

**Topic:** My Great-Grandmother's Story During The Cristeros War

**Abstract:** My great-grandmother suffered a lot when she was young, due to The Cristeros War during the years of 1927-1929. The Mexico Government didn't want any worship or religious ceremonies of God or La Virgen de Guadalupe. During these horrifying years of The Cristeros War many people who tried to rebel against the government were lynched. My great grandmother was tired of the injustice and decided that she needed to cross over to the United States in search of a new beginning. In the U.S. she had her youngest child and was able to raise him in a country where freedom and justice was established. She went back to her pueblo in Jalisco Mexico, but things were no longer the same when she went back. Her experience in the war was too deeply scarred in her that her fear was greatly traumatic.

**Keywords:** Great-grandmother, Government of Mexico, Catholic Church, Los Cristeros, Christ, Virgin of Guadalupe, Freedom, Soldiers, Pueblos, Ranchitos, Horrified, Justice

### My Great-Grandmother's Story During The Cristeros War

With only one teary eye open and her other eye shut with a gray patch over it, my great-grandmother begins to share with me her experience in living with fear and silence from 1927-1929. During the time when the Government of Mexico did not want any Catholic church or Catholic beliefs in the central part of the Country. She is ninety-eight years old and she can still remember the very first time her mother told her that the soldiers were coming and that she needed to hurry and hide. My great-grandmother lived her childhood and adolescence through a war called "Los Cristeros" (The Cristeros). The war began to take a stand when the government of Mexico passed a law that no living citizen had the freedom to believe in Christ or the Virgin of Guadalupe or practice any ceremonial events or masses. This law was practiced in specific areas in Mexico such as, *Guanajuato, Jalisco, Queretaro, Aguascalientes, Nayarit, Colima, Michoacán* and part of *Zacatecas* and *Mexico City*. Many peasants joined against this injustice and began to

rebel against the government, they formed an army and begun to fight for their freedom in beliefs.

As I am looking into my great-grandmothers eyes, I can see her sad look and teary eye begin to jitter. I ask her “*abuelita, en que esta pensando?*” (*Grandma what are you thinking about?*) She answers “*Oh Dios, estaba muy, muy feo*” (*oh God, it was very, very, horrible.*) She shared that in 1927 she was only thirteen years old and everyday that would pass by she was prepared to hide from the government soldiers that would show up like in any other small ranches in El Saltillo, Jalisco where she lived. It, was only herself and 4 other brothers and sisters, her mom and dad, since she was the oldest out of four, she had to keep in the look out for the mean soldiers she say’s. The Soldiers that would go into the ranches would take everything they owned, their animals, crops and even young señorita’s like her at the time. The women of the ranches would have to feed and wash for them as well as allow them to take all of their most valued belongings. At the time the government was in the look out 24/7 for any Cristeros, for those that rebelled against their law who were trying to fight for their freedom to belief in the Catholic Church. They looked for priests and if they’d find one, they would arrest them and wither hand them, or make them all form a line and shoot them in the head. My great-grandmother shares that the government did not want any priests or people that rebelled against their law, nobody was supposed to believe in Christ.

Therefore she shares that the Mexico government decided that in order for them to have more of a control with the people in the ranches, they must move them to the nearest Pueblos, this way nobody would help out the priest that were hiding or the Cristeros that needed shelter and rest. My great-grandmother and her family had to move

to San Miguel El Alto, Jalisco. Tears came down her sweet wrinkled cheeks when I asked her what the Cristeros had stolen from them. She shares that during that time when the government had made everyone from the ranchitos in Jalisco to move to the nearest Pueblo, her families crops had just been grown and ready to sell and eat. The saddest thing to her was watching her parents cry for abandoning their hard worked on crops and animals go to waist. The soldiers took as much as they wanted from them and left the rest to rotten. All of their hard effort, work and sweat, dreams and hopes had been left behind and all they could do, she shares was pray inside their minds for a better tomorrow, but that as well seemed terrifying also. My great-grandmother had to hide for most of her adolescence, and every time her mother had a feeling they would show up, she would wake up early and start a big fire in the kitchen area where she was going to begin to cook. When the smoke from the fire and wood began to get thick and dark, that is when my great-grandmother would run behind the fire area and smoke to hide from the soldiers. Her mother would tell her, “ *Vete atras de el umo, te tapas bien con un reboso y te metes uno en la boca para que no te entre el umo y no agas ruido, no llores, no te bayas a mover, sino te ban a llebar con ellos.* ” (“Go behind the smoke and fire, cover yourself with a scarf and put one in your mouth so that the smoke won’t go inside of you and don’t make any noise, don’t cry, don’t even move, because if they find you they will take you with them.”) When I first heard this from her I almost cried, because I could imagine my great- grandmother’s fear of being taken away from her parents to get raped and used. She continued to share her stories and the many more injustices that occurred during those three horrifying years of her life.

