Mercedes Salisachs

EYEWITNESS TESTIMONY - Part 1

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Spanish author Mercedes Salisachs from Barcelona made three trips to Garabandal during the time of the apparitions and stayed for several days each time witnessing a significant number of ecstasies. Her first visit was over Easter in 1962 (recounted in our March-April 2003 edition) about which she gives a moving testimony of how after being distraught over the death of her son in an auto accident she learned (from Our Lady through Loli) on Holy Saturday that he was in heaven. This account represents the first part of an informe (report) of her experiences in Garabandal Our series based on the remainder of her report begins with her still being in the village over Easter of 1962.

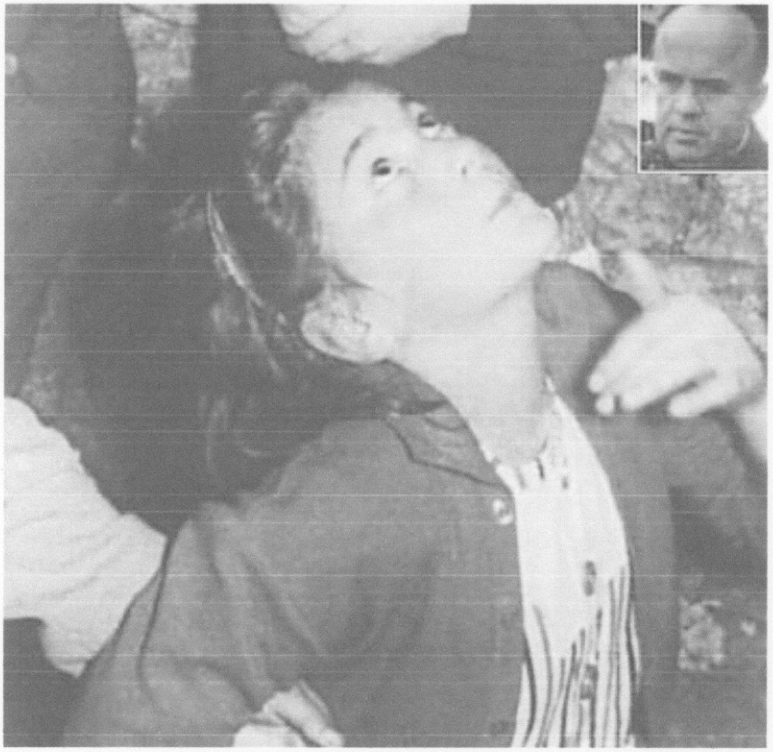
It was Easter and the people of Garabandal were happy and content. In spite of it being this time of year, the sun was shining and it was warm. Joseph (Mercedes's driver) had recovered completely. He had known and loved my son Miguel since his childhood and after hearing my story, could not stop crying.

During the afternoon I recorded conversations with the girls and with people from the town. Everyone was convinced of the truth of the visions.

At the time for which the visions were announced, we went to Conchita's home. She was joyful and spontaneous, and I noted her great personality. She was uneducated but had the spirit of an artist. While she waited for the vision she was writing, drawing, singing and playing jokes on all of us. In the letter that she dedicated to me she recommended that I put religion in my books for the good of humanity. Graciously she drew for us the image of the Angel such as she had seen him; then we recorded songs composed by her and the Hail Holy Queen, accompanied by me. She hesitated to sing it alone.

While we were waiting for her apparition they came to tell us that Jacinta was already in ecstasy. She was alone during her vision; her mother was exhausted and had fallen asleep. When we entered her home, Jacinta was leaving the house, in a trance by herself. Her mother, still half asleep ran down the stairs in a great hurry, and had to return to the house as she'd forgotten her shoes.

Always looking upwards, Jacinta walked fast with the crucifix in her hands. She stopped at the entrance of a house and knocked until they opened.



Jacinta in ecstasy in 1962. Inset, Father Valentin Marichalar, village pastor.

