

## Guillermo Galdos Part Two Transcript

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And then the helicopter started spraying bullets. They had a mini gun that goes like a - sounds like a chainsaw [makes chainsaw noise]. And I remember hearing the trees falling down and it looked like the end of the world to be honest.

**Ramita Navai:** From *Aurra Studios*. This is **The Line of Fire** with me, Ramita Navai. I've been working in conflict zones around the world for nearly two decades. And in this series, I talk to fellow journalists about covering war and the life changing moments of confronting death. Welcome to **The Line of Fire**.

**Ramita Navai:** In this episode of *The Line of Fire*, my guest is the award-winning Peruvian journalist and documentary maker Guillermo Galdos.

This is the second part of my conversation with Guillermo. If you haven't listened to part one yet, I would recommend starting with that first, where Guillermo tells me about the dangers of exposing drug cartels and what it's like dealing with hitmen.

**Ramita Navai:** Guillermo, you're talking about meeting kind of ordinary kids who get caught up in violence and gangs. What about the men who make it to the top? The drug lords. Tell me what it's like meeting them.

**Guillermo Galdos:** I've always been fascinated by those type of characters and simply because what you see in the Hollywood movies it's not real. You know? I had the opportunity to meet several high-ranking drug traffickers. Some of them, you know, with millions of dollars on their heads.

**Ramita Navai:** Millions of dollars? Bounty money?

**Guillermo Galdos:** Millions of dollars of reward. Bounty money. Yeah. Bounty money.

And I remember I interviewed the head of the Knights Templar.

**Ramita Navai:** Tell me about the Knights Templar.

**Guillermo Galdos:** It was a Mexican cartel that appeared in an area called Michoacán. And I remember the name of the guy was "La Tuta" Servando Gomez. And when I went to interview him there were more than 10,000 Mexican soldiers looking for him.

**Ramita Navai:** I mean, we're talking one of Mexico's most notorious drug lords.

**Guillermo Galdos:** Yes. He was the Mexican version of Breaking Bad. He was a teacher that ended up being the main man in methamphetamine production in Mexico. And when I met him, he didn't look like a teacher. He looked more like peasant. And the day I met him, he was - I realized immediately that he was high on coke and he was drinking.

He was a bit drunk for my taste. Not nice to meet a criminal and the first time you meet him he's completely off his head. Because you don't have a chance to actually establish a relationship with him. And I remember saying to him, you're not going to like this but I won't interview you today because I think that you're a bit off your head and you will come across as, you know, somebody who is not serious and then you won't be happy with the interview and then it won't be good for anyone. So I'm willing to wait, I said to him. And he took that as a compliment, I think. And he realized that, you know, I want to tell the story, the real story of what was happening there.

And he was not in a condition to give me that story. So we agreed to do the interview two days later. The person I was with thought I was crazy because we had the opportunity to interview him and I was not taking it.

**Ramita Navai:** I mean even meeting him is an extraordinary feat.

**Guillermo Galdos:** Yes, but I wanted to, you know, have a chat with him, an open chat. And I explained to him, listen, I'm not an informant. You clearly know that because if not, I wouldn't be here. And he knew, you know, that I had spoken to other drug cartel members and he knew I told stories and I reported on the war on drugs in Mexico.

He appeared two days later, he was very neatly dressed. Obviously, he hadn't had any drinks or anything because that's what I asked him for.

And we had a long conversation. The camera was on for part of it but then he asked for us to turn off the camera and we continued our conversation. And the funny thing was that when we were in the middle of this interview, suddenly on the radio I started listening that the army was on its way to the area where we were interviewing him.

So he had to leave and he moved to another place and we were left in that house with like 20 armed guys. And I asked them, "What should we do now?" And I remember them saying to me, "Have you got bulletproof jackets?" And I said, "Yeah, I've got

some." So we went to the car, we got the bulletproof jackets, we put them on, we went inside the house. And suddenly I see this pickup truck that arrives in the house.

It was full of hay in the back and they get all the hay off the pickup truck and they open this like a secret compartment. And suddenly they start taking all these weapons out, like grenade launchers, AK 47s, and they were putting together the weapons. And I remember thinking there like, Oh my God, we are just about to be attacked by the government.

And so I said to them listen, you know, I'm going to stay here. I'm a journalist. And if you're going to go and fight with the army, you know, you're more than welcome, but we're not going to go with you. And at the end, they stayed in the house. And for 40 minutes it was really tense. And then the army, luckily, went the other way. And after, you know, an hour and a half, I think we were cleared to leave.

But when I spoke with La Tuta, my impression that I had is that he was a very sick person.

**Ramita Navai:** Sick in what way?

**Guillermo Galdos:** Sick in a way that his concept of life and death was completely different to the one we had. And the fact that he was not only a drug trafficker but he was a great abuser. He told me that he has more than a hundred kids.

He told me that local mothers came and offered their virgin daughters to him so he would make them pregnant. So they will be pregnant with the son or daughter of La Tuta. I remember him showing me videos of him giving money out in these tiny towns in Michoacán as if he was Father Christmas. And he was sick in the sense that he didn't have a problem telling me how he had killed hundreds of people. And, you know, he was talking with his associates about a recent murder and it was brutal.

