

“SAN FRANCISCO EUSKARA ESKOLA” AN EXAMPLE OF SUCCESS SPREADING OUR LANGUAGE

The San Francisco Basque Cultural Center (BCC) has been offering Euskara classes for a long time. Aitor Iñarra has been the Euskara teacher since 2009. In the last 6 years tens of students went through his lessons, some of them are still taking the classes and some other kept going with their life.

The BCC is committed to the teaching of Euskara. They work closely with NABO and the Basque Government to improve the quality of the classes and spread the teaching of the Basque language.

“The key for having Basque Language Schools in America is the commitment of the clubs. A lot of clubs in the US don’t offer Euskara classes, and I understand that in the small ones is difficult to start a School, but if the desire of the clubs is there the rest can be done. There shouldn’t be any excuse, just the real and honest desire of having Euskara classes in each club. The Basque Government (HABE) and NABO offer their full support to the clubs to create their own schools. If they don’t have teachers or the money to start the schools we can help getting them”. Says Aitor Inarra, Euskara teacher and one of the Basque language coordinators of NABO.

Here we find some of the students at the San Francisco Basque Cultural Center and their stories:

WORKING MOMENTS

Speaking practice is a key part of learning a language.



HABE provides the Basque language schools with all the materials they need to teach high-level professional lessons. The Basque Government put a lot of effort and money in creating appropriate materials to teach Euskara at the Basque Clubs around the world, the program is called *Euskara Munduan*.

Playing Parcheesi to practice the verbs. Learning is fun!



INTERNATIONAL VISITORS

A group picture with some of the students of Mondragon University visiting San Francisco; they were a lot of help and fun in class!



The Basque Community in the San Francisco Bay area is very active and proud. At the BCC they welcome each year Basques from all ways of life, from university students (like in this case), to political leaders, poets, musicians, actors and more. Some of the recent visitors were: Former *Lehendakari* Juan Jose Ibarretxe, *bertsolaris* like Maialen Lujanbio, and musicians like Kalakan.

SOME OF OUR STUDENTS AND THEIR STORIES:

Mikel Alson (left) and Marc Schuyler (right)



Marc's family is from the French Basque Contry. He was born in the US and saw his mother and grandmother speak euskara, but he never learned it while they were alive. He's been trying to learn on his own for the last 20 years, and now he's happy to be taking classes at the SF euskara school.

*"Nire izena **Marc** da; abrokatu naiz, berrogei-ta-hamar urte ditut. Azken hogeit-ta-hamar urtetan Euskaraz ikasi nahi izan dut. Nire ama Bidarten sortua zen, bere aita eta ama Armendaritz sortu ziren; baina orain denak hilik daude. Oraindik familia asko daukat Euskal Herrian. Lehen ez zeuden euskara klaseak Californian, eta urtetan liburak erabili ditut Euskara ikasteko, baina oso zaila zen. Orain oso pozik nago klasean eta Aitor gure irakaslea delako!"*

Mikel is another example of determination for learning the language of his ancestors. He was born in Baiona, but grew up in Venezuela and France. His family is still in the Basque country. He knows that keeping our language alive is the best way to perpetuate our culture. He's very grateful to the BCC.

*Nire izena **Mikel** da. Zergatik ari naiz euskera ikasten? Euskaldun naizelako; Baionan jaio nintzen. Ama iparraldekoa da eta nire aita nafarra zen. Gaztea nintzenean, nire amonak euskara mintzatzen zidan. Denbora luzean euskara ikasi nahi nuen, azkenean klase hau aurkitu nuen. Nire helburua da euskaraz komunikatzeko gai izatea. Gure hizkuntza eta kultura bizirauteko zati garrantzitsuena da. Eskerrik asko San Francisco BCC eta Aitor Inarra opari honengatik.*

Rosa Maria and Juan San Mamés

Juan and Rosa Maria San Mamés are passionate Basque language and culture lovers. Juan was born in Portugalete (Bizkaia), but he grew up between Mexico and the US. Rosa Maria grew up in Mexico where she was born in a Basque family. They both have been taking Euskara classes with Aitor for the last six years. Rosa Maria's progress is fascinating, she became fluent in Euskara learning outside of the Basque Country and taking the class once a week. Juan is getting better.



Marie Uhalde (left) and Carol Allen (right)



Carol is one of the biggest examples of determination to learn Euskara. She drives three hours to come to class every thursday. *If she can drive for so long, there's no excuse for anybody else not to be taking classes* (jokes Aitor). Her family is Basque but she was born in the US. Now she is very happy to have the opportunity to learn the language of her ancestors.

Ni Carol naiz. Nire amaren familia Euskal Herrikoa da, baina ez ziren euskeraz hitz egiten. Hemen Estatu Batuetan, espainolez mintzatzen ziren. Nire semeak esan zidan euskarako klaseei buruz. Orain, ostegunero, hiru ordu gidatzen dut klaseetara joateko. Euskaraz ikasten asko gozatzen dut!

Marie's family is from Ezterenzubi in the Lower Navarre, or Behe-Nafarroa. She was born and raised in the US in a Basque community. She spoke Euskara at home with her dad and mom, and with the classes at the BCC she's learning the insides of the language. She loves going back to the Basque Country and being able to speak with her cousins and other relatives in their common language. She's been coming to class regularly each week for years.

Gabino Alonso with Maite from Mondragon Unibertsitatea.



Gabino loves everything that has to do with the Basque culture: the food, the festivities, the sports, and the people. Although life keeps him busy, he always finds time to come to class. He travels often to the Basque Country and he enjoys being able to say a few sentences in Basque.

Elisabeth was born in the US but her family is from Bizkaia. She loves the fact that Euskara is such a colorful language, and she wants to see it stay in the world. That's why her and her sons and daughter are learning Basque. She'd like to go to an immersion school in the Basque Country.

Nire izena Elizabeth Aramburu da. Nire gurasoak, aita-amonak, eta lehengusinak Euskal Herrikoak (Bizkaia) dira. Euskera antzinako hizkuntza da. Koloretsua eta oso polita da. Ez dut nahi Euskara galdutzea munduan. Nire seme nagusiena Renoko Unibersitatean dabil eta han Euskara ikasten ari da. Nire beste semeak eta alaba nahi dute Euskara ikasi ere bai. Denok nahi dugu Maizpideko Barnetegira joan Euskara hobetago ikasteko.

Elisabeth Kvarna (right)



The teacher! Aitor Iñarra with former student Maggie Gilkey.

At the end of each semester we celebrate our success. Sometimes we do a put-lock and other times we go out for diner.



Some of the students at the San Francisco Euskara School are not Basque in origin. This one in the picture is Maggie Gilkey, she traveled to the Basque Country and loved the culture. She attended the class for a few semesters.

On-and-off we always have non-Basque students. Their motivations to learn Basque are very different: curiosity, scholar reasons, or even to talk to a Basque boyfriend! We always welcome them all.

One of the moments of fun celebrating the end of the semester:



Basques love to get together and celebrate life sitting around a table. Each semester the Euskara class of the San Francisco BCC gets together to eat, drink and be Basque. Sometimes is a put-lock and other times a fun restaurant in the city.

Another group picture: The Euskara class at the San Francisco BCC welcomes everybody to join us, learn our language and perpetuate our identity.

