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November 21, 1997

I am Aida González, born in Infiesto, Asturias, Spain.

My father was Lino Prida, born in Spain, and in Tampa, he was co-owner of the Passage Restaurant, which is Café Creole today.

My mother was born in Tampa and her name was Blanquita Llosa and famous for her beautiful legs. They were married on May 19, 1919 and went to live in Spain.

I have an older sister in Madrid named Carol.

After the 1934 revolution in Asturias, the Northern province stayed in turmoil. This helped to bring about the 1936 Civil War.

Months after this war started, we were hiding in caves avoiding the bombing and trying to stay alive. My family decided that mother and I should leave and go to France, where my daddy, sister and aunt would join us. Little did we know that we would go from riches to rags.

So mother and I left Gijon on an English cargo ship, along with 400 people. One of Franco's ships, "El Cervera", tried to sink us by using 15 cannon shots, but thank God, were unsuccessful.

Arriving in France, they put us in a single file and went through a door where vaccines and shots of every kind were given to us. They were so afraid that we had diseases. We were guided through another door and put on a train, never letting us leave the premises, to go on our own, as we had planned to meet our family. The coaches were guarded on either side by French ^{gendarmes} gendarmes. As we were treated as refugees, we could not even go from one coach to another. Every morning they brought us a loaf of bread and a can of liver pate to last us until the following day. We drank water from the train's lavatory. Eight days later, it departed and took us back to Spain but to Puigcerda in Catalonia. We were there a couple of days and on to a cargo ship on the way to Valencia, where we were placed in a refugee camp. Full of lice and misery, they finally let us out.

We were completely cut off from the Northern part of Spain and could not get in touch with our family. My mother's family was in Tampa, so she wrote them and they, in turn, would write to Asturias, letting us know how our family was.

On the streets of Valencia, we met some friends from Asturias. They took us to the place they were staying. (Many years later I learned that it was a hotel for prostitutes that had opened its doors to help the refugees from other provinces). Now I see the great kindness they performed. There is good in everyone.

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Soon after we arrived at the hotel, my mother became quite ill. From crying so much, she must have developed an eye infection. She could not open them. She stayed in bed and I went out looking for food. Since our friends from Asturias moved to another town, I had no one to help me. There was a refugee couple from Andalusia. They had many children so I figured the mother could teach me how to cook. We had a small kitchen for the use of the refugees. I would feed my mom, wash her and cure her eyes. The pharmacy didn't have many medicines but any eyewash would be helpful. So there I was, a cook and a nurse— at 12, I had become the mother figure. War teaches us how to become helpful, resourceful, responsible and caring. In every walk of life we learn a lesson.

Valencia was bombarded daily and at all hours of the day. By the time the sirens sounded, they were already bombing and many times with incendiary bombs. It was so terrifying that at the bomb shelter, some people screamed, fainted or cried. So mother and I decided to stay in our room, hugging each other and praying to God that He would save us — and He did!

After some time, we learned that some close friends of ours were in Totana, Murcia. We got a ride on a truck to go there and stayed two months. Later we all moved to Murcia, the capital. We were very hungry and water was rationed. We walked miles to get an eggplant for eight people to eat. Mother would get up at 2:00 a.m. and stand in line until 7:00 a.m. just to get one cup of goat's milk so I could have it for breakfast. I wanted her to partake of it and she would tell me that she wasn't hungry or didn't like it... and I believed it.

In the meantime, Asturias was taken by the fascists. Our hotel in Infiesto was destroyed by bombs and all we had was confiscated by the fascists. We had nothing left. My father who had gone to Coya, went to look things over around our lands and the fascists came upon him, kicking, beating him and left him to die — he did, soon after that. I'd like to add that my daddy was a very generous person. He had a pair of boots made for him, and this neighbor was complementing him on his beautiful boots. One day, my father removed the boots from his feet and gave them to the man and made him very happy. These were the boots that helped to kill my father. The neighbor was a fascist.