She entered the house and climbed the stairs in the dark. Father Corta and I were behind her. First she entered a room on the second floor where apparently two little girls were sleeping. Then she opened the door in front of us. Somebody turned on the light and we saw Don Valentin in bed. Jacinta was laughing, and always looking upwards, offered him the crucifix to kiss but Don Valentin was half asleep and couldn't quite reach it. Jacinta, still laughing, did not give up until he kissed it. Then she made the sign of the cross, and giving it to him to kiss again, left.

Next day Don Valentin confessed to me, "May God forgive me, but I was tired from so many prodigies and doubting so much. I asked the Virgin that if the girls were really seeing her, that night have one of them come to me while I was sleeping and wake me up. Now I cannot doubt. They've never done that before. Besides, did you see how Jacinta was laughing when she gave me the crucifix to kiss?"

I think that night was the first time I saw Jacinta coming down the stairs backwards and running up the steep street. It was extremely difficult to follow her; she was running too fast to keep up with her.

At one time running backwards she slipped and fell in the mud. She immediately got up gracefully and harmoniously. It was as though we were seeing a movie in slow motion. The artistic movements of this child could not have been imitated by the best ballerina. She shook the mud off her coat and continued her backward flight.

In view of the difficulty in following her we decided to wait for her in the square. I must mention that Joseph, the mechanic, in spite of how ill he had been the previous day and in spite of his blood loss, ran after her without any problem.

While we were waiting in the square, a boy from the town (I don't know if on purpose or accidentally) bumped into her while she was running. There was a violent crash as both fell to the ground. Jacinta immediately got up without a scratch; the boy, I was informed later, had two broken fingers.

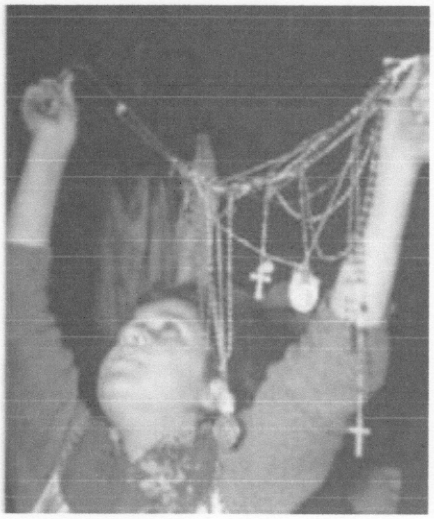
Later she returned walking normally but still in ecstasy. Once in the square *(el cuadro),* she fell to her knees upon the rock of the first apparitions. She made the sign of the cross and came out of ecstasy.

On seeing where she was, she suggested that we pray the rosary and we did. Later on I found out that whenever any of the girls came out of ecstasy in the square, if any one of those present had not said the rosary yet that day, they proposed that we all do so. This day it was Joseph who had not prayed. Since he was sick he had stayed in bed while the rest of us went to the church to pray our rosary.

Mercedes was present during this ecstasy in 1962 where Mari Loli levitated off the floor.

Mari Loli was the last to be in ecstasy that night. Surrounded by a large group of people, she went to the foyer of her house. She placed herself on the floor, arranged her skirt neatly and modestly, and suddenly, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, she raised upwards so that only her heels and the crown of her head touched the floor. At the request of Ceferino (her father) we passed my cane under her body without touching it. This was no illusion; the rest of her body was in the air.

When she sat up her feet were in the air, her body in the shape of an acute angle. Then walking on her knees, she went to Gloria (the niece of Rosario Santa Maria) and removed her medals and chain, offered them to the Virgin to kiss, offered them back to Gloria, and then held them up a bit longer, as if the Virgin were telling her something referring to the medals.



Then Gloria and I changed places. Gloria went to the other side of the room and I took her place. We wanted to see what Mari Loli would do when she came back to return the medals. She came to me in ecstasy and when she started to put the medals back, (without looking at me), she stopped and then said to the Virgin, "What? She is not here? Very well." Still on her knees, she turned around and went directly to Gloria. Without any hesitation she offered the medals to be kissed again and put them back around her neck.

Gloria, between tears, told us, "I asked the Virgin, if the children were truly seeing her, to make Mari Loli take my medals from me and then replace them."

