in the summer holidays, but eventually we got together and then got married, and that's where I came to England. My husband was born in England. So I came and yeah we got married. That's how I came eventually to England but in a way the cause of the decisions I made along the way made me find England attractive. You know I was learning English, the culture, coming here as an Au Pair. I always had one foot in Great Britain more or less.

I was just thinking its fascinating this-your inner drive, your decisions, your life is fascinating.

Yes very very much so.

And we've got the future, I know we've done a little bit, any more about that? You've described beautifully the coming here, so the future?

Well the future is my children and there is...the future in my country is still very unstable, its going to be unstable for quite a while and there is huge, huge disagreement between the Catalan government and the Spanish government. It's never been so far apart because the Catalans have always given way. At the moment they are forming parallel governments but they are not together in any agreement at all. So anything could happen in the course of these few months. I am part of the group who met in the house of commons two weeks ago because they formed a group of parties who were interested in the Catalan cause and this group is now formed and the first meeting-event took place in the house of commons two weeks ago, there will be another one next week. So something has to happen and they really have to make a decision as to whether the Catalans are able to make a choice because the...

A bit like Scotland?

Yeah a little bit like Scotland, but the situation is really very, very different, because Spain does not listen to any of the problems that there are in Catalonia, being the strongest economy in the country, but there is the least money sent to Catalonia so the infrastructure is going very badly, people's lifestyle is decreasing not increasing, even though the economy is booming. So there is a big problem that Europe has to...

Your shaping tomorrow? Tomorrows history?

I'm trying to. My brother, in my personal life, my brother who was 40 when he climbed the Pyrenees Mountains and died. He fell from the highest mountain on the Pyrenees. At the time I was doing a lot of Art work related to the Pyrenees Mountains. Before he died he put my name as the representative of the UK and in a way I feel I have an inheritance. So although I am not a politically minded person, I'm not into politics as such, the interests in conflicts, in a conflictive situation that could very easily be solved with the federal state but Spain will not listen, therefore that has moved to wanting a referendum to see what the people want.

So here we are now

And that comes from a briefcase

unclear* your role is fascinating *unclear

Thank you very much, thank you very much

Its been lovely thank you

End 21.06 mins

Summary of Josepa's story

Josepa brought with her an old leather briefcase which had been in her family for many years. She describes being inquisitive of the briefcase as a child and that she had heard part of a story regarding it but it was only recently the full story had come to light. The briefcase contained a large amount of money which had lost value following the Spanish Civil War in 1936. Her grandfather had kept the money initially thinking it would be useful to save and he could exchange it when needed but unfortunately the money was declared valueless and so Josepa's grandparents just kept the money in the briefcase. Josepa describes the difficulties her grandparents experienced when war broke out, as her grandfather was a town Mayor who was very supportive of the local workers and against the fascists, however when the fascists took over, many of the factory owners and other dignitaries in the town sided with them and so Josepa's grandparents were forced to leave and they went to stay with their son in Barcelona. He was a musician and medical student who was unfortunately killed in 1939 when World War II broke out. This meant that Josepa's grandparents had to return to their small village, with little money. Being a resourceful woman, Josepa's grandmother opened a B&B which was very successful.

Josepa also describes what life was like in the small village for her grandparents and her mother and father, following the civil war. She described many people in the village spying for the fascists and that her father had been fined for speaking Catalan. She remembers that her father was very affected by the war and refused to speak of it but it had affected him in many ways, one of which was ensuring that Josepa and her siblings ate all of their bread because bread had been scarce for her father. Josepa also recognised that many people left Catalonia via the Pyrenees Mountains, such as her husband's family and they suffered hardships as well.

Josepa went on to describe her own journey to England, describing how she had learnt English from a retired Scottish man who lived in her village and then went to England as an Au Pair. She studied English at Barcelona and then married her husband who was born in England, although his family was Spanish and had lived in her village. Josepa finished by discussing the work she is doing politically in regards to her home country, to try and bring about some stability to Catalonia.