

Cardiff Migration Stories



Photo courtesy of Valentine Rascon ©

Valentine

Valentine lives in Cardiff. His grandfather was a Spanish diplomat who died at the age of 40. He was also the President of the Carrera de Toros (bull fighting), which is why Valentine is also very interested in this.

Valentine's Grandmother.

His Grandmother, Catherine was an Irish Shakespearian actress. She was a friend of the famous Lily Langtry. She moved to Cardiff with her 4 children, including Valentine's father (aged 5), when her husband died. He said that Catherine's nickname was 'St Teresa of Tiger Bay' as she did so much to help the poor of Tiger Bay.

Valentine's father

Valentine's father, Joseph was half Spanish and half Irish. He had been born in Bilbao in Spain. Life was hard for them as they were poor, but his mother managed to make sure her son was educated. He got a job in Mount Stuart Dry Dock, but he realised that he could earn more money working as a Seaman in high mast ships. They wanted able-bodied sailors that could climb up and handle the rigging in all weathers at sea, which was very dangerous work, so they were paid danger money.

He was in Russia as a seaman in the First World War when he found out that his mother, (Valentine's grandmother) Catherine had died. He had a very difficult journey back to Cardiff. By the time he had got back, his sister had sold their house and moved, so he had nowhere to live. He was taken in by family in Canton, and that is where Valentine's father met his mother (Nelly).

Valentine's mother (Nelly)

She was half Swedish and half English (from Somerset). She only had 1 child (Valentine). He went to Kindergarten in Beecham Street and was taught by a retired governess from India.

His mother used to take Valentine to her tea dances at the Carlton Hotel and restaurant (opposite The Principality Building in Queen Street). London bands used to play there. The staff used to keep him happy while his mother was dancing, so from a young age he learnt good table manners and which glasses to use, even before he could read and write!

Valentine

He was born in Cardiff in 1921 in Avoca Place in Grangetown.

There used to be an old shop in the building which was turned into a small dance floor, and the London bands would play there too. It was owned by Mrs Maza (from a wealthy Argentinian family).

"I spend a lot of time in Spain and I speak Spanish". He had a cleaning lady who wished to work as a nurse but couldn't as she couldn't speak English, so she learned while working for Valentine.

"Well I don't have a family, my wife died five years ago so there's nobody else in my family."

"I signed up for the air force to fly at eighteen when war was declared, but because my father was Spanish I was only allowed to become a flyer and I wasn't allowed to join any other service, 'cause as a foreigner I wasn't allowed to have a gun".

Valentine has a deep love of the Spanish culture, especially tango music and dancing and bull fighting. However, he likes the warmth and sincerity of the Welsh people-how humble, unassuming and giving the Welsh are. This is why his Grandmother Catherine chose Wales to move to with her young family and to make it her home.



Valentine is on the front row, third from the left.

Photograph courtesy of Valentine Rascon ©

