

My name is Candelaria Perez Gonzalez.

I am 88 years old.

During the time before the conflict, we were very happy and calm because we had our house. I was with my husband and children.

After, when the violence came, there were many deaths and my children died.

We were content and we knew that we would have to die if death arrived. But, we thought it would come through illness. But, what happened was the soldiers killed us. The ladinos and many other arrived in large groups to kill us.

What they did was kill women and men. They would strip pregnant women and women with babies and rape them.

This is what they did to us. They killed many pregnant women and left lying there naked so that others would see.

Not only did they do this, but they also stole our animals. They stole our horses, cows, chickens, and pigs. They even took the pigeons.

They took all of our animals, and in the hacienda, prepared their food using the animals that they stole from us. They took our cattle to Chinique.

They took the horses, and left riding them. They took all of our belonging, leaving us in even more poverty.

When the information that they were coming arrived to us here, we didn't believe they would actually enter. After, there were many that arrived from Zacualpa and other places. They entered our village in big groups.

How did the information come to us? It was because the men would leave and go to Chiché and other places and return. During this time, my children were very young.

The soldiers did not take much time to enter here. And we would ask ourselves why they were entering here because we weren't doing anything, we weren't stealing anything. There was information and rumors about what the army was doing.

The first time they entered, the soldiers from Zacualpa, Choashan, and Chiché, and the dogs began to bark. And when the dogs began to bark, the soldiers began to shoot. We received this information and left our houses. We left to hide.

When the soldiers entered the first, second, and third times, my husband went to hide with us, but on another occasion he asked why we were leaving the house, and said we shouldn't do anything. He decided not to leave.

My father also did not want to leave because he said we hadn't done anything. One day, he found the soldiers there in Tierra Colorada. "They didn't do anything to me," he said. "They invited me for a cigar. They didn't do anything to me, so I don't want to leave the house." That was the decision my father made.

My father thought he already knew what the soldiers were doing, but he didn't want to tell us because he didn't want to frighten us. He said that we don't have to be afraid of the soldiers because we weren't committing any crime.

In another moment when the soldiers entered, all of my children left. They told me, "Let's go, Mom. We're leaving because we hear gunshots." But, I didn't want to leave because my father didn't want to leave. I told my children that I didn't want to leave because their grandfather did not want to leave. I wanted to stay with him.

And when the soldiers came, the first things they looked for were the houses, and when they came and were close, I asked my father, "What are we going to do?" My father responded, "Stay here. It will be worse if you run." I had to stay because my father needed someone to cook for him because he was very old.

I didn't want to leave like my children. When they told me, "Let's go," I told them that I didn't want to because their father and grandfather didn't want to leave. I stayed because who was going to prepare the food? It was night when my children left. A little while after they fled, I was seeing the soldiers come up here. They were going to enter the house. I no longer listened to my husband or my father, and I fled. I was hiding among the corn stalks when the soldiers entered the house and I heard the first gunshots.

When I was hidden and heard the first shots, my husband was seated in the kitchen eating.

This time when they entered my house, the soldiers brought a woman who lived in the first house of the hacienda. They brought her with them tied up.

The woman that they brought was naked and was only covered with a sheet.

When my husband was seated and saw that they were entering, he greeted them. "How are you, gentlemen?" he said when

the soldiers entered. They slapped him and threw him to the floor where they killed him.

When they killed my husband, they killed him with a knife. They slit his throat like we do to a pig, only we do it with care. They did not respect my husband. Then they killed my father by shooting him twice.

This is what happened to my father and my husband. This happened at night, and when the soldiers left, I returned to see the two dead. When the sun came up the next day, they were left thrown on the patio. I did not know what to do with them because the night before it rained, and now there was a lot of sun. There was not a single neighbor around. I began to see what I could do with my father. I had to take off his pants because his wound was full of blood because of what they did to him.

That day, my father was left thrown on the patio and my husband in the kitchen. I was alone listening to the barking of the dogs, and the soldiers continued entering into houses.

That night when they killed my father and husband, I didn't enter. The day after, I stayed in the woods among the corn stalks because I didn't dare to enter. Later I saw a dog that was very tough, but it didn't bark. So I thought that there must not be anyone around because if there had been people, the dog would have begun to bark. I couldn't figure out what to do because in that moment I was alone.

When I went to find my father, he was missing an arm. I don't think the dogs got to him because if it were the dogs, they would not have been able to cut through the bone. They only would have eaten the meat. His arm left mutilated in a mailbox. According to the information that arrived, they cut his arm off to show that he was a guerrilla, and left him there saying they had found a guerrilla hiding in his hole. But how could this have been my father, if they killed my father in the house?

