

# The Angel of Goliad

*This article is from the "Edifying the Body" section of the Church of God Big Sandy's Web site, churchofgodbigandy.com. It was posted for the weekend of April 11-12, 2009.*

**By Stanley West**

BIG SANDY, Texas—With the advent of the spring season, the calendar seems to blossom in beauty and meaning just as much as the nature around us.

Annual renewals and rebirths bring about excitement, activity, new prospects and the potential for growth. Life springing forth in the form of budding trees, green grass, colorful flowers and baby livestock generates a grateful appreciation for the blessings complementary of the season. Much of the significance and meaning associated with the calendar, however, derives its importance from past events as religious or historic memorials.

As a native Texan, I fit the stereotype associated with the citizens of our state. One aspect of that, of course, is our pride. While pride has its negative consequences, like most other human attributes it can be used as a positive tool to direct our awareness to focus on learning from those memorials we have from history.

## **Significant memorials**

The months of March and April are full of significant memorials for Texans. In 1836 Texas declared its independence on March 2, followed four days later on March 6 by the Battle of the Alamo, March 27 by the massacre at Goliad, and April 21 by the Battle of San Jacinto.

Remember the Alamo! and Remember Goliad! became the battle cry for Texans. While these two events were military in nature, they carried much of the same impact for Texans that Sept. 11 should have for all of us.

Since my Texas pride brought these memorials to my attention, hopefully I am using it positively to learn not only from what is remembered, but what is forgotten.

## **Remembering the survivors**

Our hearts and our sympathy go out to the victims who lost their lives in the countless tragic events of man's history. Most amazing, though, is that, no matter how horrible the event, in almost every crime, war, the holocaust, act of terrorism or any other tragedy, we have survivors. We should take heed to the accounts given by survivors.

According to the Internet article "The Angel of Goliad" by Walter L McHeehan, the Angel of Goliad was a tenderhearted Mexican lady who will forever be remembered for her many acts of kindness during the dismal days of the Texas Revolution.

No one with certainty can identify this heroin by name. She is commonly identified as Francisca Alvarez, and history records she was a compassionate and beautiful woman. She saved the lives of 20 Texans destined to die on March 27, 1836, when Col. James W. Fannin and 341 of his men were put to death on orders of Gen. Santa Anna.

### **Smitten with compassion**

Some speculate this lady was the wife or mistress of the commanding officer, but it may be she was only one of the camp followers. Whoever she was, she was smitten with compassion for the doomed men. She found Maj. William P. Miller left tied for several hours without food and water. She ordered Miller's bonds and those of his men cut and that they be given refreshment.

Francisca pleaded so effectively with Lt. Col. Garay that he heeded her pleas and spared 20 of the doctors, interpreters, nurses and mechanics.

Also among those not destined for the field of slaughter was Benjamin Franklin Hughes, the little drummer boy, thanks to the entreaties of this woman. Hughes would live to become a prominent Dallas citizen, and he spoke often of the Angel of Goliad.

She concealed several more prisoners upon the parapet of the fort until after the brutal massacre. The wounded Fannin and 40 of his men were murdered in the fort. The rest were taken outside and shot at close range, so most of the soldiers died in the first volley. The rest were run down and bayoneted or lanced as they fled.

Still, 28 men managed to reach the cover of the woods and escaped.

As for the daring Francisca, even on her return to Matamoras she showed great kindness to the imprisoned Texans there.

### **Eyewitness accounts**

Several years after the Texas Revolution, two doctors who were prisoners at Goliad and spared by the Mexicans told of the humanitarian acts of Francisca Alvarez on behalf of the Texans. These eyewitness accounts of Dr. Joseph Bernard and Dr. John Shackelford caused the deeds of this compassionate woman to become widely known.

So what finally became of the Angel of Goliad?

Her final fate is unknown. Today Goliad and Fannin have their massive memorials to the tragic events that were so fateful in creating the destiny of Texas. But the Angel of Goliad, who risked so much for the lives of her enemy, warrants only the briefest of references in Texas history to her heroism.

According to another online article with same title, "The Angel of Goliad," with information from *Unsung Heroes of Texas* and *Lone Star Diary*, the first published reference to this Mexican angel of mercy was in Dr. Jack Shackelford's account of his experience at Goliad.

"I consider it not inappropriate here to mention one female, Pachito Alevesco, the wife of Captain A. She was indeed an angel of mercy. A second Pocahontas. All that she could do to administer to our comfort, 'to pour oil into our wounds,' was done. She had likewise been to Major Miller and men 'a ministering angel.' "

### **Examples and admonitions**

From that March to May of the struggle for Texan independence, her virtues shone resplendently against the grim cruelty of Santa Anna. And then, insofar as Texas and Texans were concerned, she stepped gently out of their hearts and lives. Not even the beneficiaries of her mercy took the trouble to learn, or at least they failed to record, her name.

The author of the book of Hebrews tells us in chapter 13: "Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unaware" (verse 1).

I wouldn't attempt to limit the lessons in the numerous religious and historical memorials that are recorded for our example and our admonition.

However, I've decided to focus on just one. As mentioned earlier, there are always survivors. No matter what the event or the tragedy, I believe we can hardly ignore the account given by those survivors. That also means we cannot ignore the hand of God in the lives of men. Time and chance happen to us all, coincidence happens to us all, but I also believe that, if we are called to be a survivor, God's intervention happens to us all.

The attempt at utopian colorful language in the first paragraph concerning the calendar isn't a mistake. It is in sharp contrast to the real-life calendar events in the spring of 2009. The geopolitical, economic and security issues facing our nation and the world are nothing short of grave and sobering.

### **Focus on the positive**

While we are and should be aware of the conditions of the world, don't forget the words of our Savior, "Let not your heart be troubled." Many in the realm of politics, media and religion encourage us to embrace the victim or martyr mentality. The god of this world wants us to focus on the negative, reaching a point of hopelessness, believing we just can't make it. When we encounter trying times, whether family, job, health, church, economics or other difficulties, we still must remember our calling as a living sacrifice.

The religious memorials contained within the spring calendar reach deep into the hearts of all Christians. When we observe these memorials in remembrance of Him, it is because He overcame the world, thereby granting us the

victory. We look ahead in uncertain times, learning the lessons from those memorials. If we believe in Him and follow Him, we believe the hand of God is involved in the lives of men.

His hand is there if the result of our calling and destiny is to be a victim.

His hand is there if the result of our calling and destiny is to be a martyr.

Most assuredly, and most likely and most probably, His hand is there because the result of our calling and destiny is not just to be a survivor to witness to others. Our calling and our destiny are to claim the victory through Him, to join Him in His Kingdom as a surviving winner!

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*Works cited:*

Wallace L. McHeehan, *The Angel of Goliad*, 1997-2005.

"Sons of Dewitt Colony Texas," [tamu.edu/ccbn/dewitt/goliadangel.htm](http://tamu.edu/ccbn/dewitt/goliadangel.htm).

"The Angel of Goliad," [beer-bytch.com/angelofgoliad.htm](http://beer-bytch.com/angelofgoliad.htm).

Information obtained from *Unsung Heroes of Texas* by Ann Ruff and *Lone Star Diary* by Murray Montgomery.