

Our Lady's Photograph

Father José Ramon García de la Riva

AS I HAVE PREVIOUSLY MENTIONED, in order not to miss seeing the Virgin, the girls slept in the kitchen fully dressed. They realized if they went to bed after the Virgin had informed them that she would come at night, she would not disturb their sleep—and they so ardently desired to see her! They also knew, however, that after telling them that she would come at night, the Virgin wanted them to obey their parents if they were told to go to bed. On numerous occasions, Mari Cruz had to decide whether or not to obey her parents when they had forbidden her to go out with the other three girls or told her to go to bed. She chose to obey her parents and in that way, she also obeyed the Virgin.

It remains to be seen if the Virgin will hold the family accountable.

Some Ecstasies among Others

One day, there was an air force chaplain among the people going up to Garabandal with us. He only wore the insignia of his rank of captain and asked the other priests present not to tell the little girls (visionaries) that he also was a priest. They faithfully carried out his wishes.

That evening Jacinta fell into ecstasy and the pastor, Father Valentín, as he was in the custom of doing, ordered her to tell

him how many priests were present. The child gave the exact number of cassocks then added, "And one of those that goes on planes. Here is his name..."

Coming back with us at four in the morning, that priest couldn't help sharing with me his bewilderment and emotion.

Conchita and the Autographed Picture

One day in September, 1961, I was in Primitiva Gonzalez's village grocery store. From the window facing the street, I could see Conchita surrounded by a group of people. I went out and joined them and asked Conchita to come into the kitchen as soon

as she was finished with the visitors. She did so at once.

I had in my hands five or six pictures that I had taken during my first trip to Garabandal last August 22 (1961).

"Conchita, do you know these children?" I asked.

"Yes," she responded mischievously, "The girls are from Cosío."

"Since they are all around you, you can keep the photos. And since Mari Cruz is also in the pictures, you can give her one too."

"Thank you, Father."

Then, suddenly becoming agitated, she excused herself saying, "I must go," and disappeared. (I have to admit that I knew nothing of the "calls" at the time.)

At that moment, I remembered that one of the pictures I had given her was autographed and was supposed to be given to the priest from Burgos who had come with me to Garabandal on August 22, 1961. I asked Primitiva's daughter if a child could be sent to find Conchita and ask her to return the autographed picture in exchange for another one. But Conchita was already in ecstasy. Her mother had successfully retrieved the five or six pictures from her hands except one she still held onto while in ecstasy.



Joey Lomangino's medal kissed by Our Lady. Small medals containing a piece of missal kissed by Our Lady are available (see page 21).

felt I would have to get up in the middle of the night to take it. At 2:00 a.m., I awoke to go to the washroom and afterwards as I sat on my bed, reached from my medication. But wait, there was no pain. I felt terrific! I was sure the pain would "kill me" in the morning but I didn't need any medication at this time. I prayed the rosary and thanked Our Lady and God for these few hours.

I woke up early Monday morning and to my utter amazement, I felt absolutely wonderful. I thanked God and waited for the pain to begin later. My wife, Helen, knew nothing about these wonderful few hours for me. As we got on the bus I waited for the pain—but it didn't come.

Bob House, wonderful caring Bob, came to me as we were getting on the bus and before even knowing what happened to me, gave me his medal which was an exact replica of Joey's and told me to use it daily. I have been doing this faithfully and have it in my possession constantly.

As the bus made its way to the Santander airport, I realized it would be unfair of me not to tell Joey and the rest of the group about the wonderful few hours I had just experienced. Eight hours without pain was just phenomenal for me and I told everyone on the bus about the present state of my health.

All the way I expected the pain to hit me but it didn't. Our new friends kept coming up to me and asking, "Are you still all right?" "Yes," was my answer.

Helen and I missed our connecting flight to Ontario from New York's Kennedy Airport and had to wait even longer on an already exhausting day. When we arrived home very late, it was cold and raining, the kind of weather that usually kept me in the house. The next day, my office staff members were surprised when I showed up for work. The weather was terrible and they knew that normally, on days like this I would not be able to work. They saw my face,



they heard me speak, they saw my energy and how I walked. They couldn't get over it. Whatever happened to Mike?

