## LIFESTYLE

## **From history** teaching to historical memory

Malgara García Díaz. A historian, archaeologist, teacher and writer who is now president of the Casa de la Memoria Association

n February 2020 Malgara

García Díaz was elected

president of the Casa de la

Memoria Association, based

in Jimena de la Frontera, in

Cadiz province, but with the

onset of the pandemic barely

a month later, the activities

and events she and her col-

leagues had begun to plan

were unable to go ahead. That

does not mean that Margarita,

as she is known, has been idle.

In fact, for someone who is of-

ficially retired from her pro-

fession as a teacher, she seems

busier than ever, despite the

limitations imposed by Covid-

In a way, Margarita has al-

ways been quite a pioneer.

When she first went to univer-

sity, Franco was still alive and

the subjects she chose - His-

tory and Geography – were

unusual for women at the

time. There were still many

differences in the way men

and women were treated, and

she recalls one incident when

a friend was refused permis-

sion to withdraw money from

her own bank account with-

out her husband's signature.

"The bank manager had to

come out and intervene, be-

cause she and I made such a

fuss about it. That was in

She originally dreamed of

a career in journalism, but

that course was not available

at Malaga university, which

was nearest to her home, and

her parents refused to let her

move away to study elsewhere.

1977!" she savs.

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**DEBBIE BARTLETT** 

She chose History because she found it interesting, but al-Margarita at the Casa de la Memoria La Sauceda, with a student helper. sur most immediately discovered archaeology, which she describes now as "a true passion". She took part in excavations with some of the great

names in archaeology and participated in research, but realised that there would be no jobs available after graduating. In the end, friends persuaded her to become a teacher.

"At first it was very painful to have to give up archaeology. I had been planning to do my thesis and had to abandon the idea. But then, I discovered that teaching is actually something wonderful. It's quite magical. I miss my pupils because they give you so much energy, I miss my History of Spain classes because they were always a challenge and I miss my colleagues a great

deal. They are extraordinary people, who are totally dedicated to what they do. For the first year after I retired, it was awful because it almost felt as if I had lost my identity, but then I was able to reinvent myself and do other interesting things that I hadn't been able to do before," she says.

IN THE FRAME

## **Historical memory**

One of those interesting things was to become more active in the historical memory movement. Her interest stems from her own family history. Her great-uncle was shot in 1939, after the civil war had finished, and she was instrumental in locating his body and ensuring that he was buried with dignity. She still recalls her grandmother's pain at the loss of her

brother. Another great-uncle was recruited by Franco's troops and died after being sent to the front. The family have tried to find his whereabouts, but so far have been unsuccessful.

So for Margarita, it was a combination of personal background and ideology that led her to contact a fellow historian. Fernando Sígler, who manages the archive at the Casa de la Memoria La Sauceda, a civil war information and research centre, and offer to help.

It is an environment she loves, and has led to other things: for example, she has written articles and books, the latest of which is about the way the closure of the Gibraltar border by Franco was portrayed in the Spanish, Gibral-

was while chatting to colleagues in the archive that the idea was proposed of forming an association to manage and promote the Casa de la Memoria, raise awareness of the historical memory movement, and organise a busy schedule of activities. Then, as mentioned earlier. Spain went into lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic and these proiects had to be put on hold.

tarian and English press. It

Nevertheless, Margarita and her colleagues have continued working behind the scenes and online. "We keep the Casa Memoria website updated with information, and have just started a digital radio station called La Voz de la Memoria, which is a very powerful tool. We are digitalising the information in the archive. and working on publishing posthumously a book by the author Jesús Ynfante, called La Remonarquía. We are also preparing a series of talks and conferences, for when we are able to hold them again," she explains.

Someone as busy as Margarita must feel that there are not enough hours in the day. but she still manages to find time for hobbies and interests such as reading, writing, music, sport, and seeing friends. "But nothing relaxes me more than a walk in the woods, and then a shower," she says.

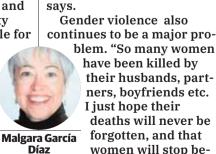
Women's rights in Spain: "there's still a long way to go"

March 8th is International Women's Day and although Spain has made significant progress in women's rights in recent decades, a great deal still needs to change, savs Margarita.

She believes that this will be difficult while so many employers still treat motherhood as a problem and some sections of society find it more comfortable for women to look after the home and be res ponsible for care.

'Women's work is often undervalued and less well-paid and it is difficult for them to reach positions of responsibi-

lity. Women's achievements need to be recognised and be seen as normal," she



ing considered someone else's 'property'. The law needs to act inexorably in this respect".

Díaz