This kind of testing was common in Garabandal. Several times I saw the girls stop during their ecstatic walks, as if someone had called them, and return to a particular person. Or (as what happened to my future son-in-law Alfonzo Zuleta), they'd raise their arm above and behind themselves, bend backward, and offer the crucifix to be kissed by someone standing behind them. This was usually in response to a mental request made by one of the onlookers.

Of course, rationalists will explain this by phenomena of suggestion or transmission of thought. But it

never worked for me. I desperately tried to get the girls to give me the cross to kiss, and provide answers to calm me about the death of my son. All I got from them was total indifference. Could my subconscious have been trying to keep me ignorant of the answer? Did it think I'd be happier not knowing? In my case, couldn't a word of consolation have been more effective than the rejection I suffered? What would have happened if I'd left the village before receiving my answer?

Truly, as far as I'm concerned, my lack of success in thought transmission could be blamed by the rationalist on my being a poor medium, but then how do they explain that since Mari Loli revealed the answer to my question my quality as a medium had improved so much?

I went back to Barcelona totally convinced the girls were seeing the Virgin.

(PART 2)

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Mercedes Salisachs (Part two)
EYEWITNESS

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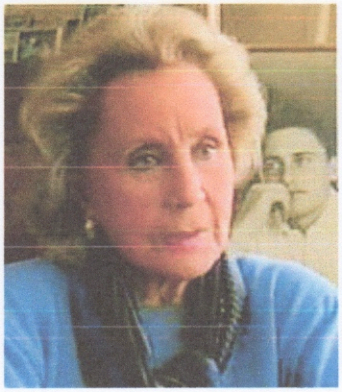
Excerpted from LOS MILAGROS O FAVORES DE NUESTRA MADRE DE GARABANDAL *by Maria Josefa Villa de Gallego*
Translated from Spanish by Dr. Edward Serrano

The report of Spanish author Mercedes Salisachs continues after she returned to Barcelona from her first trip to Garabandal in April of 1962

I didn't know when I would be able to go back to Garabandal. We were planning a trip to Asia, but I told the girls [visionaries] that perhaps I would return to the village before leaving for Japan.



Twenty days after getting back to Barcelona from Garabandal, I received a cordial and affectionate letter from Conchita which she wrote while waiting for the Virgin to appear. "I know you are going to Japan; have a good trip," she wrote. But in a postscript she added, "I know one of your secrets but I can't tell it to you now. Goodbye."

All through the trip I was wondering what she meant by that. No matter where I was, my devotion to Mary increased, and thinking about the fervent piety of the children only increased it more. The trip itself was happy and interesting. We visited Japan, Hong Kong, Thailand, and Iran, but even the most wonderful sights could not be compared to the slightest occurrence in Garabandal. I was wondering when I would be able to return but my husband said it could not be until after the summer, and I was hoping he would come with me.

On June 24 (1962), when I arrived back in Barcelona from our Asian trip, I found a letter from Conchita dated May 20. She told me the angel continued giving her Communion on the days when there was no Mass and that she was waiting in vain for me to make a quick trip to Garabandal.

As for the secret that she had written about, she said, "Tonight I'll be seeing the Virgin and I'll ask her if I can tell it to you. She still has not allowed me to do so." The emphasis she placed on this secret increased my curiosity more and more, but I was not anxious about it. I was surprised that the Virgin continued talking about me with the children even though I was not present in the village. I also didn't think this was a story that Conchita had invented to keep me in suspense. It just showed me that the Virgin bestows her mercy on those who least deserve it.

Toward the end of July, David Toribio, a native of Garabandal who had grown up knowing the girls and had now been employed in my house for about a month, showed me a letter his brother's wife, Mercedes, had sent. The letter was dated June 21, 1962, two days after the anniversary of the [first] apparition, and the news was terrifying. At this very moment it is in my hands and I can pass on to you the most important paragraphs. It reads thus:

