

Gloria Made the Revolution

Fifth Estate Collective
Various Authors

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I was born in the Sierra Maestra in 1934. I am 36 years old. My mother is from Camaguey and my father is from Oriente and my grandfather is French. My grandfather lived and worked in the countryside but my mother is from the city, from Camaguey. She sent me to school, when I was eleven years old. I didn't read or write when I was eleven years old. I went to the Catholic school in Santiago de Cuba, and then when I left the school I went to the Sierra Maestra because my family lived there. When I left the Sierra Maestra to go to school, I didn't know anything about anything.

When Fidel Castro led the attack on the Moncada Barracks in 1952, I was very unhappy because I knew somebody who was killed at the Moncada, a really great guy and he died at Moncada and I was very angry and very unhappy. That day I knew that Fidel Castro was right, but I couldn't find him because I was so young. I knew nothing about anything.

Then when Fidel came to Cuba, to the Sierra Maestra, in 1956 I was there on vacation. I tried to find somebody from the guerilla band and I finally found them in December of 1956. I found somebody, a guerilla, who wanted to send something to Santiago, just a letter for somebody, and he asked if I could bring it with me to Santiago.

And then in Santiago, they needed to send something to Sierra Maestra. And I brought it to Sierra Maestra. Then they sent me some young people that wanted to go to the Sierra Maestra, and I said they're my cousin and my brother and I got them through.

Because I know very well the Sierra Maestra and I can walk through every part. It was very easy for me and I think it is nothing important. It was important for people like Celia Sanchez or Haydee Santamaria. They knew nothing about Sierra but Sierra is my home.

When I was a messenger between the city and Sierra Maestra, it was easier to do this work because I was a woman. And because I knew the city and the mountains. It was very easy for me. And the Army people, the Batista people in the Sierra Maestra, who stayed there for a long time, knew me since I was young.

The Batista soldiers would ask me, "Gloria, where are you going?" I would say, "I go to see my grandfather," or "I go to see my friend." or "I go to see my family."

And they say, "OK, Gloria, pass along and be careful with the Fidel Castro people, they are terrible!"

And I'd say, "Oh yes, terrible men! Don't be afraid for me, because if I saw any of them, I'd kill them."

But other women were killed trying to do this, making these messenger trips. Sometimes because they didn't know the Sierras, or they didn't know the city. So many women killed, and men too, doing this work.

Then, in 1957, Camilo Cienfuegos told me that I can't continue going to the city because Batista's men are looking for me. And he told me I have to go to the United States. It was terrible for me because I

didn't want to leave; but I was at the same time very skinny—99 pounds. And he said you are so skinny, you can't be with us because we walk all night and you have to be very strong to be here. But you can do many things in the United States because we need someone we know very well to make organization in the United States. And I was very, very unhappy but I went to the United States.

That's where I learned my English. I went to work. I sold hotdogs. I was in Chicago. We had an office and we worked with all the Cubans.

When I talked with people, I explained what we needed in Sierra Maestra, that we needed ammunition and money. At that time in Cuba, you could use the United States dollar or the Cuban peso. We contacted all the Cubans working in Chicago and asked them to help us by giving money to the Movement. We would give parties, serve Cuban food. All Cubans want to eat Cuban food and they would pay \$10, \$5, \$1, whatever they could, and we would take this money and send it to the Sierra Maestra. We also sent money to Mexico to buy guns and ammunition, to be sent to Fidel.

One day we were invited to a party. We said wonderful, and we went to the party. When we went in, somebody saw a picture of Lenin. I said, "Oh, let's get out of here. Comunistas! Comunistas! Communists, these are communists!" Now, whenever I see a picture of Lenin, I think of that party.

I remember one day all the people from the different governments of Latin America had a big party and the Cuban government-Batista—sent his representative. And then we went to this place and we gave out leaflets saying that the Batista man is not a representative of the Cuban people. The Cuban people are represented by Fidel Castro.

We had to have a permit for everything. We had to go to the police and say we're going to make a party and want a permit. I was a political exile in the United States and I couldn't work anywhere. Now the United States gives work to the people who leave Cuba but not to us then.

One day I was applying for a job in Chicago and the lady asked me, "Are you French?" I said, "No, I'm not French." I answered in English but right away she knew I was not a North American because of my pronunciation.

She said, "Oh, I see. You are Mexican." I said, "No, no, I am not Mexican." She said, "Then you are Puerto Rican?" I said, "No I'm not Puerto Rican, I'm Cuban." She said, "No difference, it's all the same shit."

When Cuba was freed, in 1958, the Cuban government sent an airplane to Chicago to bring us home. There were so many people to come in this airplane. People who I didn't even know. They were Cuban and they said, "We want to go to Cuba, we are Cuban, we have no work, we have no money." And we came back to Cuba.

When I first was coming back to Cuba I thought I would like to travel all over the world. I thought now we had won and that was fine and everything was over. When I got back to Cuba, friends would greet me and ask what I wanted to do now. When I told them I wanted to travel, they told me, "Gloria, we need you here, we need everyone to help, to work and study, and build the Revolution." And I realized we had just begun and we all had to work together for Cuba.

At first I had trouble because I was really very Catholic. I believed in God and everything. And when the Cuban Revolution turned to be socialist, I was very troubled with myself, not with anybody else, with myself. And my mother talked to me about this. I had a sister. When she was two years old she died in the Sierra Maestra. She didn't have medicine or doctor or anything at that moment. She died without medical help. And in this place the Revolution has now made a hospital. And my mother told me, "Well, Gloria, you have trouble with yourself, but remember where your sister died without a doctor there is now a hospital."

Every night before I went to sleep I had to pray to God, in order to be able to go to sleep. Every night, every night. But Finally one night I began thinking of a poem by Marti, Jose Marti. I said the poem and I fell asleep. And right away I didn't believe in God anymore. I'm not afraid now and I don't pray. I say a poem and I'm asleep. Because I've changed my mind, that's all. There is no God. I can't believe in him.

Before the Revolution, most Cubans in the Sierra Maestra, farmers and workers, thought that North Americans were our Friends, that the U.S. government means no harm to us. We didn't think at that time that it was a problem for us.

We knew that there were North Americans who owned the sugar mills and sugar plantations and that people who worked for them were poor. I saw many people, not only in the countryside but in the city, who would ask for a dime, a nickel, for bread, for something to eat. They had no food, they had nothing. I thought the Cuban government had to do something but I didn't think the United States had anything to do with it.

You are North American and you are my friends. But I know that the U.S. government wants to invade us, to destroy us. After the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961 I realized that.

I went to the university and became a student in the political science school. Because I said, "Well, Fidel-I know him-he led us through the Revolution and he says that socialism is a good thing. And Che Guevara, he is a very intelligent man, and he thinks that socialism is a good thing. Then why, if I don't know anything, I say that socialism is a bad thing? I have to study to know what is happening."

Then I went to political science school in the university. I read and I studied and I understand this way, why socialism is good and why we should be a socialist country.

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