And he got angry after the interview because I asked him about the deals that they had with the Chinese. And he said something surreal. He said, "Tell me about one Chinese citizen that has been kidnapped or has been harassed here in Michoacan. No Chinese, you won't find any Chinese citizens that, you know, we've kidnapped or killed." And it was true because they were working with the Chinese. And...

**Ramita Navai:** Guillermo, tell me about the deals with the Chinese because I don't know about this.

**Guillermo Galdos:** Oh, sorry. The Knights Templar didn't only deal with drugs in Michoacan, but they were heavily involved in the export of iron to China. And they controlled a port where they had one of the biggest places to export iron in the whole of Mexico. And the iron was being exported to China.

So the Chinese came to Michoacán and they made a deal with the cartels and they were buying very happily the iron that was produced by the cartels. The cartels realized that they could make more money actually exporting iron to China than trafficking with, you know, drugs in the area. So when we exposed the relationship of the cartels with the Chinese, my email was hacked.

The webpage for my company in Peru was hacked. And my phone started behaving really strangely and I'm sure that it came from China because we found out through a couple of friends that work with computers and hackers and all that, that actually the bugs were sent from China. And he sent a message, La Tuta, saying how we exposed that relationship.

And my answer simply was, listen, you told me if I wanted to see a mine run by your people and you showed me a mine run by your people. And you said to me that you were dealing with the Chinese and then he stayed quiet. He never replied anymore. And then I think a year later he got arrested and he's serving a long sentence in a Mexican prison.

**Ramita Navai:** Were you relieved?

**Guillermo Galdos:** Yes, I think I was relieved. I thought that, you know, it felt incredible that such a big chunk of Mexico was controlled by a nutter like La Tuta because he was not a low profile trafficker. No. He was very brutal and very open about his dealings.

**Ramita Navai:** Were you scared meeting him?

**Guillermo Galdos:** When I interviewed him, yes. Yes, I was.

I was. Because, you know, he was always offering alcohol and I immediately thought, I remember, that he was filming me. I don't know why I had that feeling. And months later it came across that yes, indeed. He filmed his meetings with politicians and with journalists and whenever he felt like it he would put out those pictures and ruin the lives of those people.

**Ramita Navai:** What is it that men like that have in common, these men who get to the top, that's not just their propensity for violence and ruthlessness? Is there something else they have in common?

**Guillermo Galdos:** I think most of them have a chip on their shoulders and they want to show a lot more of what they really are. Obviously they are kings in their kingdoms, but when you compare that to the world, you realize that they are just some warlords. That's what they are, more than traffickers.

I think what we have now in Mexico are, you know, 20 different warlords that control the country and that they do whatever they want in the areas they have. And the abuse of women is something that I've seen in all the places and with all the high ranking drug traffickers. It's like, I mean, we know, [Joaquín] "El Chapo" Guzmán was addicted to Viagra.

And it was a way of trying to prove his manhood and that he could have like 20 girlfriends, all of them really young, and that he could have lots of kids. And that idea of, you know, a real Mexican Macho is engraved in these guys. And most of the very high ranking traffickers until - I'm talking about until 10 years ago, there were people who came from the countryside, they were peasants, they started trafficking with marijuana, and then when the game changed and they started exporting cocaine and they became very big, you know, they were still peasants. But their kids, that what we call the Narcos juniors or the new Narcos, the sons and the daughters of these guys that were once peasants and ended up like big drug traffickers. Those guys who are now in power, that's a different story because these guys have been educated well. I know that some of them, for instance, have been educated in London.

Their kids can go to an American or to a British university or to a university in Europe. And then they go back and probably most of them, they pick up on the family business, but they're educated.

**Ramita Navai:** Does that make them more dangerous?

**Guillermo Galdos:** That makes them more dangerous because they can reach further, I think. They can go further than the parents. And because if you think El Chapo Guzman, he was a peasant and you know, he was a guy that spoke very shy, a brutal criminal and assassin and all of it, but he was peasant. The way you look at him and if you dress him with peasant clothes, he would be a guy who was harvesting marijuana in the field in Sinaloa.

But these guys, the new guys, I mean, they look like lawyers, you know, they're in suits. They have, you know, all the new cars, all the technology. And yes, we saw that in Culiacan not long ago when El Chapo's son was arrested.

The guy was wanted by the US and the Mexican government is obliged to release him because of the gunmen of El Chapo's son, what they did on the streets of Culiacan. They took over Culiacan. 700 sicarios appear from nowhere...

**Ramita Navai:** Sicarios are hitmen.

**Guillermo Galdos:** Yeah, sicarios are hitmen. 700 hitmen appeared from nowhere and they took over the city of Culiacan and they obliged the armed forces to release Ovidio Guzman. That was surprising.

**Ramita Navai:** I mean, El Chapo is perhaps one of the most famous drug lords of all time. And you've had dealings with him.

**Guillermo Galdos:** We had dealings with his people and certainly when he became famous and before anyone before Kate Del Castillo went to meet him and all that, I went with a dear friend that we worked a lot together.

We've been working a lot for a number of years with Angus MacQueen and we decided we wanted to go and look for El Chapo. And I spent months in Culiacan trying to get access. And finally we got access to La Sierra and we got access to El Chapo's brother, and to all his security and to his mother and to all of that.