> The whole town was frightened because of the visions that occurred last night and the night before last (June 19 and 20). You can imagine how horrible it was when even the men in the town cried as if they were little

children. The girls in their visions screamed and said things such as the punishment was near. The Virgin did not tell them the date but she told them what it would consist of. I asked Conchita but she said, "I cannot tell you; you would die of sadness if I did." In ecstasy the girls begged for Mary to "take the children with you so that they don't suffer so. Take them with you for they are innocent." That is what they asked from the Virgin. To us they asked that we all go to confession (that was Tuesday) and that we prepare ourselves. You can imagine how it was when today 400 of us went to confession with fervor as never before. We cried all through the Mass and even the hymns and chants were relevant. We were lucky a Franciscan priest arrived Wednesday morning. He had permission to hear confessions and celebrate Mass. Last night those who were near him also said that he was crying. When the children screamed he began to pray and everyone prayed with him.

During these two nights almost all the people present were the townsfolk. Visitors have begun to arrive, and although many came last night, there still aren't as many as last year. The Virgin said for the visionaries to stay in the *cuadro* but they said to us, "You can do whatever you want," and many stayed with them.

Today Mari Cruz was the only onehaving visions. The other girls will not see the Virgin until Saturday. Until now, everything was pretty much like when you were here: we were lukewarm, but now...

This letter was overwhelming but not surprising. When the Virgin shows herself in such an obvious way, it is always for a very powerful reason. If we are to consider her a mediatrix it is logical she would come to warn us to prepare for a future disaster.

It is very strange that many who at the beginning were inclined to believe in the sincerity of the girls paradoxically refused to believe in the visions when they heard about the Chastisement. The opposite should have been true.

It would seem that the desire of the Virgin to reveal such an important message appears incompatible with the place she chose for the revelation; a poor, barren corner of the world forgotten by man and of difficult access. But it is in a place like this where one can find a nucleus of people able to accept the truth and the demands exacted by Christianity. An apparition of the Virgin in such a remote corner of the world makes it, by her very presence, a most comfortable and desirable place, regardless of the material and logistical difficulties incurred in arriving there.

God wants everyone to come to him, and it is up to us, the few who had the privilege of attending and believing in these apparitions, to bring the rest to him. Perhaps this is the true mission of those who live there, or those who have visited and been moved spiritually by the events of Garabandal. Some will argue that the Virgin should make her apparitions where everyone can see them comfortably, and they would become instantly famous. But wouldn't this then, make one have second thoughts about the validity of the apparitions? If it were easy to spread the message, there would be little merit in doing so. Isn't it more convincing when something so difficult to promote at the beginning, such as Lourdes and Fatima, overcomes all obstacles by its piety and authenticity? Since it is natural to absorb what one likes and ignore unpleasantness, should we be surprised that she appears almost secretly with her disturbing messages?

The Virgin is asking for penance and prayer. It would not make any sense if she appeared in a comfortable place. Comfort will have to be sacrificed to go to Garabandal.

In those days, the sister of my future son-in-law, Carmen Zuleta, was in Barcelona living in the home of Jacinto Maristany, a great devotee of the Virgin and very enthusiastic about Garabandal. She wanted to go to Garabandal, but at the same time was very skeptical. One day she came to my home and asked my husband if he would let me accompany her to Garabandal as she did not dare to go there alone. Her visit in my house coincided with the presence of Father Eliseo Buedo, Superior of the Passionists from Santa Gema, a chief of the Civil Guard stationed at that time in Barcelona, and other people interested in the apparitions.

In spite of her skepticism Carmen Zuleta told us what had happened to her the previous night. While she was discussing the Garabandal events with Jacinto Maristany, half jokingly and half seriously, she said, "I'm going to pray three Hail Marys to the Virgin and afterwards I'll open this book to see what she tells me." She picked up the only book in the room without knowing what it was. When she opened it the page began with a title in capital letters saying

"Apparition of the Virgin" and below it an image of Our Lady. She was very surprised but did not give much importance to what she considered a coincidence. The book was the Bible and the passage referred to the Apocalypse of St. John.

Father Eliseo Buedo seemed to be interested but also did not appear very impressed by this. Once my husband had given me permission to accompany Carmen on her trip to Garabandal we begged Father Buedo to join us. He said that would be impossible as he needed to ask permission from his provincial superior, who was in a different province. I suggested he telephone him. The line was busy and we were informed it would take three hours before communication could be established.

