



## The Chili Story

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In the days before refrigeration, people had two main ways to preserve food – drying or salting, or both. When Spain introduced cattle to Mexico, the meat was preserved by cutting it into long thin strips, rubbing salt into it, then drying it in the sun. It would keep for months. However, eating it was a chore, especially if you were beyond middle age and had no teeth. Chili peppers grew well in Mexico, as did an assortment of beans and tomatoes. If dried meat was soaked in water, some of the salt came out, and the meat became soft. Some ingenious cooks then added chili peppers to spice up the brew. Beans were easily dried and stored; they were high in energy and vitamins, so they were also added to the pot, along with a generous helping of tomatoes. The result was spicy, hot, delicious and nutritious. It was called Chili Con Carne, or, translated, '*chili with meat.*'

In the 1850's it became very popular in Mexico City. Chili stands dotted the streets. Every cook's chili tasted just a little different, depending on the type of tomatoes and varieties of beans. But it was the chili pepper that gave it the zing. Mexican people love the spice – the hotter the better!

I had a classmate at Bible College named Gabby. She found our Canadian food very bland. Even our spicy chili was way too mild. She discovered a Mexican food shop only a block away and Gabby became their best customer. She often came back with something that looked like a meat pie. They smelled very good. One Friday on my way home, I bought six of these delicacies as a treat for my family. They smelled good when Nora warmed them in the oven. They still smelled good when she cut them in half on our dinner plates. However, one bite and the consumer resistance was unanimous. So was the cry for cold water. I was the last to try. My eyes burnt, my nose ran, my tongue felt like it was flaming. We opted for toast and scrambled eggs with Heinz Ketchup for supper. Our farm dogs would eat anything, be it dead or alive, but they refused these Mexican delicacies.

Gabby was a slender young woman, barely 5 feet tall. But she was fearless. One evening a week, along with a few other students, she went downtown Kitchener to the area where druggies and dealers hung out. These students told people to turn to Jesus and leave their life of sin. I am not sure any were brought to faith, but the students took away their excuses. Yes, no one who heard the Gospel from Gabby would be able to say on Judgement Day, *“But no one told me!”*

I had a brief chat with Gabby on our graduation day.

“What are you going to do now, Gabby?” I asked.

“Oh, I’m going home to Mexico.”

“To work in a church?”

“No, I am going to work in the Mexico City dump.”

I was shocked. “The dump!” I exclaimed. “Do you drive a machine burying garbage?”

She laughed and then explained. “Keith, there is a community of people living in the vast dump. They build shacks from galvanized roofing and furniture from cardboard boxes. They scrounge for their food. They raise children there. This is their home!”

I realized I had lived a very sheltered life on the farm at Valens.

“Gabby, what do you teach?”

“I teach basic math and Spanish and English. I teach hygiene, how to care for babies and children. But mostly I teach about Jesus so they can believe in Him and be prepared for a better future someday.” Then she smiled, almost an angelic smile, “Keith, there are no garbage dumps in Heaven! I must teach all who will listen that Jesus loves them. And these children will listen!”

Our conversation lasted no more than 5 minutes. That was 32 years ago. I have not seen or heard of Gabby since. But I find myself longing for her spunk, her faith, her self-denial, her love for those who have never heard about Jesus, the God-Man.

What motivated her?

It was not the spice in her Mexican diet!

It was the fire power of the Holy Spirit. May God pour out anew that fire power – on me – and on you!