

## María del Carmen de Andrés Elorriaga

17th January 1930 - 18th March 2017

María Carmen de Andrés climbed aboard the *S.S. Habana* on that fateful day 80 years ago, alone, because she was the only one of her family that went with her father to the Socialist meeting held in Bilbao. Word had come through that she was on Franco's list.

After a very rough crossing she reached England, and after being looked after by The Salvation Army, Red Cross and the local people of Eastleigh in Hampshire, the *niños* were told they would be going to foster homes. One girl was crying and Mari Carmen asked why, and this girl said that she was an orphan and would not be fostered. So Mari Carmen said that she would say that she was an orphan and they would be fostered together. Unfortunately they ended up in an orphanage in Manchester run by Catholics.



After about a year of bad times Mari Carmen had a breakdown at 8 years old! and ended up in hospital. When she recovered, they found that she was not an orphan and took her to Margate to join the Spanish children there. After lots of Basque Dancing to raise money for food and keep, which she enjoyed, one of the teachers, Miss Worall, took her down to South Wales, when she was ten years old, where Miss Worrall's sister's family took her in. She learnt English and the Jones family brought her up as their daughter, and she grew into a lovely girl, inwardly as well as outwardly.

On April 13th 1947, just before the Easter weekend, she met Peter Wood who was in the RAF. Over Easter, Mari Carmen was able to show Peter all the different parts of the countryside, visit the cinema in the evening and the funfair on Easter Monday. It was back to Norfolk on Tuesday.



Later he was posted to an airfield near Coventry. Letters back then were the equivalent of one penny, so many letters were written between Mari Carmen and Peter. In January 1948 Peter cycled to Barry one long weekend to see Maria and was taken home for inspection and high tea. After this Peter cycled down most weekends until in June when he was demobbed and had 56 days leave. Most of this he spent at a farm just down the road from where Ma Carmen lived. His days were spent with other young people, picking potatoes and doing other farm jobs, his evenings were spent with Ma Carmen.

When it was time for him to return to his home in London, Mari Carmen found a job at Heinz in Willesden and soon they were enjoying the sights together.

They were engaged to be married Christmas 1948 and married Christmas 1949.



Daughters were born in 1951, 1954 and a son in 1959. The family moved to Crawley New Town where they had a real bathroom instead of a tin bath in the kitchen! Ma Carmen and Peter enjoyed much cycling and walking. Later they moved to a nice new bungalow in Bognor Regis.

In 1963 Peter's boss lent him the money to take Ma Carmen and the family to see her Mum and Dad for the first time in 26 years. It was a lovely experience.

Mari Carmen was a marvellous cook, and the best dressmaker in the South of England!

After many, many happy years together, she passed away on March 17th 2017.

*Peter Wood*