It was getting late so he decided to go back to the monastery and asked that the telephone conference be transferred there. "If God wants me to go, everything will turn out. If my Superior doesn't allow me to go, then God doesn't want me to go either."

Ten minutes later, as he was about to leave, the phone rang. It was the provincial superior and he gave Father permission to go. The next day, June 29, the feast day of St. Peter, we left Barcelona in two cars. There was plenty of room and Dr. Puncernau, neurologist, and his daughter Margarita joined us. My future son-in-law, Alfonso Zuleta and Guiomar, my daughter, engaged to Alfonso, also joined us and we left Barcelona.

Mercedes Salisachs (partially hidden) with police chief Juan Alverez Seco stands behind visionaries from the left: Conchita, Mari Cruz, Mari Loli and Jacinta.

MY SECOND TRIP TO GARABANDAL

Mercedes, the mechanic's wife, was in town with her husband. She had suffered all her life from terrible headaches but since that Holy Saturday of her previous visit when she had been cured, she had never had another one. Now she appeared to have something on her mind. I thought, but wasn't sure, she was asking Our Lady for a very special spiritual grace which she had not yet received. I suspected what it was, but dared not pry, though I encouraged her by saying, "Trust and be patient, and you'll see how the Virgin hears you." I, too, prayed for her intention with absolute faith that sooner or later Our Lady would answer her.

We arrived at the town the thirtieth of the month and in contrast with my first visit, the reception from the girls was very warm.

That same night while I was in Conchita's house awaiting her visit from Our Lady, I was told that Mari Loli in ecstasy had gone to the rooms in the house where my daughter and I were staying, and blessed my daughter Guiomar's bed and my bed with the crucifix, but skipped the one bed that was empty. How did she know which of the three beds would have been empty that night? It was a happy sign for us that Our Lady was welcoming our presence in the town.

That afternoon I had asked Conchita when was she going to reveal the secret. She told me that she would ask the Virgin that evening. I wanted to be with her as I was curious as to how she would ask and suggested she hold my hand

during the apparitions as I knew that once the girls had something in their grasp they did not let go. However, she showed no sign of receiving any "calls" and the time was passing, and we were losing the opportunity of seeing Mari Loli. Both Father Buedo and I asked her if she was sure that she was going to see the Virgin that night, and she shrugged her shoulders, saying, "I think so," but without any sign of impatience. She was remarkably tranquil and unconcerned.

Meanwhile, tired of waiting and afraid we would miss Mari Loli's second ecstasy, we left Conchita with her mother and two other people. No more than a minute after we arrived at the tavern (the main floor of Loli's house where food and drink were served) we heard Conchita had fallen into ecstasy. When I saw her again that night she told me, "You should have seen the Virgin laughing when you left after waiting so long."

Conchita told me that the only time she saw the Virgin cry was when she delivered the message.

By the way, this is another example of that "lack of solemnity" that so many austere people noted in the apparitions. It was obvious that the Virgin was not trying to give the impression of severity or somberness to the Garabandal apparitions. Conchita told me that the only time she saw the Virgin cry was when she delivered the message.

An Injured Foot

At all times what was occurring in Garabandal had the seal of happiness. It was as though the Virgin wished to present herself as unceremonious and accessible. An example of this informality was told to us by Mari Loli.

One afternoon she hurt her foot playing. Later, during an apparition, she had twice gone up and down the hill nearly barefoot. When she got back to the house her feet and legs were dirty. My daughter Guiomar offered to treat her injured foot to avoid an infection. First she washed her feet, and then with the help of Father Buedo bandaged her wound. But still a piece of skin was hanging down and Father Buedo was going to cut it off but Mari Loli did not let him.

A short time later Mari Loli fell into ecstasy. Father Buedo was on her left side and I was on her right. Listening to Mari Loli's conversation with the Virgin, Father Buedo said, "This is how we should pray." Mari Loli was talking to the Virgin with innocent charm and openness, as a child to her mother, reporting in exact detail what had happened. "And Guiomar washed my feet and Father wanted to cut the strip of hanging skin, but I didn't let him because I was scared."