And because we wanted to tell the story of El Chapo and get it right, it was important for us to tell the fact that one of his sons had been killed by his own people. And the story of how this happened was pretty surreal for us. Because the war touched his family as well.

**Ramita Navai:** The war on drugs?

**Guillermo Galdos:** The war on drugs and the same war that the cartels were fighting against the government and against other cartels, you know, touching El Chapo very personally, you know? One of his kids was killed. And so we decided, we asked El Chapo's brother for permission to film in the tomb in the mausoleum that was built for El Chapo's son. After a few days he came back and he said, yes, you can go and film there. So we went with Angus, we went to this mausoleum. Looked like a small church, where the boy is buried. And he's buried in a place in the outskirts of Culiacan, in a place pretty dangerous actually, because you could see it was full of armed men.

And we went to the mausoleum. We film inside the mausoleum. And when we were coming out we encountered El Chapo's wife with a number of hitmen. And she had warned me before not to film there. And she was not happy. So I immediately said to her, yes, we were leaving. And I realized that she didn't know that we had filmed already.

She saw me with the camera outside the mausoleum. So she didn't know that we had been inside already filming. So we left and we were followed by a car full of hitmen. And then we tried to lose them. And then we got stopped very suspiciously by the police that work for the Narcos in Sinaloa.

And I remember seeing through my rear view mirror, how this policeman was approaching my car and he got his pistol out of his waist. And he had the pistol in his hand while he was approaching me. Then he saw the camera that I had on my lap. And I think that he didn't know how to react.

We ended up going away. We changed cars. We went to the hotel and we left Sinaloa immediately. But when I was on the plane, the cartel people called me and they had kidnapped our driver. So I could hear my driver in the back shouting because they were torturing him. And El Chapo's wife was saying to me that she wanted those pictures, that she realized that I had filmed inside, and that she was going to kill the driver if I didn't hand over the material.

And I was on the plane about to take off to Mexico City. So I said to her, I was going to erase the footage. She said, I don't want you to erase it, send me your card. So I got to Mexico City, I made a copy of the material and I sent her the memory card and my driver was released, luckily.

She was pretty angry. I know that there was some talk within the cartel, especially with El Chapo's kids about, you know, that they were not happy with the fact that we had filmed in their brother's mausoleum and they talked about actually, you know, doing something to us. But I know from a very close friend that El Chapo's mother intervened and she said, 'Don't do anything. You know, those guys had permission. It's not their problem that, you know, my son El Chapo and his former wife don't have a good relationship.'

But it was pretty scary.

**Ramita Navai:** What happened to your driver?

**Guillermo Galdos:** He was released and we took him out of Sinaloa.

**Ramita Navai:** Was he from Sinaloa?

**Guillermo Galdos:** He was from Sinaloa but he had family in Los Angeles. So we sent him there for a few months.

**Ramita Navai:** Where is he now?

**Guillermo Galdos:** He's back in Mexico, yeah. He's back in Mexico, all good. I've been with him not long ago.

**Ramita Navai:** Guillermo, classic journalist, not deleting the footage and making a copy. Would I be right in assuming that you did something with the copy?

**Guillermo Galdos:** I actually used it in the documentary. That's... **[Laughs]**

**Ramita Navai:** I bet you did.

**Guillermo Galdos:** That's what I did.

**Ramita Navai:** Did you check with the driver before you did that?

**Guillermo Galdos:** I did. I said to him, listen, we have to use that material. And, you know, the film took a while to be broadcast and at the end we used it.

And I didn't know, it would end up as the most watched documentary in the history of Discovery Channel Mexico. So for a few years, every time I went to Mexico, people recognized me and they say, "Oh, that's the guy who did the documentary about El Chapo." And I had a couple of situations because of that. Yeah.

**Ramita Navai:** Yeah. I mean, these characters like El Chapo are fascinating. You said that meeting people like him is very different from Hollywood. It doesn't sound that different from Hollywood. Tell me how it's different from the films and also why you think these guys are so romanticised when, as you say, they're so brutal and so violent?

**Guillermo Galdos:** You need to, I think, understand the context where these people come from.

And I'll give you an example in la Sierra, in Sinaloa, in this area where people don't go and that we had full access to, and we actually flew on a plane that they had into La Sierra. It sounded like fiction. When we arrived, I realized why people love him so much. It was mainly because of two things, because these guys are like Robin Hoods in their own communities. And they help people a lot. And I met a guy whose son had a car accident in La Sierra, and he was pretty badly injured. And El Chapo sent an air ambulance to collect him, to collect this boy and take him to a hospital in Culiacan.

So when I met that father, I realized that that guy was going to protect El Chapo for the rest of their life. And that was the case with the majority of people there, you know? These guys are like local Robin Hoods. But then why I say it's different from Hollywood is because, you know, even though they have this macho presence, you know, with their, you know, M16 hanging, their other pistols and all that, El Chapo was not, you know, a guy that was carrying weapons.

I mean, his hitmen were. He was surrounded by armed people. He was like every time, you know, he went through Culiacan or La Sierra it was like the president going by, you know? His convoys of 10 SUV's and stuff like that. But for me, it was looking at normal people. El Chapo was really small. His brother was also really small.