A New Lease on Life

Since that time, virtually all my patients have been amazed at the tremendous change in me. I was like the old Dr. Mike before the accident. I joked, I was happy, I was radiant. Weather has not affected me since then and Helen complains that she has lost her walking barometer. Energy? I have too much for even my staff whom I have managed to exhaust every day since then. I relate the story of Garabandal constantly. Once my assistant said to her mother, "Mike is so happy I can't stand it." You see, she didn't know me before the accident. And I can swing those

Below, from left: Joseph Lomangino, Helen Rozeluk, Joey, Hugh Clerkin, Marilynn Lomangino with younger son, John, and Dr. Rozeluk in Garabandal, 1994.

golf clubs again, cart a heavy wheelbarrow, lift heavy weights and do all those things I couldn't do for eight years. It's wonderful.

Since then, Helen and I have given a number of talks on Garabandal and will continue to do so as long as we are able. I thank all those who are happy for me and if it's God's plan that my pain should return even this minute, don't feel sorry for me. I have had one of the greatest gifts anyone could have. I felt very lucky after a few short hours and now after seven months one can imagine how fortunate I consider myself.

As a result of this unexpected gift the lives of my family, friends and patients have all been changed for the better, not to mention the many others who have seen me suffer for years. Helen and I will pray that they, too, will be rewarded and that we'll all be able to witness the great Miracle soon.

To this day I ask, Why did it happen to me? I have no answers. How long it will continue only God knows. But I thank Him every day for the tremendous blessing He has bestowed on me. □



In ecstasy! On the facing page, Mari Loli and below, Conchita.

When I learned that Conchita was in ecstasy, I went to observe and take a few pictures. It was 5:30 in the evening and still light. Since at that time, I didn't have a flash attachment for my camera, I hadn't been able to take any pictures of the girls in ecstasy because whenever I was in the village, the visions occurred at night.

After I had taken all the pictures and came to the end of the roll of film, I went to a dark area to change it. By the time I was finished, Conchita was out of ecstasy. Someone then came up to me and said, "Conchita is looking for you; the Virgin gave her a message for you." "Where is she?" I asked, but no one could tell me.

I headed for her house and saw her there surrounded by some of my parishioners who had accompanied me to Garabandal that day. As soon as she saw me, she immediately left the group and came over.

"Father, the Virgin told me to give this picture back to you because you gave it to me by mistake."

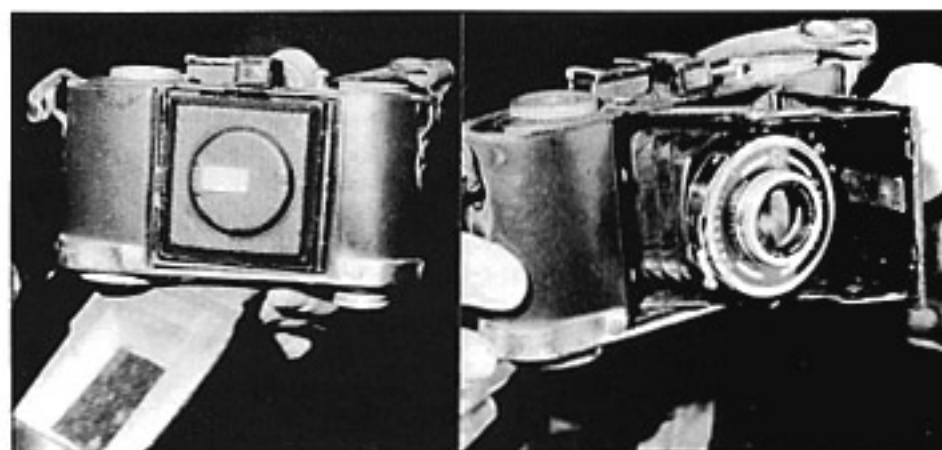
I was dumbfounded. Then after recovering my faculties I said, "Really; that's just what I wanted to tell you."