I did not know what to do when I saw my father and my husband dead on the floor. I began to cry when I saw the bodies because I was now alone in the house.

My father and husband were lying there when the soldiers returned to enter the house. And what did I do? I hid again where I had been when they were first killed. I left running and had enough time to hide again. The day when the soldiers returned I was in hiding. The soldiers set fire to the forest, and I felt the fire approaching, but didn't know what to do. I asked myself, "What are we going to do?" Later, I realized I should have asked, "What am I going to do?" because I was alone.

Thankfully, the fire did not continue to burn and didn't arrive where I was near the house. I felt I'd be left there to burn because the fire was very strong, but later, I succeeded in escaping it. After the soldiers left, the fire stopped and I returned to the house.

And when I arrived at the house, I said, "What am I going to do?" because my dead were left lying there. The first thing I did was take my father and drag him to the patio.

"What am I going to do?" I said to myself because it had already been two days. There was not a single one of my neighbors or family members there. I thought my neighbors would be returning to join me and bury them so I began to boil corn so that when my neighbors returned, they would be able to help me bury my father and husband.

After two days, Saturday and Sunday, none of my neighbors had arrived from hiding. I had food for them because I supposed they needed food after being so far from their homes for such a long time. But they didn't come. I was alone when the dead bodes became full of flies. It was just me and the sound of the flies in the house.

After three days, I saw my grandson arrive. He was very young.

I asked my grandson to do me a favor and make a pool of water. Meanwhile, I took off both of their clothing and bathed them because they could not be buried full of blood like they were.

What I did was go to the pool of water by the house with their clothes, washed them, and hung them to dry. I also washed my father and husband head to toe so they would be clean for their burial.

In that moment, my oldest son appeared. He was very happy to see me at the house and asked me if I had something to eat. But, he did not know that his grandfather and father were dead.

After I told him what happened, I told him to bring the rest of the family, maybe my sons-in-law and other family members so that they would come and help us bury them.

My son left to look for them, and only three people came. Those three people helped us so we were able to bury my father and husband. We buried them a few meters from the house in the woods. After we buried them, my son told me that we were going to leave because the soldiers could come again.

I did not want to leave because my grandson still had not come back, but my son told me not worry and that he was going to go anyway.

I left with my older son and went to Tierra Colorada. Close by in the sector of Xexac, we heard when the soldiers arrived and fired gunshots. I said I was leaving the house to hide because they were returning to enter here again. So we left again running.

When we were leaving Xexac, we hurried. But I left with my children because my husband and father had already been buried. This saved me. I knew that I would be dead if I had stayed there.

Here, the soldiers came through the main entrance and entered through Xexac. We saw what the soldiers did with the woman they had stripped, and we later found her dead. They did this to other women in Xexac also.

When we brought the case against this ladino [Candido Noriega], we met several times and decided that within our group, we, as women and those who had lost loved ones, would join together to do this work.

We decided as a group that we were in agreement because we all suffered what they did to us. We no longer had our husbands, parents, or children. This motivated us to do this work.

When we brought forward this trial, they asked us whether we were sure it was Candido Noriega. We responded that we were sure it was him. We knew him and knew that he led the groups that came to kill us.

When Candido Noriega brought the group of soldiers that killed the people, many were able to save themselves, but the soldiers organized the civilian defense patrols, and later, in front of all of us, Noriega chose ten people who were killed before us.

The time when they organized us in front of the patrols, they told us that we were going to be okay and that they were going to save us if we joined them. There was a man there whose face was completely covered. He pointed out people and we didn't know why he was doing that. We didn't know he was the person who signaled those in the patrols that were to be killed.

They didn't die, those they had taken here. They had them tied up and the soldiers forced the other members of the patrols that arrived to kill their comrades. There were many who were shot at, but later did not die.

All of the neighbors were crying in the afternoon when they were burying the men. Even the men who were forced to kill their comrades were crying. But, if they had not done what they were ordered to do, they would have been killed. We felt we were going crazy because we did not understand what had happened that morning.

Everything I am saying right now is what happened. Almost all of us here have asked God for a lot of strength to continue forward. Not to forget what happened, but to continue having the strength to move on with our children. And we saw that Candido Noriega entered our village.

When Candido Noriega returned after the massacres, after what happened here, he met with us and told us that he was going to be our new patron. He said, "I'm going to pass by all of you here within these boundaries, and I am going to put a fence around this entire area." This is what Candido Noriega told us.