They were, you know, they look like peasants and they spoke like peasants. And the only thing that they had behind them was a lot of money that allowed them to do whatever they wanted. But if you take them and you put them, is El Chapo himself or is

La Tuta himself really powerful? I will say, no. I will say there are other people that allow them to be as powerful as they are.

And those are the lawyers, the politicians, and the armed forces. Without those three elements, without them being accomplices of the Narcos, because a Narco is no one without a good lawyer, and now a Narco is no one without good connections in politics, and a Narco is no one without good connections within the military.

So without those three elements, they are no one. And that's the thing that surprised me. Because I was thinking that how can a man like El Chapo have a massive organization that operates in more than a hundred countries? That was not possible. You could see that by speaking to him. But obviously the lawyers, the entrepreneurs, the banks that allow these guys to be who they are, they're accomplices.

**Ramita Navai:** So what is it about people like El Chapo, if they're not cleverer than the others, if they're not necessarily more charismatic than the others, is it just their propensity for violence?

**Guillermo Galdos:** I think that if you show that you're brutal, people respect you. But if you're brutal without money, they will get you.

You can be very brutal. You can kill a lot of people. If you don't have a big wallet like these guys have...

**Ramita Navai:** But they don't start off with big wallets. So what is it about them that attracts the politicians, the lawyers, attracts all of the support behind them?

**Guillermo Galdos:** I don't think that when they are low ranking, they don't go - politicians are not looking for them. Once they become...

**Ramita Navai:** No. So how do they get to that high-ranking place?

**Guillermo Galdos:** By killing people. By being brutal. That's it.

**Ramita Navai:** It's as simple as that?

**Guillermo Galdos:** It's as simple as that. You don't get to the top in the drug trafficking chain by being a nice guy. You...

**Ramita Navai:** Or by being charismatic?

**Guillermo Galdos:** No. No. You can be charismatic, but you need to show power. And the only way to show power in that world is like showing who is stronger.

And that's I think the case in the majority of Narcos in Mexico.

**Ramita Navai:** Guillermo, do people act differently when they're driven by greed and power, rather than ideology?

**Guillermo Galdos:** I haven't seen a criminal group in Latin America that is driven by ideology. Not even FARC, not even people like that.

**Ramita Navai:** I guess I'm thinking, you know, well, Shining Path, we could argue that that's ideology.

**Guillermo Galdos:** Yes.

**Ramita Navai:** And I'm also thinking that you have, you know, you have reported in the Middle East, where that's ideology rather than greed and power. So if you, you know, comparatively, if you look at your experiences, the thing that sets Latin America apart really, as you say, is that it's power and greed.

So do people act differently when they're driven by that than ideology that you may have seen in other places?

**Guillermo Galdos:** I think it's more dangerous, power and greed. And that's the majority of the examples that I've seen in this part of the world. When people said, oh FARC is fighting because of the ideology. They want to take power.

That was bullshit, you know? They were fighting because they were fighting for their space in the business. And they were for a while, the biggest cartel on the face of the Earth. Then that was changed and that was taken over by the Mexicans. But this is something that I've seen very close in my part of the world.

And is how the money that drug trafficking generates has created a situation nowadays where you have, you know, all these brutal assassins and, you know, all these dangerous people going around with impunity. And that impunity simply survives because these guys have a lot of money and drug trafficking has created a cancer in Latin America because of corruption because, you know, what has all that money generated?

Recently I was in Ecuador and they stopped eight tons of cocaine. I mean, £320 million in just one shipment. If you think that those guys are, you know, moving that amount on a regular basis monthly, we cannot even begin to understand the amount of money that they move. And that is the big problem because they can buy themselves into politics.

They can run countries. And then when you've got those alliances that we have started to see about drug traffickers joining politicians. That is the end.

[First Ad Break]

**Ramita Navai:** Guillermo, I want to ask you about that one moment where you faced death and you were really scared and it was in Colombia, February 2002 peace talks with left-wing rebels had just broken down. Can you take me back to that day and tell me what happened?

**Guillermo Galdos:** Yeah. The war in Colombia at the beginning in 2000, I remember, you know, I was quite interested in what was happening there and I started going a lot.

And I remember being with FARC and it was like all these, you know, young journalists, you know, going to film these left-wing guerrillas.

**Ramita Navai:** For our listeners, can you tell us in a few sentences who FARC are?

**Guillermo Galdos:** FARC are the revolutionary armed forces of Colombia.

They were the oldest guerrilla movement in the world until recently. They signed a peace deal with the Colombian government.

But you know, I was really interested in this complex situation that Columbia was living in at the time. And so I went and called the FARC a lot.

And then a couple of years later, I went to interview the high-ranking commander of FARC. And we were doing a documentary for Discovery Channel, actually, about terrorist organizations.

And FARC had been labelled as a terrorist organization by the US and the European Union. So, I went and hung around with them for one day. And while I was there with the commander, FARC kidnapped a plane, and they landed the plane on the highway, and they took away I think a couple of politicians that were on board. And immediately the president, President [Andres] Pastrana, he broke the peace negotiations.

He stopped the peace negotiations and the FARC commander, I was inside FARC territory, and the FARC commander said to me, I recommend...

**Ramita Navai:** This is in the jungle in Colombia?

**Guillermo Galdos:** This is in the jungle a few hours away from a place called San Vicente del Caguan in Southern Columbia, right in the middle of the jungle. And I remember the commander said to me, "You should leave now."

