

Giordano Díaz Lombardero: 1923 - 2017

Giordano's Story

Born in August 1923, Giordano was the younger of two brothers: he was 13 and his brother Amador was 14 when the Spanish Civil War broke out. Their mother had died when he was three, and the two boys were brought up in Bilbao by their paternal grandparents, living a property called "Arbolarte" in Portugalete. Their father was a civil engineer and worked in the Altos Hornos steelworks in Portugalete. Their maternal grandfather had also worked there, but had been killed in a horrific explosion.

One of Giordano's earliest memories was the declaration of the Republic in 1931. When the Civil War started, Amador went to work with his paternal grandfather, Mateo, who was a carpenter and had his own business. Giordano was not able to go to school because they had been closed. His father would leave work for his sons to do at home. Giordano's main task was to go and fetch food for the family, and he recalled waiting in interminable queues for hours on end. As the house was rather large, it was soon requisitioned by the nacionalistas and used as a munitions factory and the family went to live in an apartment in Deusto, part of Bilbao.

Near where they lived, a new bridge had been built, which opened up in the middle to allow the passage of ships, rather like Tower Bridge. It was always left open, so if bombs dropped on it, there would be less damage. However, one day, he noticed that it was open and realised that the boats were carrying wounded people; later he found out that they were some of the victims of the attack on Guernica.

In 1937, the Basque Government arranged for the evacuation of up to 4,000 children to Britain. Giordano's father arranged for his two sons to join the evacuation for their safety, and they were joined by two cousins. Arriving in Southampton in May 1937 they stayed under canvas at a camp set up at Stoneham for two months before being taken to a colony near Huddersfield. It was The Old Clergy House at Almondbury, where they arrived on 28 July, together with 19 other boys.

He recalls that as regards any education they had, it was difficult to be consistent in those particular circumstances. There were two señoritas there, one of whom, Hilaria Alonso later married and remained in Huddersfield for the rest of her life, and a maestra, Soledad Gorriño. She found it all very hard, especially because of the lack of Spanish textbooks, and also because of the wide age-range she had to teach all in one room, from 8 — 14. Coping with mixed ability is notoriously difficult, and this was compounded by the fact that the boys wanted to learn in English, but she knew very little of the language. Giordano was able to attend the local school

and had a better command of the language. He recalls that the colony was just opposite the Public Library and his favourite occupation was going there and reading the newspapers to find out what was going on in Spain.

When repatriation started, the Giordano and his brother were not able to return to Bilbao as there was no one for them there. His father had gone to France and then left for Venezuela. Giordano would not see him again until 1950 when he visited his sons in Britain for two weeks.

Amador was married by then and working for an architectural firm in Ipswich. Thanks to a grant from the Juan Vives Scholarship Trust (administered by the Spanish Republican Government in exile), he had been able to complete his studies at Regent Street Polytechnic.

When Giordano reached school-leaving age, he went to work in an import/export business, and studied to gain qualifications. During the Second World War, he worked as an apprentice mechanic at Wellworthy Piston Rings Ltd, Ringwood, Hampshire until 1947. He then worked as an electrician for the Royal Mint, until it relocated to South Wales. Later he worked at St Thomas' Hospital and stayed there until he retired.

During the war years, Giordano would meet up with the other niños vascos at the Hogar Español. He says that whenever they got together, they would always say: "When we go back to Spain. . .", but the majority did not go back. He remembers participating in the setting up of the fiesta in 1942 and also in collaborating in the preparation of "Amistad", the Newsletter of the Basque children in London. In fact, he was a prolific writer and contributed many of the more serious articles. As you can see from the titles*, he considered historical events and their repercussions in the future. The articles always ended with a tone of enthusiastic rhetoric, as can be seen in the two extracts that follow:

But the spirit that animated the Spanish people on 14th of April 1931 and during the three years they held up against reaction had not died, it cannot die, it is the spirit that animated the peoples in the world in the struggle against the oppression, it is the unbreakable spirit that guarantees freedom will come to Spain once more and it will come to stay. (Amistad No.9, April 1941).

If we want to defeat Fascism, we cannot confine ourselves to defeat their attacks, we must take the initiative and we must attack them. You cannot exterminate a germ merely by preventing its spreading, you must kill it. There is one factor we must remember, without which all our efforts will be in vain, that is unity. We must not let anyone divert us from our aim of standing any nonsense from those who seek to divide us. United in aim and united in actions, victory will be ours! (Amistad No 15, Nov-Dec-3-1941)

Each of his articles concludes in a similarly optimistic manner. What stands out in these examples is the enthusiasm and stirring vigour and youthful optimism of the writer, all is not lost, but the Spaniards need to be united for victory.

Living in London at the end of the 1940's Giordano met a Pakistani student, Iffat. They married in 1959, and moved to Blackheath, SE London. Iffat died in 2007. Giordano continued living in Blackheath until December 2016 when he moved to a care home in Lewisham, where he died in May 2017. In keeping with his rather 'left-field' and altruistic view of life he left his body for medical research.

He is survived by a niece and nephew and four great nephews.

Giordano liked living in Britain and never really wanted to go back to Spain. He spoke wistfully of never being considered British by the British, and similarly, never being considered Spanish when he returned to Spain. He found this loss of identity particularly hard to bear.

*

<i>Heroic Madrid</i>	<i>Amistad No 4, Nov 1940</i>
<i>Do you remember Teruel?</i>	<i>Amistad No 6, Jan 1941</i>
<i>The lesson of Guadalajara</i>	<i>Amistad No 8, March 1941</i>
<i>14th April 1931</i>	<i>Amistad No 9, April 1941</i>
<i>Madrid leads the way</i>	<i>Amistad No 10, May-June 1941</i>
<i>When Spain fought for freedom</i>	<i>Amistad No 11 July 1941</i>
<i>Victory on the Ebro</i>	<i>Amistad No 12, Aug 1941</i>
<i>Heroes all</i>	<i>Amistad No 14, Oct 1941</i>
<i>No pasaran</i>	<i>Amistad No 15, Nov-Dec 1941</i>
<i>Aflo nuevo, vida nueva</i>	<i>Amistad No 17 Feb-March 1942</i>

This appreciation of Giordano Díaz Lombardero is based on a piece written by Natalia Benjamin of the 'Basque Children of '37 Association UK', with additional material added by Giordano's nephew, Alvin Díaz.