

MARI LOLI LAFLEUR 1949-2009

A WOMAN OF FAITH

by Barry Hanratty

Reprinted with kind permission from *GARABANDAL JOURNAL* March-April 2009

She accepted God's Will in all that she had to endure in this life.



Destined to be known throughout the world, Garabandal was a poor, isolated place on May 1, 1949, when Mari Loli first saw the light of day. She was one of eight children born to Ceferino Mazon, president of the town council, and his wife, Julia Gonzalez. They ran a tavern on the ground floor of their dwelling.

Loli was no different from the other village girls her age until that fateful day of June 18, 1961, when she became one of the four chosen ones to see the visions of Our Lady and Saint Michael. During those visions, the Virgin emphasized the importance of praying for priests and Loli, more than the others, seems to have had a special calling in this regard. Her mother recounted one of her visions: "I was alone with her when she was in ecstasy. How she cried that night! How this child cried, my God, and how she suffered! The Blessed Mother told her to pray very much for priests and that she should make a lot of sacrifices for them. Many of the priests were going bad. Things were going bad and this was something I did not like to hear. To me priests were the most sacred in the world and I was to hear my daughter say this?" Later, Loli would say that praying and making sacrifices for priests would be one of the most important things in her life.

After the visions ended for her in January of 1963, she began having locutions, the only one besides Conchita to do so. She described them as interior communications with either Jesus or Mary. In the last ones she had with the Blessed Virgin she was reminded of the need to pray for priests: "...The Virgin has made me understand when a priest is in sin. She has helped me to know that he needs many prayers and sacrifices. Also she has made me understand the Crucifixion in the Holy Mass, so that I understand the humility and sacrifice for the world."



1961 From left: Conchita, Mari Cruz, Mari Loli and Jacinta

1962 With Fr. Ramón Andreu

On October 13, 1963, she wrote to Fr. Luis Retenaga about a recent locution she said she had had with Our Lady in which she asked for a cross to suffer for priests. The Virgin responded by telling her to bear everything with patience and to be humble. In this locution, perhaps for the first time, Loli would learn the trials she would have to endure in life. Again she was reminded of the need to pray for priests:

"Am I going to die soon?"

"No. You have to remain in the world to suffer. In whatever place you are, you will suffer."

"Let my parents believe!"

"They do not believe so you will have more to suffer. Suffer with patience."

She also told me, *"Pray the rosary every day. Pray for priests, since there are some who need more sacrifices for them every day."*

"Why don't my parents believe?"

"Because you have to suffer. You have much to suffer in this world."

"What sacrifices should I make?"

"You have to be more obedient."

In another locution whose date is given as February 7, 1966, Loli was again told by Our Lady of the sufferings that awaited her. She wrote:

"I had a locution with the Blessed Virgin. She told me that I would have to suffer a great deal in this world, that I would experience many trials, that it would be that which would cause me to suffer most....I asked her to give my father a proof of the apparitions so that he would believe also. She said that he would believe 'very soon' and that everyone would believe also. She told me that she was very pleased with my sacrifices, but that each day I should become better and more mortified in all things, that I should recite the rosary every day as I had been doing up to now for it is a devotion that is very pleasing to her, that she loves us all very much, that she wants us to be very good so that we may soon be reunited with her in heavenly glory."



1965 Going down the valley to buy supplies for the tavern

1966 Loli on the left with Jacinta and Father Luis Lana in Zaragoza where the two seers were going to school

1970 In Garabandal

Loli's father died on June 4, 1974, and apparently did receive a "sign" on his deathbed of the truth of the

apparitions which he asked for as recounted in *SHE WENT IN HASTE TO THE MOUNTAIN*.

DOUBTS

According to Conchita's Diary, in the early days of the apparitions, the Virgin told them that they would come to doubt their visions. When Loli heard that she responded: "How can we say we haven't seen you when we are seeing you right now?" But this did happen beginning in 1963.