And I left. We drove to a city called San Vicente del Caguan. It took us like three hours together. We slept there and at night we could hear some bombings taking place around where we were. The next morning, we left pretty early and we were surprised that there were no cars on the highway...

**Ramita Navai:** Where were you driving to now?

**Guillermo Galdos:** We were driving to a place called Florencia that was like three and a half hours from San Vicente del Caguan. And I remember that there were no cars on the highway and our driver called Jerry - I still remember - Jerry, he stopped the car and he disconnected the needle that measured the amount gasoline in the car. So it looked like the car was empty, that he didn't have any gasoline, even though we had a full tank.

So I didn't realize why he did that. But then a few moments later, we got stopped by FARC. And you can see that the FARC guerrillas were really excited and they were like leaving the area and they needed cars. So they were stealing cars. And luckily they went inside our car, they look inside and they thought we didn't have any gas.

So they let us go.

**Ramita Navai:** Ah clever.

**Guillermo Galdos:** Yes.

**Ramita Navai:** Clever move Jerry. And why were you trying to get to Florencia?

**Guillermo Galdos:** Because we knew it was not safe to stay in the area. And FARC told us it was not safe. So we were trying to get to Florencia and suddenly no cars on the road. That was bad news. Suddenly we encounter a truck that was crossed in the highway.

I get out my car. I see several FARC guerrillas and they were shooting at the tyres of the truck, I mean, just to make sure that nobody was going to move it. And I remember listening to the bullets bouncing from the wheels. And I said to the guy, "Hey, what are you doing? You know, you're going to hit someone."

And suddenly, while I was talking to them, two Blackhawk helicopters appeared on top of us. It was the first time in my life I saw Blackhawk combat helicopters so close to me

flying. And I remember being able to see the face of the guy that had the weapon on the helicopter door.

And the guerrillas pushed back and they were like under the trees.

Do you know? And I immediately thought, "Uh oh, this is going to get ugly." And suddenly one of the guerrillas fired into the helicopter, I could hear [makes gun sounds] bam, bam, bam, bam, and then the helicopter started spraying with bullets. They had a mini gun that goes like a - sounds like a chainsaw [makes chainsaw noise]. And I remember hearing the trees falling down and it was like - looked like the end of the world, to be honest.

I remember I went down to a ditch and I crawled a little bit to the side. They were fighting for like 10, 15 minutes. And then I assume the helicopters ran out of gasoline. So they went back to refuel and when they left, I stood up and I went to the place where the truck was.

And I remember seeing a female guerrilla that was cut in two. I remember seeing the legs on one side and the torso on the other. And I had been chatting with her 15 minutes before, and then another guerrilla was injured there.

And then somebody approached me and then he said to me, "You see what you do, you journalists?!"

And I say, "Hey man, you know, I have nothing to do with this. You know, I'm just trying to cross, I just interviewed your commander yesterday, look at the interview and all that." And they basically said to me, "Nobody's going to cross. Move away."

I went back to my car and by that time, we've already had like, you know, a queue of cars behind us, like, you know, 10 maybe 15 cars.

And, they kept saying to me, "Hey, Mr. Journalist go and speak with FARC. We need to cross, we need to cross." And the helicopters appeared again. There was another battle. I was a bit more removed, I mean, I was like maybe 150 metres from the area where they were fighting.

And I remember thinking about how this dream that, you know, I had at one point about the peace process and a peace deal was going to be signed. After that event, that dream collapsed.

And I knew that there was going to be war for several years before any agreement was reached.

That was at the beginning of Plan Colombia. You know, those helicopters were part of the American help to fight drug trafficking and FARC in Colombia.

**Ramita Navai:** And what does it look like where you're standing in the area they're fighting? Was it a paved road just in the middle of the jungle?

**Guillermo Galdos:** No, it was a paved road, but it's in the middle of the jungle. You have, you know, big trees next to it. You have rivers crossing and stuff. It's a very green area.

On the top of a small hill and then the road went down and that's where the truck was crossed in the middle of the road. So the first time the helicopters attacked, I was down below with FARC. And then when they left, I managed to come up, you know, and I remember Jerry telling me, you know, I thought they had killed you because obviously I was down there when all this happened.

And then I went back to speak with FARC when the helicopters left for the second time. And I was trying to make them reason that we wanted to go through and I had an interview with their commander that needed to be broadcast. And I even showed them the interview and they didn't give a shit, to be honest.

**Ramita Navai:** So at this point you're kind of pleading for your life because you know that if you stay the helicopters are coming back?

**Guillermo Galdos:** Yes, I knew the helicopters were coming back.

But of course, Columbians in that part of Columbia, they were so used to looking at gun battles and stuff. And I remember that the helicopters were shooting 150 metres away from where we were. And they were like standing up looking at it. It was like they were not taking cover or anything.

And then, you know, I realized that for them, it was normal. It was daily life. But the second time I approached FARC and I asked them, you know, how can we move the thing? I said, there was a sick lady that came in a car that she needed to get through. And they started firing at the wheels of the truck again.

And one of the bullets that bounced hit a lady that was - because there was a group of civilians behind me - and it hit the lady in the leg. And I remember this lady falling down to the floor and I remember seeing this massive hole in her knee and suddenly I realized that the bullet had gone through one leg and it was, you know, it had stayed in the second leg.