During the Cristeros War with the Mexico Government, everyone who lived in the ranchitos had already been forced to move to a Pueblo so they could be controlled, but most likely so that the Cristeros wouldn't get shelter. She began to share with me that every other day she would wake up and look out of her window without anyone watching her and she would see straight far from her window 3-5 bodies hanging from tall trees. She lived horrified for a very long time, her mother had to hold her at night because she would get nightmares of soldiers hanging her and her family in the same trees. The government continued to threaten all of the Pueblos residents by showing what they were capable of doing if they left the Pueblo, rebelled against them or helped any Cristero or Priest in need for shelter. If they wanted to leave the Pueblo for either work or travel to a different Pueblo, they had to get a permit to leave and sign a promise of coming back. My great-grandmother was fourteen when she married. She still lived in San Miguel, Jalisco when she had her first child at fourteen. This was the moment when my great-grandmother had enough with putting up with the government injustice laws and War with the Cristeros, she knew when she had her first child that she needed to go to a place in the world where freedom was a law and where she could have her last child. It was then when she prayed every night for freedom and justice. My great-grandmother felt trapped and without a voice, her only hope was her husband and first child at the time, she knew that there was more out in the world, "Better". She continued to have her children and when I say children, I mean many children. She had fourteen births and out of the fourteen only ten lived, three died right after birth and one little girl died at the age of five from falling off of a roof top. There was hope for my grandmother and she had seen pictures of the U.S. of California, the beach, sand and palm trees.

In 1929, the Archbishop at the time sent out a letter stating to the new President that had been elected that year that they would not demand the repeal of their laws, only their most compassionate request. Therefore an agreement was made with the government and the religious church that all worship freedom was allowed and registered priests would be allowed to live back in their churches and people could go back to their previous homelands. My great-grandmother said that she was extremely happy and so was everyone else that had been living in fear and look out. She shares with me that she returned back to where her and her family used to live in Rancho El Saltillo, but nothing was the same, the land was dry and her trauma was much bigger than what her eyes could see once again. She raised all of her children in El Saltillo and in San Miguel. When she was expecting her youngest child, she decided that it was time for her to come to the U.S in search of a new life and opportunity for her youngest child. She said that she somehow knew that her baby to be was going to be her last, and so he was. She arrived in Los Angeles, California and stayed with a close cousin that was going to help her get a job as a maid. Her very first reaction to the US was “que paz” (what peace.) As she is sharing all of this with me she begins to smile and slowly tells me in a soft and breaking voice, *“Tubo a mi hijo En los Estados Unidos, y por fin pude cumplir mi promesa, ahora puedo decir que todo mi temor, batallas y todo lo que me quitarron de niña valio la pena.”* (“I had my son in the United States, and finally I was able to keep my promise, now I can say that all of my fears, battles and everything that they once took from me when I was a young girl was all worth it.)

I could see my great-grandmother's proud self in having lived through a time of death, injustice, War and fear to live freely, because of her I am here today. She is an

inspiration and true blessing in my life, and out of many students in my History class I bet I am one of the very few that still has a great-grandmother sharing stories that are priceless. I have experienced my great-grandmother's life during the War of "Los Cristeros" by listening to her stories and watching her old and sweet facial expressions. My great-grandmother remembers every smell, texture, sounds and pictures of her unforgotten memories of "La Guerra de Los Cristeros" (The War of The Cristeros.) If you were to ask her to share with you an interesting story, I'm sure she would have many to choose from.