In 1966, Loli and Jacinta were enrolled in a boarding school in Zaragoza and it was here, after her last locution with Our Lady, that the doubts that had begun a few years earlier, returned with a vengeance as she explained to Fr. Francis Benac, S.J., in 1978: "I began to again feel that everything was lies and that I was deceiving the whole world. I said to myself, 'How can I explain all this?' On the one hand I felt ashamed, while on the other I felt sad because of what my family would feel and say. I felt a sort of remorse of conscience because I felt that I had committed a grievous sin and if I happened to die, I would go to hell. In such a state I prayed throughout the night, 'Lord help me, help me to confess my sins.' During those days the students made their retreat and as you know at the end everybody feels so happy, singing and writing different things about their beautiful spiritual experience. But I said to myself, 'How lucky they are, being in a state of , grace, while I am in the state of mortal sin. I have to confess that we did not see the Virgin.' One sleepless night, I cried and cried asking God to help me to confess all this."

The next morning, Loli asked the Mother Superior, if she could see Father Luis Luna, who had been instrumental in having her and Jacinta enrolled in the school. When Fr. Luna arrived, he found Loli in the parlor, her face bathed in tears.

After she confessed to him that she hadn't seen Our Lady and invented the whole thing, Fr. Luna, himself a witness to the apparitions and no doubt aware that visionaries of accredited apparitions such as at Lourdes, Fatima and Pontmain had experienced doubts of their visions, nevertheless, to put her at ease, gave her absolution and a whopping penance of one Hail Mary. Loli knew he didn't take seriously what she said, but she still felt at peace for having confessed everything. But the doubts persisted and when she got back to Garabandal, she told the new pastor, Fr. Olano, that she wanted to see the Bishop and tell him all was untrue, which she did. She also signed a declaration (her father who was with her at the time refused to sign it) that she had not seen Our Lady. Jacinta and Conchita also signed similar declarations but all three later retracted their denials.

Loli left the school in Zaragoza and returned to her village where she wasn't sure what to say when people asked her about the apparitions. But while staying with Mercedes Salisachs in Barcelona from 1969 to 1971 to study clerical and secretarial work, and English and French, she had a spiritual director. She asked him what she ought to do and he replied that she should speak about the apparitions because this was a mission that God had entrusted to her.

Loli first came to the United States in 1972 at the invitation of Maria Saraco, well-known promoter of the Garabandal Message who at that time lived in Brockton, Massachusetts. Loli accompanied Maria on some of her conferences but didn't say or do anything except be greeted by well-wishers. Later, however, she freely granted interviews to: Fr. Joseph Pelletier, AA (early 1970s), *NEEDLES* magazine (1975), Fr. Benac, SJ (1978), *GARABANDAL* Magazine, (1982), Fr. Jerome Palmer, OSB (1984). On a number of occasions in the 1980's she attended the annual Garabandal Seminar staged by Regina Goodyear in Columbus, Ohio. She appeared on



1973 Dancing with Bill Henry at Conchita's wedding reception. Loli was one of the bridesmaids.

Spanish television and attended the 1991 Australian Conference on Garabandal with her whole family.



In 1974, Loli married Francis Lafleur whom she met at one of Maria Saraco's Holy Hours. From then on, she and Frank, a very devoted husband, saw their family grow. First came a son, Francis, and then two daughters Melanie and Maria Dolores.

Up to this point in her life, Mari Loli had had her share of suffering with the doubts and other trials and, like any good mother, the anxieties of raising children in today's world. In the latter part of the 1980's, however, the prophecy of Our Lady that she would have much to suffer in this life, took on added meaning when tests showed she had lupus, an illness described as "a chronic inflammatory disease that occurs when the body's immune system attacks its own tissues and organs" (Mayo Clinic).

Lupus was serious enough but in 2001, came something worse, possibly brought on by her lupus, when she was diagnosed with pulmonary fibrosis, a disease where air sacs in the lung are replaced by scar tissue, reducing the lung's ability to transfer oxygen to the bloodstream. At the stage of Loli's illness, life expectancy was from five to seven years. Needless to say, this was a devastating blow for the entire family. In her last several months, she was in a wheelchair and on oxygen most of the time, and had frequent coughing spells. With a raw throat and parched tongue there were very few foods that she could eat other than cough drops. Hospice had only been installed in the home a few hours when she died.

A DAUGHTER OF THE CHURCH

Loli was a true daughter of the Church and observed all its laws. I am told that she went to daily Mass and Communion as long as she was able. In one of her locutions, the Blessed Virgin asked her to say the entire rosary every day and she did this for a while but then became lax. She told Fr. Benac in the 1978 interview: "Reflecting now over the event, it seems to me that Our Lady must have said to herself: 'This child cannot manage it alone so I better send someone to help her fulfill my wish.'" When she met Frank she learned that he was saying the fifteen decades of the rosary dairy and so in their marriage they continued the practice.