Even though she was talking in a soft voice, her laughter was loud enough; it seemed the Virgin also was laughing, because when Mari Loli stopped laughing, she would wait expectantly and then start laughing again.

The Fat Priest

I believe it was that night that Mari Loli told the Virgin of "a fat priest who doesn't believe." It was a priest who had arrived that afternoon with no intention of believing in anything that was happening. Mari Loli was saying to the Virgin: "He only talks about his supper, that if there was any food available; it seemed to be his only concern. And he is fat, very fat, very, very fat, and he believes in nothing, nothing of what is happening in the village." Then there was a pause, "Then he will believe? He is very good? Ah."

PHOTO at Left: Mari Loli with her younger sister Sari.

I don't know whatever happened to the priest, but this was a significant lesson for the girls, even if they didn't realize it. Just before Mari Loli had fallen into ecstasy he had said, "Nobody disturb me; I'm going to bed now. None of this waking me in the middle of the night to kiss a crucifix." And so it was. When she went [in ecstasy] to the house where the priest was staying,

she woke the seminarian who was staying in the room next to the priest, offered him the crucifix to kiss, and then went out, opening the door to the priest's room, but passing by without offering it to him.

That day Dr. Puncernau was able to speak privately with the girls. It seems he asked Conchita to pray for a patient with cancer who was going to die soon. This was a person who was not religious and didn't want to know how serious his condition was. Before Dr. Puncernau left the village, Conchita gave him a written message to be given to the patient when he got back to Barcelona, and she forbade him to read it before the patient did.

Dr. Puncernau obeyed and gave him the message. It said if that man repented of everything sinful that he had done in his life, the Virgin would heal him. The patient behaved badly. Not only did he refuse to go to confession, he assured the Doctor that he would cure himself since he was not suffering any serious disease. Unfortunately, this man is already dead and I don't know if in his last hour he ever repented of anything.

According to Dr. Puncernau, something that convinced him as much as anything of the truth of the apparitions was when Conchita asked the Virgin to heal her from bursitis (it had nothing to do with her falling on her knees during ecstasies). Our Lady told Conchita to go to a doctor, since "that's what they are there for."

A Note in Russian

I should narrate now , what happened to Carmen Zuleta. All day long she felt out of place, she saw the children as inaccessible, and her hostility and mistrust were obvious. Before Mari Loli went into ecstasy, Carmen handed her a piece of paper with petitions to be presented to the Virgin. One of them (which is of no interest to us) perhaps because of suspicion or discretion, she wrote in Russian and wrote the initials of the involved person in the same language, using the Russian alphabet.

When Mari Loli gave her the written response, it included the complete name, surname and nickname of the person involved, and it was in Spanish.

Carmen was very unsettled by this and after several hours she decided to leave the village the next day. But after going to bed she began to feel tranquil and when she awoke the next morning she was feeling such peace that she never wanted to leave. Today she has no doubts and believes that what happened there was supernatural.

As far as Father Buedo is concerned, he received so many proofs that he no longer has the slightest doubt. He is also attracted by the religious atmosphere and love for the Virgin in the village. One day he confessed that nothing would make him happier than to be the parish priest of Garabandal. To be in touch with the townspeople was to be exposed to constant piety.

Our Lady told Conchita to go to a doctor, since that's what they are there for.

A Passionist Emblem

Padre Buedo has been one of those treated in a privileged way by the girls. Not only have they given him messages of great personal value (whose content we ignore) but also in all the ecstasies they have treated him with special deference. Nevertheless, when Father went to Garabandal he was convinced due to his humility that he was only going to be a spectator.

Father himself would put the girls to the test. Whenever they went into ecstasy, if it seemed they were going over to him with some article of his, he would hide; he would climb to the top of the stairs or go into a hidden niche. The girls always found him. Once I suggested that he detach the Passionist emblem from his habit and add it to the objects Mari

Loli would be giving the Virgin to kiss. "Ask the Virgin, if it is true that she kissed it, to have Mari Loli put it back where it belongs."

