

Telling our stories - voices from the Basque child refugee oral histories: (3) Medical checks



The children were given further medical checks and given different coloured ribbons dependent upon whether they were identified as having a medical or dental issue, were to be taken to the public baths or were okay to go straight to the camp at Eastleigh. Hair was cut as part of the bathing to prevent the spread of lice: this was particularly hard for the young girls.

Herminio Martínez:

“Before... we left my brother said to me ‘oh look, wait here whilst I go above’ and then he disappeared and a door opened on the side and someone got hold of me and put me through and they did a medical examination, the next thing I was being taken on a bus to the camp, separated from my brother.”

Valeriana Llorente:

“I do remember going down the ramp of the boat. We were given a little ribbon according to how fit we were or if our head was clean and so on... One of the first things they did all the girls had their hair cut...”

Benedicta González:

“All my life my hair had been my crown and glory because I’ve always had very strong abundant hair and everybody said how beautiful it was. And then somebody

said, 'Go in there to have your hair cut... You have no choice, they are taking you to a camp and you can't go there with hair that long.' ... In the end they forced me, I mean they held me by force. I can't forget."

Francisco (Paco) Robles:

“And then when we arrived on the 23 May in the morning in Southampton there were doctors there giving us injections and vaccinations and all that.”

Angeles Cubas:

“First we were checked by a doctor... She checked our heads to see if we had lice... They also looked inside our mouths to see if we had bad teeth and checked if we were limping or if there was anything wrong with us. And they tied ribbons to our wrists. Whoever had something wrong with their teeth, for instance, got a yellow one, those who had lice got blue ones, those who had a physical defect got red ones and those who had nothing at all got white ones.”

Augustina Pérez:

“The day we arrived in Southampton, a lady came round and give us ribbons to put on – red or white... I changed my one with a girl my age ... because I liked red... And when we got off the boat, there were buses waiting for us. But then I realised that the ones wearing red went to a different bus than the ones wearing white. And the ones wearing red were taken to the public baths in Southampton. I was terrified... They took us to separate bathrooms and they cut my hair and based me, the same with the others.”