1978 Loli with Frank and Jacinta and Jeff Moynihan at the Columbus, Ohio, Seminar

1987 With Bl. Mother Teresa
1988 Meeting John Paul II

1991 In Australia with Frank, Francis, Melanie (with glasses) and Maria

Loli was pro-life and despite her lupus went to Washington D.C., at least on one occasion for the annual March for life.

Whenever she was asked to make a public appearance on behalf of Garabandal, she always asked permission from Bishop of Santander, Juan Antonio del Val Gallo, with whom she had an excellent relationship. In 1982, when he was in a Santander hospital recuperating from prostate cancer, Loli went to see him and gave him her last crucifix kissed by Our Lady at Garabandal (her mother did find another one).



1990s Julia, Loli's mother who died on October 18, 1997. Inset, Ceferino circa 1965.

2001 In her old house in Garabandal. Inset, with sister, Sari.

2004 In Garabandal with visitors from Australia

Loli was self-forgotful. When Maria Saraco suffered a massive stroke while in Spain in 2003, Loli, discounting her own physical condition, flew to Spain and took accommodations for a month near the hospital where Maria was, to be with her.

SHE KEPT HER SECRET

Loli was the only one of the four seers to know the year of the Warning. And while she was never told she could not reveal it, she always felt she shouldn't. This must have been inspired from above because she could not have done so without also revealing the proximate time of the Miracle since both events are within twelve months of one another, which we learned from Loli. She was faithful to the end in keeping her secret. And even though she was told in a locution in 1966 that she would forget everything about the apparitions, she never forgot the year of the Warning.

She was a great asset to the Garabandal Movement by just being herself: pleasant, always with a ready smile, accommodating, sincere and humble. At the Australian Conference, she and Jacinta, who both had crucifixes kissed by Our Lady at Garabandal, were asked to hold them out so the people attending the conference, forming two long lines, could kiss them. Loli did this but looked uncomfortable being the focus of attention.

In every respect she was perfectly normal and enjoyed the three way telephone calls with Conchita and Jacinta (I wonder who picked up the tab on those sometimes two hour calls).

She once told Maria Saraco that whenever she was almost at the breaking point from her sufferings, "the Blessed Virgin comes with a piece of candy for me" (meaning some consolation to support her in her trial). But Loli did not complain about her illness. Jane Pigott, who was one of Loli's closest friends and used to call her on the phone regularly, told me that Loli, toward the end, never talked about her condition and it was only after some gentle cajoling that she might open up, such as when she told Jane that it hurt when she talked. Jane immediately offered to hang up, but Loli said no, that she enjoyed hearing her voice. The call ended when she began having one of her coughing spells.

During the last apparition at Garabandal on November 13, 1965, Conchita said to the Blessed Virgin holding the Infant Jesus: "I am so happy when I see both of you. Why don't you take me now to heaven with you?" She could have been speaking for all of them when she said that, and therefore it should not come as a

complete surprise what Loli once told Maria Saraco: *that she was living for the day she dies.*

Our Lady once said to her that she wants us to be very good so that we may soon be *reunited with her in heavenly glory.* We have every reason to believe that Mari Loli is there right now while still keeping a watchful eye on her beloved family here below.

A CLOSE FRIEND

Jane Pigott, devoted promoter of Garabandal in upstate New York, also organized for many years the annual Rosary Rally at the Shrine of the North American Martyrs in Auriesville, New York, where she got to know Loli and her family, who made the four hour drive to attend the rally each year. Jane eventually became like one of the family invited to First Communion and the weddings of the girls. After some anxiety as to how she could get to Loli's funeral some six to seven hours away by car, friends Tom and Bonny Massett, came to the rescue and offered to drive her for which she is eternally grateful, being able to be with the family at this solemn time. Here is how she remembered Loli.

To those of us lucky enough to have known Mari Loli Lafleur, the most accurate way to describe her was "to know her was to love her." The most precious things in her life were faith, family and friends. She was a beautiful lady in every way, especially as a loving wife, mother, mother-in-law and grandmother

Written by Barry Hanratty

Reprinted with kind permission from *GARABANDAL JOURNAL* March-April 2009

to order subscription: [GARABANDAL JOURNAL.](#)