Father hesitated because the fastener on this emblem was complicated. It had a spring and he said it would be difficult to operate for someone who didn't know how it worked. I said, "Father, one more reason to do it."

And so it was. Mari Loli, after giving the emblem to the Virgin to kiss, went to Father. She stood in front of him and began trying to fasten it back on. Seeing that this was a complex procedure, she stopped and asked in a clear voice, "And now, what do I do?" She seemed concerned but was smiling. She listened for a few moments to the inaudible voice and then with the greatest of ease released the spring and replaced the emblem on the priest's habit. A small part of the safety latch did not make contact with the habit and, with her eyes always looking up she said, "Very well, I'll leave it like that," and she went to deliver the rest of the kissed objects to their owners.

A Lost Wedding Ring

Loli in ecstasy returns a wedding ring kissed by the Blessed Virgin to its rightful owner.

That same evening Father witnessed another surprising event. Mercedes, the wife of the mechanic, was worried that her prayer had not yet been answered, although the girls assured her it would be very soon. She mentally asked the Virgin that if she was really going to answer her prayer, to kiss her wedding ring and her husband's, but to only replace her husband's ring on his finger.

And that's what happened. Mari Loli placed his wedding ring on Jose's finger after it was kissed by the Virgin. Then she went out into the street, taking with her Mercedes's ring, and went to join the other girls who were in ecstasy. That night the girls went to the Pines twice praying the rosary. When they were coming down, a multitude of people followed them, bumping into each other because of the darkness and unevenness of the terrain. Jose, who was very near the girls, remembered hearing a metallic object fall to the ground and roll down the hill. He didn't know what it was or who dropped it, and nobody could have stopped to look for it without being overrun by the crowd.

Next morning, on awakening, Mari Loli realized that she had lost Mercedes's wedding ring. Mercedes was somewhat uneasy about this, but not unduly worried. Mari Loli promised her that she would ask the Virgin where the ring was. "When she tells me I'll go find it."

Later, while in her trance, we heard her ask the Virgin, "Tell me where Mercedes's wedding ring is. I lost it." When she came out of ecstasy she said, "I know where it is", and went out of the house with Jose and Father Buedo, each carrying a flashlight. The girl climbed the hill without any hesitation. When they arrived at some bushes, she said, "It's in there."

Father Buedo told them not to move and aimed his flashlight where Loli was pointing. Indeed, under some small rocks, there was Mercedes's wedding ring.

Many were the signs given to Father Buedo and they made him very happy. The night before he left Garabandal, one of the girls in ecstasy (I don't remember which one) went to his room, knelt in front of his door, and walked on her knees into his room. With the crucifix she blessed the pillow of the bed where the priest slept and also a change of clothes he had on a chair. After this, she backed out and went to the room in front where Alfonso slept. He was there at the time, and with identical solemnity she made the sign of the cross on his pillow and went out.

Alfonso also received many signs. All the proofs he had asked for in his skepticism were abundantly given. On one occasion he handed Mari Loli his neck chain with all his medals so that the Virgin would kiss it, and Mari Loli added it to the pile of medals and rosaries that, as usual, were around her neck. The fact that, after the medals were kissed by the Virgin and Mari Loli had come out of the trance, she returned them to their owners without making a mistake was in itself inexplicable, but on this particular occasion, as on many others, she returned the medals in the state of ecstasy. Alfonso asked the Virgin to have the girl, while still in a trance, take his chain from her neck and place it around his. The petition was risky because the chain was very short and to return it to him she would have to open the latch and this would be very difficult without looking.

Without the slightest effort, she opened it and was going to place it on Alfonso's neck when she saw the chain was tangled up with all the others. Again with no difficulty, she untangled it, the Virgin kissed the medals, and Mari Loli offered them to Alfonso to kiss. He fell on his knees before the girl. He was strong and heavy, but she easily lifted him up and with her little arms behind his neck, she fastened the chain without looking and left the medals hanging on his neck.

Then she came to me and replaced my gold scapular, which I had not brought on my previous visit. Also, I knelt and was lifted without any effort.

NEXT .... Part 3

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