



# Mi Abuelita



By Mildred Hilbrich

I have thought long and hard on my grandmother's life and on women in general who lived in that era, which was in the early nineteen hundreds and beyond. I heard all the stories about my grandfather. But what about my grandmother and all the other women that lived similar lives?

I used to ask my mother about her and she would mostly say "she was a saint". But I wanted to know why she saw her as a saint? Bits and pieces would come out in conversations between family members about my grandmother's life.

My adult life began when I met my boyfriend and, later, husband. We were raised in a little village called *Doctor Arroyo*, in Nuevo Leon, Mexico. I fell in love with Don Margarito the first time I saw him. We were so in love that we couldn't wait for me to become of age, so we eloped. But my parents found out that we were eloping and they called the law on us. The law put us in jail. But we remained faithful to each other and were married when I was of age. We started our family and Margarito was a very good provider. He was an overseer for an hacienda. He had also worked in a silver mine.

During the revolution, Don Margarito said that we were going to have to leave our home and country. He couldn't put his family at risk with the *federales* pillaging the countryside and *haciendas*. Young girls were at risk of being violated. So I had to make the decision, to leave or stay. I knew in my heart that if I went, I would never come back—that I would never see my parents and family, again. What was I going to find in a strange country? I knew my life would change forever. But I would go for the sake of my family.

Soon my family would be working in the fields. Whatever the season, they would follow the needs of the farmers. I would stay in camp and cook meals on a camp fire, wash the clothes in a tub and hang them out to dry on whatever branch or bush I could find. That was my life in our new country.

As the years passed and we became more prosperous, we owned a general store and all the family had a job to



do, except me. I still saw to it that the family had hot meals and clean clothes. At every point in my life I was in charge of the well-being of my family.

I never went back to Mexico to see my parents and siblings. For many years I lived in terror that the law would come and take me back, until the family got my legal papers.

Aside from my family, I would help out neighbors in need, I would also cook for the pecan shellers that worked for us in the pecan business.

One of my favorite things to do was to sew. I would go to the veranda and call the older grandchildren, "come

inside, we are having a sewing session". "Here is what you do, first cut the square like this, put the cardboard square on the piece of cloth and follow the lines of the square". I would always thread needles for them. And I would show them how to knot the thread so it wouldn't go through the cloth. (I was always amused at the boys, they weren't always as patient as the girls.) Then I would demonstrate how to put the needle in and out of the cloth to sew a straight line. The grandchildren would eventually learn to sew a straight line.

My other passion in life were my plants and flowers. "Come here mi'ja, come and help me with this plant", my little granddaughter loved plants too. "What is this plant mamá Cecilia, it smells so good."! "Mi'ja, that is *yerbabuena*, (mint). You can cook with it and put it in tea and it's good for a lot of other things, like it keeps away the bugs from the plants." "And see, we have to pull the weeds out of the ground around the plants so they can grow healthy".

One of my favorite places to go was a little nursery on Commerce St. Once a month I would make the trip downtown. "Vamos mi'ja, we are going to buy plants." I knew the names of the streets on the way there by heart. I couldn't read or write but I could memorize. So I would name the names of the streets for mi'ja, so she could learn them. too. We had a favorite little tiendita we would stop at when halfway there. This was our resting place and

where we got our treat, a 7-up. At the nursery, I would make sure to show her how to pick and choose a healthy plant. "Mi'ja, you have to feel the plant, make sure it doesn't have growths on it, you have to smell it, it has to smell good like the earth when we pull the weeds, remember?" "Yes, I like to smell the flowers." "They have to be standing straight and firm, not wilted or turning brown." I would buy my plants, guessing how much we could carry all that distance from Commerce to Tampico St. And, we would, once again, make the stop and get our refreshment halfway home.

Sometimes, I would ask one of my grandchildren to write a letter for me to my parents. I would tell them what to write. Writing a letter, was not what I wanted. I would

have liked to be near them to tell them what was in my heart. It was heartbreaking for me, and the children saw how I felt.

My admiration of my grandmother is so great! I am always in awe, when I think about her, how difficult it must have been to just leave her parents and family and country knowing that she would never see them again. In those days people didn't just pull up and leave country and family everyday. It had to be something so devastating to families to do that, like a war or revolution.

Mildred DeLong Hilbrich

## "Don't Take Any Wooden Nickels"

By: Roze Livar

Ever since I was a kid, I have heard my Dad say this to everyone upon leaving. "Don't take any wooden nickels!" It always brought a smile to everyone's face. As a child, I was familiar with tokens or wooden nickels and I'd think, why not?

As a teenager, I would cringe at the "corny" line. "Ugh! Please don't say it, especially to my friends," I'd say to myself. "Why can't he just say, bye and leave it at that?" It wasn't until I grew older, that I learned the wisdom behind my Dad's silly little phrase.

What he was saying to everyone, in essence, was, "Know what is true and know what is fake." He didn't want anyone to be "taken in, lied to, fooled or deceived." I believe he wanted to say this to us,

"Know the true value of something or someone and know the difference between what is real and what may be a cheap imitation." While a wooden nickel may get you a trade on a trinket, it is not actual currency. Although both may be used to trade for goods, you can't take the wooden nickel to the bank and cash it in for five pennies.

Today, on your Birthday, Pop, I'm doing my part. I'm speaking and standing up for Truths, no matter the costs. I've taught my kids and now my grandkids to do the same. I'm hearing you say, in that accent I miss so much,

"Hey... keep your peepers peeled!"

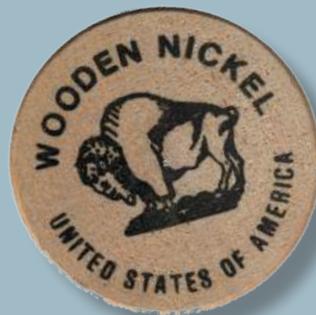
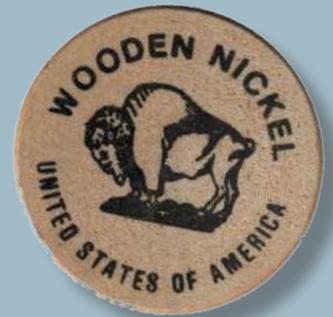
(Eyes wide open, be aware) and especially,

"Don't take any wooden nickels!"

All my Love Pops,

All the Time,

Roze



Roze Livar

*Roze Livar is a current member of Teatro Esperanza. She is a local actor and advocate for the senior community of San Anto'. She very much enjoys listening to stories as well as telling them through playwriting, short stories, musical parodies, poems and acting.*