So that woman I'm sure that she was not able to walk ever after that. So the lady was shouting. It was this amazing scene. And then the guerrillas were really heated up as well, because, you know, you have other guerrillas that had just been killed by the army. And I remember the whole scene. And at the end, I don't know why, I shouted at these FARC guerrillas and I said, "You see? You see what you've done? I've told you not to shoot, you know, at the tyres because the bullets are bouncing. I told you that before."

And I remember this really young guy, probably he was like 17 and he was looking at me. He was sweating. I remember very clearly his face. And he had like white on the side of his mouth, you know?

And he was like, you could see that he hadn't had any sleep. And probably the girl that was killed was quite close to him. He was in shock. And they were kids. You know, they were just very young people carrying weapons and just being incredibly irresponsible.

And they left the place where the truck was and at the end we managed to cross and it was incredibly traumatic for me.

I mean, what happened with the lady that was next to me and then seeing this female guerrilla cut in two. I remember it shocked me for a while.

**Ramita Navai:** Guillermo, what was going through your head when this was all going on and you were in the middle of it?

**Guillermo Galdos:** I was thinking that, you know, they could kill me. Yes. I thought about that. I could hear the bullets whistling, you know, next to me and the sound of the trees falling down.

I remember I was confused. I thought it sounded like a chainsaw. And then, yes, it was pretty hectic.

**Ramita Navai:** And Guillermo that moment where you thought this was it and you could die, what were the thoughts then that were going through your head? How were you facing death in that moment psychologically?

**Guillermo Galdos:** I thought that I've never been that scared about dying, to be honest, but I thought, you know, when I saw that girl it impressed me.

You know, when you see somebody who has been cut in two by bullets it's not nice. It's incredibly traumatic when you see that like a metre away from you. Especially when you have been talking with that person 15 minutes before. And I thought her face looked at peace.

I remember - because, you know, she had been cut in two by the bullets, her face was intact. You know? And it was obviously white because she lost all her blood but she had a peaceful look on her face. And I remember thinking, how is that one can have such a traumatic death and end up with a smile on your face.

And I just remember thinking, I hope that if ever that happens to me, I just go in peace and you don't feel much.

## [SECOND AD]

**Ramita Navai:** *[INSERT] Hello, it's Ramita Navai here. Before we continue the conversation, I want to thank you for listening to my show. I hope you agree that these stories are not only powerful but important. As I speak to some incredible journalists from around the world about what they've learned from working in dangerous places and how it's changed their perspective it would be great to get your help in sharing their insights.*

*So please do spread the word and subscribe, rate, and review wherever you get your podcasts. I hope you continue to be inspired by the series. And I look forward to you joining me for more episodes. Now back to the show...*

**Ramita Navai:** And how did that change your perspective on life?

**Guillermo Galdos:** I think you realize that, you know, it's just we are so vulnerable all the time and it's just a second that changes things. Literally a second. And it made me aware of, I think, after that I took life - I was more concerned about my security certainly after that event. And it took me to another level of conscience and awareness. I think when about it every time I go to a war zone or to a conflict zone.

**Ramita Navai:** And apart from changing the way you worked and changing your approach to risk and safety, how else did it change you as a person?

**Guillermo Galdos:** I think it made me a better person.

**Ramita Navai:** How?

**Guillermo Galdos:** I think it made me understand that I was living such a privileged life and it was a matter of luck. It was like playing the lottery when you were born, you know?

And some people are lucky, they're born in decent places. And some people are not. And I've always thought what would happen to me if I had been born in a place like Southern Columbia, where my father was a guerrilla, my mother had been killed by the

army or by the guerrillas. And, you know, if I would join the army and have that anger inside to go and kill all the people or those who killed my parents or my sister or my, you know? So you start thinking about those things and you realize that it's a matter of luck.

And in the end, it depends a lot where you grow up and it depends a lot on what surrounds you. And some people are able to overcome those obstacles and to, you know, come through. But I would say that the majority won't.

**Ramita Navai:** Do you think you'd be the same person as you are now if you hadn't experienced some of these traumatic events?

**Guillermo Galdos:** I don't think so.

**Ramita Navai:** How would you be different?

**Guillermo Galdos:** I have - in my case it's quite clear, I think, the example because I have an identical twin brother who does something completely different. He's not a journalist, he's an agronomist, he's an engineer. He, you know, sells and buys wheat around the continent. And he's never understood why I need to go to dangerous areas and report stories from there.

And he's always asking me why I'm so keen on going under the feet of the horses.

**[Laughs]**

I mean, he doesn't understand and we've talked about it before. But I think it's once you see things like that and you consider yourself as a vehicle to tell the stories of those people, that's when you start to begin to understand the power of our work and how we can really sometimes change things or at least make people aware of what's happening around them.

**Ramita Navai:** What did covering that war and specifically that incident teach you about the way the world really works? Did you have any realizations?

**Guillermo Galdos:** I begun to, I think, to understand the war on drugs there.

And when I realized that it was very clear for me that Latin America was putting up the dead and that Europe and the US were putting up their noses. That left me with a feeling of not being fair. That the war was not being taken seriously. And at one point I thought, you know, if they wanted to finish with cocaine they could finish it in two days if they wanted, you know? I didn't understand why they were dragging this war so much and who benefited from it.