"What I'm going to do is bring together all of this land by placing a fence around it and I am going bring cattle and horses. I am going to be your patron and you are going to return to working your weekly shift."

"You all are going to do work for me every week. You all have to prepare my food and serve me." When told us this, we said to ourselves that's it's not possible for this to happen again.

We met and thought that what Candido Noriega really wanted was to deceive us because not only did he want to become our new patron, but we also heard that he wanted to kill us. This is what we thought he was going to do to us. If he returned, he could deceive us while we were calm in our homes. He could return again. That's why all of us who were affected met. But, we weren't very clear on whether we were going to go to the authorities.

When we were their testifying, they asked us many questions. "But are you all sure it was him?" they asked. And we responded that yes, we were very sure it was him.

When I was there, I said that when they organized the civil patrols it was a trick because they chose the men they killed. I had to clarify all of this for them. They kept asking if we were telling the truth, if we were lying. There were moments when we were there and the family members of Candido Noriega passed by kicking and shoving us. We just stayed there, unable to say anything.

When I was seated there, Candido Noriega's children passed me, kicking me in the ass. Everyone saw them, but no one could do anything.

When we were there testifying, they asked us if we were lying, if all of this was just slander. They told us, "If you all are lying you are going to have a big problem because you are going to have to pay a big fine." When I heard the amount we would have to pay, I wanted to stop giving my declaration because I was afraid.

I was also afraid because after I gave my declaration, I left and I could not talk to the other women or tell them what questions they asked me. I had this fear that if our declarations did not match up, they were going to place all the blame on us.

In all of the declarations that we gave, we were very clear that we could not change them from the moment we gave the first one. When they called us, we had to say the same thing. Later, they scared us because they told us that if the majority gave good declarations, but one person was wrong, there would be problems. This made us very afraid because if someone messed up, the group had to pay that fine.

When Candido Noriega was encarcelated, his children spoke, we remained silent watching. That is how we succeeded in this trial.

We succeeded, but it was a huge process, and there were many times that we had to leave to testify.

I felt at peace when we won. I said that now, perhaps, we can rest because he is in prison. He had told us that there was still something left that he had to finish. To know that he was finally put in jail leaves me at peace because finally we can rest.

And when I say that maybe we can rest, it is because I have my children and the others have their children also. That is why I believe we are more at peace, because we know that he is no longer here.

I feel very calm. When they asked us how much time he just serve "20, 30 years?" we felt very content. Maybe this is a sin, but he also has to pay because, in truth, we no longer have our husbands and fathers. I feel very at peace.

Now, I've lost count of how long his sentence is, and how he is doing because I don't have information about him.

Yes, we feel calm because he got what was coming to him. He had no reason to do this to us. Before, when everything was calm, we went to Chinique. There were people who bought their liquor there. We were calm, but Candido Noriega, where

did his terrible thoughts come from? Why did he do this to us? So now, he is there and I feel good.

We also feel better because the soldiers are no longer taking our children to the barracks. We succeeded in making them respect our children and not take them to the barracks.

How do you feel about telling what happened to you? I feel it is good and very important. I feel a calm because you all are here with us now.

We suffered a lot here. I also want to say that I have a daughter who is married. She married the son of my children's godmother. She had small children, but one day, a Saturday, she left the town because her son was very sick and she went to buy him medicine, but when she was in Chiché, they took her and threw her in jail.

According to what I understand, they took 10 women and jailed them. At night, they raped them.

How could they survive? The women were threatened while they were in jail, and the soldiers told them that they began digging a hole where they said they were going to kill and bury them. Here, we were very afraid and begged God to keep them safe.

How were they able to survive? There, they were not given any food. After, there were people that said they had to free the women because they were not guerrillas. Those they persecuted most were the men, not the women.

They were in jail for four days and suffered a lot while there. But later, they released them and they came back. But they had been beaten, and many of them had been raped. When they arrived at the house, I asked the godmother of my children, and she did not know if Juana and her husband had begun to fight because she had been raped.

Also, they took the husband of my daughter, put dog excrement in his mouth, and killed him.

The group that came to take my son-in-law tied him up.

We don't know where they took him, and now we are very sad. I am very sad and so is the godmother of my children because of everything they did.

Now, I am very sad because my daughter still does not know what she is doing. They killed her father, her grandfather, and her husband. She got with another man, but he has a wife, and it's as if she wants to destroy another family. But I don't know what is happening with her now.

Before, my daughter was not like this. When her husband lived, they were fine. But she has not been able to recover, and she does not know what she is doing because of what happened.