I gave her a similar picture, without the autograph, and Conchita left to rejoin the group.

Taking the Virgin's Picture

Here is a story about a photographic session at which I was an impartial eyewitness. I would like to tell the whole story because without understanding it completely, certain readers could be confused.

On September 12, 1961, at exactly 4:00 a.m., I assisted at a very long ecstasy of Jacinta and Mari Loli which took place in Conchita's house. Among the numerous men and women attending, there were many who had given the girls objects to be kissed by the Virgin when she appeared. For my part, I had given them everything I had close at hand. Now, while Loli and Jacinta were in ecstasy, I gave Conchita my camera but did not explain how to use it.



Closed and open views of the camera used by Mari Loli to take the Virgin's picture.

Note that Conchita herself was not in ecstasy and I repeat, we could not communicate with the visionaries in ecstasy but they could communicate with each other.

Loli received the camera without Conchita instructing her in its use. Immediately, without hesitation, she raised the camera to her eyes and was heard to say, "I'm going to take your picture." Then she looked perplexed. "What a strange camera, I can't see you."

And at that instant, as though she was being instructed by the Vision, she said, "Oh, I must push a button?"

Actually the camera was in its case. She felt around with her fingers for the latch and opened the case.

"Now I see you."

Then she seemed to be receiving new instructions.

"Oh, I must push another button?"

(My camera was a Kodak equipped with a bellows. The bellows had to be pulled out for the camera to operate.)

We watched Loli search for the second button, pull out the bellows and raise the camera to her eyes again.

All this was done leisurely, very calmly. Her head was thrown back. Loli had never stopped staring at her vision. She never looked at the camera or the control knobs. It was evident that she had been acting according to mysterious instructions. She said, "Oh, I have to turn the roll?" Still in ecstasy, her fingers searched in the correct area on the bottom of

the camera, and executed the advancement of the roll without hesitation. Naturally, without this maneuver there would be a double exposure.

After that came the indication to lower the apparatus in order to operate it. She executed that but not right away.

One noticed that if all the operations were done correctly, it should take a little time.

She ended up taking two more photographs without having to be reminded of the series of gestures necessary. This time it was done with much more assurance, and without receiving, it seemed, any further instructions.

Loli operated the camera very eas-



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ily as though she was perfectly familiar with the apparatus, in the manner of an experienced photographer.

I was not particularly excited about these photos taken by Loli and so it was a little while before I sent them to be developed. I didn't think we would get very good results and for two very good reasons. In the first place, Loli was photographing inside Conchita's house with ordinary film but without a flash, her only light a dim, kitchen bulb. Secondly, a camera is only meant to photograph things or people visible to the naked eye.

Naturally I viewed the pictures when they came back. I then sent them to Loli, teasing her.

"Seeing as how you took the pic-

ures yourself, the next time you see the Virgin, ask her why she was not more successful—because I can see nothing."

Three months later, Loli confessed that she kept forgetting to ask the Virgin about the photographs. Finally she did and here is what she said, "The Virgin has assured me that she was well photographed and she showed me where she could be found on the photographs. When I asked her why she could not be seen better, she replied, "Because even if the picture had turned out perfectly clear, he would believe it no more than he already did."

On the subject of these pictures, I know a person who later had an inter-

esting experience. Into another set of pictures, she slipped the one we had got into the habit of calling "the photo of the Virgin." Loli evidently knew nothing of this. She went into an ecstasy and taking the lot in among the other objects placed on the table by the assistants, she began to offer the images to be kissed by the Virgin.

She came, without knowing it, to "the image of the Virgin." She paused for a moment then said, "Oh, this is the photo where you can be found?"

The way I see it, this story of a photograph is of particular interest from what we might call a technical point of view.

Before the affair in Conchita's



The photograph of the Virgin taken by Marl Loli.

kitchen, Loli knew nothing about operating any camera, especially mine. Yet, only eight days after her spectacular success in the same kitchen, she was again absolutely unable, in the normal (non-ecstasy) state to operate the camera. I myself verified it in her house in the presence of her father, Ceferino, by putting into Loli's hands the same camera—she knew nothing.

