

## Finding Truth in Fiction

*by Sister Confianza del Señor*

One night in June, 2015, I awoke to the faint squeak of the front door hinges. There didn't seem to be wind strong enough to blow the door open, so I climbed out of bed to find out what was going on. I crossed the single room of Amigas del Señor Monastery where I live, and, since we don't have electricity, turned on the solar-charged flashlight. When I shined it at the door, I could see that it was cracked open—and then I realized that a man was slowly stepping through!

*“¿Quién está? Who's there?”* I asked. Keeping the light on the intruder, I saw that he was holding a large revolver in his right hand. He looked at me with a slight smile; I could smell alcohol on his breath.

*“Hermana Alegría!”* I called, to wake Sister Alegría. *“Hay alguien aquí y tiene un arma. There's someone here and he's got a gun!”*

Sister Alegría quickly got up and came to the scene. “You need to leave,” she told him. When he stepped closer to me, I tried to push him away, but the stranger didn't go.



*Sisters Confianza and Alegría in July, 2016*

Neither sister Alegría nor I were frightened. In our eleven years living at this Methodist- and Quaker-based monastery in rural Honduras, we've dealt with a drunk after dark and armed robbers more than once. On this occasion, we were actually rather bored with this man who flopped himself onto the floor and spoke incoherently. However, I kept my eye on the gun, which he waved about unthreateningly.

After a while, he set the revolver on the floor by his head, and I picked it up. Since he hadn't left the premises, we decided we would. Sister Alegría and I exited the house wearing only our nightgowns, which are worn-out dresses, and carrying only flashlights and the heavy gun. We began to walk the 200-yard path along the hill to the road in our flip-flops, but soon heard the man's footsteps following us.

"Throw down the gun," Sister Alegría said to me. I hesitated, then threw it about twenty feet ahead of us along the path. In that moment, the intruder, not much taller than me, caught up to us. He threw his arms around me from behind and pressed himself against my backside. Then he groped for my crotch.

*"¡No me toque allí!* Don't touch me there!" I said to him sternly.

"Is he feeling you up?" Sister Alegría asked me in English from a few steps away.

"He's trying!" I replied, and did my best to pry his strong arms off of me.

I am a nun and a virgin, but I wasn't terribly scared, even though the intruder was now more aggressive. In fact, I felt reassured by something I'd read just the night before—not from a great spiritual teacher, but from a historical novel set in medieval England in which a girl experienced a similar assault.

In *Pillars of the Earth*, by Ken Follett, a young nobleman set on revenge enters the bedroom of a 17-year-old virgin named Aliena. He proceeds to rape her in front of her younger brother, and begins by grinding against her backside and feeling up her front. Because I'd read that scene before going to bed, I immediately recognized what was happening to me.

Then the man pushed me down onto the hillside and began to unbutton his pants. I pulled my knees up to protect myself while Sister Alegría kicked him from behind and shouted, hoping to wake our other neighbors some half a mile away. However, our actions weren't what distracted him. After several minutes of struggle, he suddenly yelled, "The revolver!" and got up. He pulled his cell phone out of his pocket to use as a light in his search for the gun.

Seeing the distinctive orange phone, I finally figured out who this guy was: the caretaker of a property to the south whose house we can see from the Monastery. Fausto got this job taking care of cattle far from his hometown and only twice in the many months he'd worked there did his partner and kids visit him. Both times, we'd invited the family over for holiday celebrations. Now, it seemed, he was missing his lady, and trying to compensate with alcohol and the local nuns.

As Fausto fumbled around looking for the gun, Sister Alegría and I started off again toward the road. "Walk quickly and don't look back," Sister Alegría reminded herself. I took in the fact that I'd just narrowly escaped from being raped for the second time in my life. Then I thought about Aliena's response to her traumatic experience in the novel. She willed herself to forget what had happened to her, and told

her brother to never mention it to anyone. They escaped from their castle and were taken in by a seemingly kind man and his wife. But when the couple turned on them, Aliena swore she'd never take kind gestures at face value again. She'd rely only on herself and her wits. She'd lost her innocence and her trust in humanity.