My daddy had been the first republican mayor of our town, when the Republic came into power in 1932. Because of this, my 17 year old sister was put in jail and sentenced to die. She was saved from death by an argument between two fascists— to kill or not to kill? That's when her future husband came into the picture and finally freed her. He was one of Franco's army officers.

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Our Tampa family didn't let us know about daddy's death on June 3, 1938. They waited until the Fall to give us the news.

My mother and I had gone to San Pedro del Pinatar in Murcia to visit a friend from Gijon. She lived by the Mediterranean Sea and we would run to the seashore to eat the live coquinas that would come out of the sand as the waves rushed in. Food was more than scarce and we were so very hungry.

After a few months, we went back to our friends in Murcia; that's when our Tampa Family told us about daddy. It was very difficult and sad for us to take and we didn't even know the details.

Mother and I went to Valencia and tried to fix the papers to come to the U.S.. Since my parents married in 1919, mother lost her citizenship. In 1920, a new law was passed that if you married a foreigner, you still kept your American citizenship. Since daddy died, she regained it. When the documents were finally done, we traveled to Barcelona and had to stay there a few weeks. From the windows, we could see the fighter planes go after the bombers. It was a frightening sight. You never forget it. Hitler and Mussolini helped the fascists with men and war equipment. The Russians sent some planes to the Loyalists but never fought themselves. Spain was the trying grounds for World War II.

Our Tampa family had made arrangements and paid for our trip on the Normandy to come to the U.S. . When we finally arrived at La Havre in France to board the ship, we were advised and denied our entrance to the ship because we were refugees and would have to depend on the government to support us. They didn't give mother a chance to explain we had family here. So they left us ashore.

We had no money and only the change of clothes we'd been using all along —really nothing. We were crying and a frenchman came by and asked what was wrong. They must have told him our problem because he handed mother 100 francs and left. I still pray for that kind gentleman. We never knew who he was or saw him again. We went to a hotel and took a bath--- our first in a tub since we left Asturias--- and we

ate, oh boy, did we eat! The following day my mother called the son of an Asturian senator we knew who was now in Perpignan, We traveled there. He met us at the shipline office and translated from Spanish to French back and forth. My spunky mother, tired of this, asked if someone knew English. They did and my mom really told them off in no uncertain terms. It worked! They took us to Paris, set us in a hotel and paid for it, food and all. We stayed there a little over a week. Then we went to Cherbourg and boarded the Bremen. We had the worst storm in 30 years and we were
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seasick the five days it took to arrive in New York in Dec 19, 1938, two months before the war ended.

After I had been in Tampa eight months, the Immigration Office advised us that in order for me to remain in this country, I would have to go to Cuba, so my mother, from here, could claim me. They took me to Miami (I was just 14 then) and put me on a hydroplane (my first time in the air) by myself and told me that I would be back in a week. I left August 21, 1939 and very much alone for two months, as I returned on October 21, 1939.

When I arrived in Cuba, Marcos Kholly was waiting for me. His parents were supposed to take me in but they were moving from their house in Miramar to a condo in El Vedado. So I was taken to a mansion converted into a boarding house. They had no room for me so on the far side of the house, away form everyone, was the chapel. They brought a cot for me to sleep and left me. I looked all around and saw the long green velvet curtain where the altar used to be. Also the bar swinging doors with no locks, open space above them and under them. As I laid there I wasn't thinking of robbers or criminals coming after me, no, not that at all. Instead, I was terror stricken by the phantoms and monsters all around me. By the time I cried myself to sleep I'd wake up screaming and calling for my mother--- I still do this every so often, the mind never forgets.

Learning English was very difficult but in later years, God blessed me with a wonderful husband, Frank Gonzalez, whom I lost September 27, 1994. We had two very nice children Frankie and Roxanne.

From all this, I learned that peace of mind is the most important thing in the world and only God can give it to us!

Thank you for your patience and God bless you always!