**Ramita Navai:** Guillermo, do you think you've become inured to the violence that you've been witnessing?

**Guillermo Galdos:** I think I don't get as surprised as I used to.

**Ramita Navai:** Does that worry you?

**Guillermo Galdos:** It's not that you are immune, but I think because of my experience, you know, what I see doesn't bounce around in my head as much as it used to do in the past. And I think once I understood that I couldn't change the world because that's I think the dream that I had once.

I know I'm 47 years old and I know that, you know, I've covered the war on drugs for 20 years and I know that, you know, I might have exposed a few things, but I'm not going to change it. So once you realize that and you realize that you can expose things and you can make some people think about and you can make some people re-evaluate the way things are being done.

Yes. But we cannot change the world. And also, you know, I cannot stay with all those faces and bodies that I've seen, you know, inside my closet, you know, I know that I need to keep them out and I have a life, you know, I have kids, I have, you know, a family. And yes, I don't want my family - because this is the thing, you know, once you look at your family, I think things changed a lot for me when I had my kids which was 12 years ago. You know, when I had my daughter, I started to think more about the places that I was going to go. And I had seen so many fathers being killed in my life and daughters and sons growing up without their parents that I didn't want to be part of that group of people. So I started taking care of myself more, and it's not that I haven't covered dangerous areas since I had kids.

I have covered a lot of dangerous areas. But I think I play things more carefully and I think I've got a certain amount of experience that allows me to navigate those waters. You know, with some safety.

**Ramita Navai:** I relate to both things you said just there. The fact that that realization that you start doing this because you think you're going to change everything and the realization at some point that dawns on you that hang on a minute my work is not going to change the world. It's not going to stop these wars. And that's quite a depressing moment. And also you're talking about compartmentalizing. You know, separating the terrible things you see, is a way of processing them.

**Guillermo Galdos:** I mean, the stuff that we do, I mean, many people go by, you know, many lives and they don't even get close to that. And I think it is, you know, I feel good that I was given that chance to approach that world and to be able to tell stories from

that part of the world. But then also you realize that the world is not only composed by death and horrific things.

You know, this world also has various, many, many beautiful things that I try to think about those things nowadays and not the horrible things that I've passed through.

**Ramita Navai:** Guillermo, before I come to my last question, I want to ask about your time in the Amazon. You've spent a lot of time in the Amazon with indigenous communities.

What have you learned from them about their attitude to death and fear and dealing with death and fear?

**Guillermo Galdos:** Yes, we've done a lot of, um, sorry, we're just speaking and somebody just send me a WhatsApp message from Honduras that a woman that we met has been killed.

**Ramita Navai:** Oh God.

**Guillermo Galdos:** Part of the... yes. Part of the wave of femicides that central America and Mexico are going through at the moment.

**Ramita Navai:** I'm sorry to hear that. Who was she?

**Guillermo Galdos:** Yeah. It's absolutely disgusting. I'll read you the email. It says, talks about - Oh God. It says, ah, he's telling me about he described it as a Dante-esque event where a man killed this woman that we knew with a machete, killed her daughter and her mother-in-law. The three of them.

**Ramita Navai:** Do you know why?

**Guillermo Galdos:** He's asking me if I might have pictures of this girl in my archives because I filmed with her before. I did a story in Honduras when they killed Miss Honduras just weeks before she travelled to Miss Universe in London a few years ago.

And they went to do a story about her murder and I spend a few days with her mum and her sister. And that's when we met this woman that's just been killed.

**Ramita Navai:** And how do you feel now reading that Guillermo?

**Guillermo Galdos:** I don't know. For some reason it doesn't surprise me. And the way it was done with a machete and the fact that you have a woman, a nine-month-old baby, and the mother-in-law, I mean, three women killed with a machete.

Something that in Europe will look like - you know, it will be headlines for sure. I can guarantee you that, in Honduras it will probably won't even make the afternoon papers.

**Ramita Navai:** And that to me is one of the most depressing aspects of this and I think a really worrying aspect is becoming anured to the violence, is that it's so normal and so every day that you receive an email like that, and you're not surprised.

**Guillermo Galdos:** No, I'm not. I'm not. I actually was speaking with this guy not long ago about doing something in Honduras about women and actually abortion. The situation is really, really bad for women in this part of the world.

And I'm sad and ashamed to say that my continent is the place where more women are killed in the whole world, even more than in the Middle East. You know, it's a mixture of macho attitudes of, you know, the lack of value for life really.

**Ramita Navai:** Guillermo, how often do you get messages and emails like this?

**Guillermo Galdos:** A lot. A lot.

You know? And, yes, they send me pictures of stuff and messages and, you know, all the time. But that's part of I think the network of contacts and people that I know in the region that, you know, some of them they are looking - they see me as a way to voice, you know, their complaints or to voice their worries.

I mean, yes, it's a bit sad sometimes. And I need to disconnect from that because you know, you're on the beach with your family and suddenly you receive a message from somebody in Juarez who says, "Hey, you know, I have this guy who's telling me that his daughter disappeared yesterday. You know, can you please call the guy in the Attorney General's office in Juarez that you met a while ago and tell him to investigate this please? You know, it's been like two days and my daughter had disappeared." And one has to make some phone calls, you know, and try to help. But, again, I cannot fix the world.