That was when the insight came to me: I knew that I wouldn't let this experience harden me. Even if I'd actually gotten raped, I would be okay and I would recover. I would tell my experience to others and not keep it as a secret to fester inside, injuring me and continuing a culture of hidden violence. Moreover, I can't afford to stop trusting others or accepting gifts. As a Monastery, we live on donations. I would continue to seek the Divine seed in each person that we meet. I had the opportunity to live out this insight over the next day.

Sister Alegría and I reached the lonely road and began walking toward the village of Limoncito under the starry sky. As we neared the creek, a pickup came toward us, its headlights shining in our faces, and stopped. Though we are often suspicious of cars late at night (there are drug runners in the area and other armed persons), Sister Alegría told the three young men inside what had just happened. They decided to turn around and give us a ride to our friend Margarita's house in Limoncito. We gratefully accepted the lift from these total strangers.

Margarita welcomed us in, though it was past 10 p.m. and she'd already gone to bed. She listened wide-eyed to our story in all its detail. "*¡Mire que bueno es Dios! See how good God is!*" she exclaimed when we told of our escape. Then she made up a bed for us, and Sister Alegría and I got some fitful sleep.

The next day we visited Fausto's bosses who live a little further down the dirt highway. Doña Olympia and her adult daughter welcomed us in like old friends and served us breakfast, as well as gave us plantains and fresh eggs to take home. After telling them what their employee had done the night before, we insisted that they had to fire Fausto or we would call the police. Our impression was that Fausto is not actually a dangerous man. Though he'd pointed the gun and forced himself on me, he had not continued with any of his attempts. We asked them to send him home, figuring that if he was back with his family he'd straighten out.

Though she admitted that Fausto had acted inappropriately with us, Doña Olympia resisted. "Give him another chance," she said. "He's a good worker."

But we thought, "Another chance to come and actually do us harm? No way."

"He has to leave today," Sister Alegría insisted, and we didn't change our tune as finally all of us got in a pickup, went out to their property and confronted Fausto.

He showed no repentance and tried to shrug it off saying, "When the Devil gets a hold of you..."

Doña Olympia eventually conceded, and they packed up his stuff and took him away. We thanked them and gave them a pineapple from our harvest as a token of goodwill. It was a tough love morning, but it all got resolved within twelve hours of the incident.

In the November 2015 issue of Friends Journal, one book reviewer commented, “I’m the kind of Quaker that doesn’t read fiction.” That got me thinking. Our monastery library is not large, but we have a few novels. We’d decided to keep the gift book *Pillars of the Earth* because it has an interesting storyline about a Benedictine monastery and its monks. As I read the novel, I questioned whether it was good for me, as it includes scenes not only of sexual violence, but pillage, killing, and other aggression that turned my stomach. Yet I knew that even if these exact incidents hadn’t ever occurred, events like them certainly did, and I could learn something about the world and how people think and act in reading this book.

After we lived through the experience of the nighttime trespass and attempted rape, I felt helped having read the story of *Aliena*, realizing that I can choose how I respond to bad experiences. I can choose not to harden my heart, but rather to open it to others.

I am certain that God/Spirit can use any circumstance—whether good or bad—for our benefit, if we are open to receiving. And I believe what Sister Alegría has often said about fiction: “It may not be true, but it contains much Truth.”

*In November, 2016, Sister Confianza del Señor made her Perpetual Profession as a lifetime nun of Amigas del Señor Monastery, which shares a Covenant of Caring with Multnomah Monthly Meeting in Portland, OR. Write to her and Sister Alegría or request to receive their email updates at [amigashonduras@gmail.com](mailto:amigashonduras@gmail.com).*

