I would like to tell you something about this collection of books that my husband, Ron, and I rescued from Manuel’s small flat in Paris in the mid 1980s. For nearly 25 years they remained stored in boxes in “Villa Nabarra” the house in Leigh-on-Sea where my parents lived and which today is my home. For most of that time they remained forgotten - although every now and then I would find an opportunity to look at them, escaping at moments from the demands of motherhood, child rearing and a teaching career to actually read some of them. So often I wondered what should be done with them.

Eventually the time came when there was a free room in the house and the space and opportunity to unpack the boxes and inspect their contents in detail; the variety of texts and publications started to pile up before us and my brother-in-law, Richard, offered to make a catalogue of the books.

Our dilemma started to take shape as we became aware of the breadth of material that the boxes contained: should we ship the collection back to the Basque Country to join the archive of my grandfather’s papers that is administered by Eusko Ikaskuntza or did this collection of books written in English, Basque, French, Spanish and Catalan call for a different destination? Early on I was in touch with the Gernika Museum and decided to send them one book in Portuguese entitled “Guernica” and dedicated to my grandfather by a group of activists in Brazil. They did not have a copy of this particular text and later I also sent some photocopies of articles and photos that seemed to be particularly relevant to them. But what about the rest of the collection?

We approached other contacts in Euzkadi: Josu Txueka, a well known and respected historian, suggested sending a copy of our inventory of books to Aita Agirre at Lazkao, who has created an important store of documentation relating to the Basques and their struggle for freedom. There was also Paul Preston, professor at The London School of Economics and our great expert on contemporary Spanish history, but LSE does not include any courses on Basque. For a few years Richard had been studying Basque in London and was aware that Liverpool University was currently offering some short courses in Basque studies and indeed that it had been the first university in the UK to offer Basque as a subject back in the 1970s. Chance had it that one of Richard’s friends was serving as Pro Vice-Chancellor at Liverpool University and through this connection came the contact with Dr Chris Harris and Dr Juan Arana in the university’s Iberian and Latin American department, and with Dr Mari Jose Olaziregi, professor at The University of the Basque Country and Director for the Promotion and Diffusion of the Basque Language at Etxepare. Marijo was very keen to promote and develop Basque Studies as part of a degree course in Liverpool University’s curriculum and saw Manuel’s collection of books as an opportunity to bring this about. There could also be the possibility of a Manuel Irujo Fellowship. It seemed we had finally found the right solution.

However, having learnt of Aita Agirre and his work, we felt it was important to help in completing his collection of newspapers and pamphlets where we could. In particular he had no material that had been published in London in the post-war era, so we donated these to his institute, taking care to make photocopies for Liverpool and Eusko Ikaskuntza. As mentioned earlier, Eusko Ikaskuntza administers the Fondo Manuel Irujo and we have done our best to make sure that any material relevant to their archive has been passed to them. For example there were some letters found in one of the books relating to Don Bruno, Manuel’s “amigo/enemigo”, a priest well known in the
Estella area early on in my grandfather’s career; Manuel’s accounts gave a slightly different version of events from those in the book of that name and revealed where the real barbarity occurred in 1936. These letters have been passed on to Eusko Ikaskuntza with photocopies to Liverpool; in addition, many of the articles written by Manuel in the newspaper “Euzko Deya de Mejico “and the journal “Iberia” have also been photocopied and retained with the collection.

Having spent many months browsing and reading through the collection, I now feel an even closer bond with my grandfather: he was a hugely warm hearted individual who always made the effort to try to understand others. He was a man of true integrity and principle and worked tirelessly for what he believed was right. There are many personal dedications by the authors of these books, which illustrate the affection and respect that he inspired. The books cover a breadth of Basque culture and history and reflect our grandfather’s range of interests and his love of his Basque heritage. I have had a chance to ponder on this heritage, the Basque community spirit and their belief in an essentially non-hierarchical society, which has been maintained for centuries via the fueros. The Basque ability to organise is illustrated in the highly successful system of delegations and Basque cultural centres in the Americas and post-civil war Europe which ensured that refugees sent into exile were offered help and support to find work and the opportunity to establish themselves in their new lives. It also meant that Basque integrity and identity were maintained despite the diaspora which over the last two centuries took so many thousands of Basques across the world. All this is evidenced in the magazines and newspapers in the Irujo collection which were published throughout Central and South America, Paris and London, and sustained exiles in the years during and after the Spanish Civil War.

But the books that spoke most eloquently to me were the first hand accounts of people’s experiences during the civil war written by individuals such as Pilar Fidalgo, Antonio Ruiz Vilaplana, Dr Manuel Gabaran and Inaki de Aberrigoyen amongst others. The publication of Paul Preston’s “The Spanish Holocaust” and the interest it has generated have led me to reflect on the fact that these books are telling the same story and that the evidence was already there in the 1930’s; although the words ‘holocaust’, ‘pogrom’ and ‘genocide’ were used at that time no one wanted to listen: the horrors of the Second World War were still too much to the forefront and Franco’s oppressive regime was accepted by the democracies, even though it had only gained power with the massive support of the Italian fascists and German Nazis. I feel proud to know that during the conflict my grandfather worked tirelessly to maintain some semblance of a system of justice and to ensure as far as he could that humanity triumphed over barbarism. He saved many people's lives and he also sought many years later to have it acknowledged that those people who had been ‘taken for a walk’ or openly executed should not be forgotten. This work continued by the Aguirre sisters, daughters of Fortunato Aguirre, Mayor of Estella executed by Franco forces at the beginning of the Civil War, has recently come to fruition in the creation of the park of memory in Navarra in Sartaguda, with the wall of remembrance detailing all the names of those who were killed.

On behalf of the family I would like to extend our deep gratitude to Marijo Olaziregui, whose enthusiasm and energy have enabled all parties to achieve the present outcome. We would also like to thank Chris Harris and Juan Arana for the work they have put into creating this new opportunity in Liverpool, which will honour the memory of Manuel Irujo and will keep alive his hopes and aspirations for peace and justice not only in Euskal Herria, but throughout the world. Good luck to all with the new Basque Studies courses.