**Ramita Navai:** Yeah. Well, I mean, I was asking you about what you've learned from indigenous communities when you got that email.

**Guillermo Galdos:** Yeah. I've worked a lot in the Amazon and I love the Amazon. And one thing that the Amazon has and - people, and you start to understand that I think once you've worked a lot with communities especially that have had a few contact with the Western world or people who have been living in isolation or are in the initial contact as they call it is...

**Ramita Navai:** You made an amazing documentary about an uncontacted tribe.

I absolutely love that documentary, Guillermo.

**Guillermo Galdos:** Yes. Yes. It won the RTS actually. But yeah, I spent a lot of time in the Amazon with that. And what I realized was how normal death was for them. And that surprised me a lot. And I mentioned on one of my reports that uncontacted tribes or tribes living in isolation, voluntarily isolation, they practice infanticide.

And of course all the NGOs jumped when we published that. And I wouldn't understand it if I haven't gone through it. But when you are a nomad tribe and suddenly you get a kid that gets born with six fingers or with a leg that is shorter than the other leg, they will leave the baby there because the baby won't be able to walk, they won't be able to move by itself, and they cannot carry him. And if he has any sort of problems, the most likely is that they will be abandoned. I've been told as well by experts that they do that as well if you're born and you're an identical twin, for example, they will kill one.

And then with uncontacted tribes, their names, they acquired their names by the first person that they kill. It's like a coming of age. So if you live in a tribe that lives in isolation in the middle of the Amazon and you have other tribes that you fight with, clans inside these massive reserves, if they kill a white man, their name is going to be white man. If they kill a guy from another tribe and it's the Mashco-Piro tribe, their name is going to be Mashco-Piro.

And I asked them, "And what's your name before you kill?" And they said to me, "You don't have a name. You are the son of whoever is your father." And that's how they know you until you get into this coming of age. And you realize how death, you know, it's been around in his part of the world for such a long time.

**Ramita Navai:** Guillermo, onto my final question which I ask all of my guests: if there's one piece of wisdom you would give our listeners from everything you've experienced, what would it be?

**Guillermo Galdos:** Don't trust anyone. That will be my piece of advice and don't believe anything until you've seen it yourself.

**Ramita Navai:** Why?

**Guillermo Galdos:** Because there's lots of interests I think in this world of journalism and storytelling.

Nowadays I have to see things. I have to live them in order to tell them. That's what I found out that that's the only way of being accurate and the only way of reporting with the real truth.

I don't believe the journalists that report from hotel rooms and, you know, based on sources that people from here and there, you need to live the situations in order to, you know, be able to speak accurately about them.

**Ramita Navai:** But Guillermo, there's something about that that depresses me to not trust anyone because there's something so cynical about that.

And does that mean we shouldn't trust anyone? Not just in life and in business but in love. Why would that be your...

**Guillermo Galdos:** No. That doesn't apply to love. I think love is a different scenario. But in terms of my work, in terms of what I've learned through my experience is I don't go out trusting people normally.

And it's not that I show them that I don't trust them. No. You know, but in the back of my head, I'm thinking, you know, okay, I get what you're saying but I need to see it by myself. And in order to get a real account of things.

**Ramita Navai:** And is that survival? Do you think that's also what's enabled you...

**Guillermo Galdos:** Completely. Completely. I think that has enabled me to move around and to, you know, not to say too much to the wrong people and, yeah, and not to show sides in any situation. I think one of the things that has kept me alive is the fact that I show the characters that I interview that I am neutral, that I'm willing to listen, and I'm not going to judge them. But that doesn't mean that I trust them.

**Ramita Navai:** And if there's one piece of advice you would give our listeners from having faced death, what would that be? On living life, having experienced what you've experienced.

**Guillermo Galdos:** I think that life is incredibly beautiful and one should rescue the beautiful things of life and not the horror. And sometimes, you know, they come in the same package and the difficult thing is to be able to separate them and to stay with the best. Don't stay with stuff that hurts you and that is going to make your life more difficult. Stay with things that make you grow and enjoy life. Because we only have one.

**Ramita Navai:** Well, Guillermo, I think that's a beautiful message to end on. I think that's a wonderful message to end on. Seeing the beauty in life. And I think if someone like you, who has seen so much suffering and violence, can see the beauty in life, then there's hope for all of us. Guillermo, it's been such a pleasure.

I could talk to you for a long time. You have a lot of stories.

**Guillermo Galdos:** Thank you very much, Ramita. It's been a pleasure to speak with you.

**Ramita Navai:** It's been amazing. Thank you so much, Guillermo.

**Guillermo Galdos:** You're welcome.

**Ramita Navai:** You can watch Guillermo's incredible, award-winning film **FIRST CONTACT: LOST TRIBE OF THE AMAZON** on Netflix if you're outside the UK. For his latest work, check out his page on the [Channel 4 News website](#) He's also on Twitter: @GuillermoGaldos.

Thank you for listening to this episode of **The Line of Fire**. If you'd like to follow me, my Twitter handle is at @RamitaNavai.

And if you've enjoyed this episode, review, and subscribe. And tell your friends they can find us wherever they get their podcasts.

Until next time.

**The Line of Fire** is a podcast from *Aurra Studios*.

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