An experience in camera technique? Yes, and through the instructions of the Virgin, the young girl (she was twelve and a half years old) had done precisely all that was necessary to do, the first time, within the margin of time required for the execution of the instructions received.

Then she had operated the camera

with the rapidity of a professional. There were five operations in all: remove the camera from the case, turn the reel (wind the film), open the bellows, release the shutter latch, press the shutter.

Why, on that night, had I passed my camera to Conchita to give to Loli? I didn't think anything of it. But by contrast, I remember that night as though it were yesterday. Loli told her assistants my full name, first, middle and last. She also told them that my parish was dedicated to Mary. All this is exactly as it happened on that day in September, 1961. To my knowledge, Loli has never spoken of it since. □

The story of Garabandal continues through the translation of original documents.

Interviews

Part 12

DURING THE APPARITION OF SAINT Michael on June 18, 1965, Conchita was heard to utter, "...July 2nd?" Later it was learned that she would have a locution with Our Lady on this day, the fourth anniversary of the Virgin's first appearance at Garabandal. Another locution with the Queen of Heaven followed on July 18, third anniversary of the Miracle of the Visible Host. Whatever the Virgin said to Conchita during these locutions apparently did not deter the teenager's determination to enter the religious life. She truly believed she had a vocation and on August 18, wrote with "great joy" to Father Materne Laffineur: "My mother is allowing me to enter the convent. This is a great thing for me to so consecrate my life totally to Christ from the age of 16 for the rest of my life.... Pray for me so that I can join the Discalced Carmelite Missionaries as soon as possible."

On the day preceding Conchita's letter, a new bishop was installed for the diocese of Santander in the person of Monsignor Vicente Puchol Montís. Some saw it as an ominous sign for the cause of Garabandal. A priest from Madrid, former student of the Pontifical University at Comillas wrote to the Rector Emeritus, Father Lucio Rodrigo, S.J., who had witnessed the girls' ecstasies in Garabandal and was favorably disposed to the events: "Now you will have to proceed with caution. I know Don Vicente Puchol and I know that he is

against Garabandal. He is a declared enemy of the 'apparitions'." Within two years, Bishop Puchol was to have suffered an untimely death due to an auto accident (May 8, 1967), but not before waging a vigorous campaign against Garabandal in the press, on radio and television.

It was believed by some that his predecessor, Bishop Eugenio Beitia Aldazabal, had grown more sympathetic to the apparitions. Bishop Beitia was highly esteemed for his intelligence; the dean of the faculty of Canon Law where he received his doctorate had, according to Father Laffineur, said of him: "Bishop Beitia was the most brilliant student in our university." Being chosen by the Spanish Episcopal Conference as chairman of press activities in Spain, gives some idea of the high regard in which he was held.

While acknowledging the function of the official commission appointed by Bishop Doroteo Fernandez, Bishop Beitia could not help but be aware of the negative bias of its members toward the apparitions and allowed the formation of another se-

cret unofficial commission made up of distinguished doctors all favorably inclined to the events. The reports the Bishop received from Drs. Alejandro Gasca, Felix Gallego and Celestino Ortiz would have differed greatly from those submitted by the official commission members and provided the Bishop with the opportunity to see both sides of the issue. His predecessor had not been so fortunate.

The fourth "nota" from the Santander Chancery issued on July 8, 1965, and which bore Bishop Beitia's signature while repeating the usual cautions for both priests and laity, nevertheless, included the following important passage:

However, we want to make it clear that we have not found any grounds for ecclesiastical condemnation, either in the doctrine or in the spiritual recommendations that have been divulged in the events and addressed to the Christian faithful since these recommendations contain exhortations to prayer, sacrifice, devotion to the Eucharist, and to Our Lady under traditional praiseworthy forms, and to the holy fear of God offended by our sins. They simply repeat the present doctrine of the Church in these matters.



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