

## 27. Francisco Alvarez

Well, you see, I remember the 1988 plebiscite. I have several memories, but I have a pre-memory of when it all started, like the campaign, there was a Yes and No campaign. And obviously, you live here in a neighborhood, but it's like politics wasn't discussed much in my home at that time. I mean, we knew things were happening, but it wasn't the main topic of conversation. Maybe it was because my mom had a good job. I didn't experience as many hardships during that time because my mom worked hard, she worked hard, and she had, let's say, not an excellent, but a decent living. So, I didn't personally experience precarity, but I did have that awareness that there was poverty in some places and all that. So, when you watched the campaign advertisements, unintentionally, you saw yourself reflected in them. Because you saw that the country was a sad country, a country lacking joy, and that there were unresolved issues with the people, with the population. So, the campaign was like something that gave you strength, like you would say, "Okay, things are going to change."

I remember one early morning when I was at my house and the house of some neighbors, two cars stopped abruptly and some people got out and went inside, looking for a neighbor. We had a good relationship with that neighbor, so my mom went out in her pajamas and started asking what was going on. It turns out they were looking for that neighbor, the intelligence services. As a child, you would see everything with a child's eyes. Nowadays, you understand the situation because you've talked to the person who experienced and suffered through it, but back then, you didn't know what was happening. It was strange to see two cars, those typical eerie cars, and people getting out. It was intense. So, you would think something was going on, but as a child, you were more concerned with other things like playing and doing kid stuff. Some people have a better grasp of what's happening; some understand it, while others don't. Then these videos started coming out, like from an underground channel, which only certain people had access to. They were like Tele-Analysis. That's when I started watching Tele-Analysis, seeing types of torture and the repression inflicted on people. In addition to that, you would see the campaign advertisements on the mainstream channels, like Channel 13, Channel 7, and Channel 11, which were the channels that existed at that time. I remember this lady who would say, for example, "Give me two little tea bags" of the 'No' materials, just enough for one." At that time, everything was sold separately, like tea in a bag, and it was scarce. You would go buy a quarter or an eighth of oil. The thing is, nowadays, with modernity and the passage of time, you can find a whole liter easily.

So, you know. And when unemployment, low wages, and labor issues started to become visible in the neighborhoods, that's when you really identified with the "No" side. I remember going to the city center to stores like Falabella. I was wearing a large "No" badge, a huge one, you know? Imagine walking into those stores, Falabella, where anyone could enter at that time, or Almacenes Paris, because that's what it was called back then, now it's just Paris, you know? I would go there because they would buy my clothes. The salesperson would look at me like this and glance around, searching for something, you know? And they would say, "Oh, I'm with you too." they had a small badge, something really tiny, like a fingernail, barely visible, but I wore it under my lapel, secretly, because a lot of "No" and "Yes" merchandise started being sold on the streets, you know? So, that's how I walked around with my badge, right? And all of that stuff, you know?

But I was never one to go to protests or marches, you know. Then, there was this friend of mine, who lived in my neighborhood and was the same age as me, and suddenly his mom started taking us to the Arte Normandie cinema, you know. I started to discover things that I kind of suspected with him, with his mom. I'll always remember her because she opened my eyes to certain things, well, we were kids, but you were still witnessing what was happening. So, it was like after that, I was on the "No" side. I would buy a flag, some plastic horns that were sold for a while, and you, you, you know, made a huge noise. Then, I remember buying the cassette with the "No" song, I have it on cassette. Now I remember. And I have it at home. And the cassette, imagine at that time, the cassette. And I would play it on my cassette player, you know, and I would listen to "Chile..." whenever I wanted, not just on the campaign ads. I could listen to it whenever I wanted because I had the cassette. Then the final gathering was going to be at Stop 1 on Gran Avenida. Everyone was going to meet there. Today, one of the groups passed by Departamental Avenue, and there were people with Pinochet's face, you know. Not exactly with a mustache like Ruche, but similar, and others with a sign of Pinochet turned upside down, and the old man with a mustache like a cat, all sorts of things. And with my friend, we started walking and we reached Panamericana Avenue, and everyone was walking in that direction, you know. And the event was at Stop 1, but on Panamericana, not Gran Avenida. That was the end of the gathering where they said, "The campaign is over, now everyone vote for the No," that's what we heard on the loudspeakers. We didn't manage to reach the main stage in the end.

Well, then, afterward, it's like you went to bed, and the next day, people woke up very early, you know, like that. My mom went to a school over there, within walking distance. I remember she took about 5 hours, a long time. It was crazy. I also remember that my brother went to the top of the hill, but here within the commune, yeah, but it was a longer walk. Nowadays, there's more convenience when it comes to voting. I always remember, and I recall it with great pleasure, that day because in my house, they made "mote con huesillo" because it was a very hot day, I don't know, really, it was very hot, scorching. So when they arrived, it was like a refreshing drink, you know, and I remember a neighbor, there was like an immense line, so my brother told me that the gentleman from the corner went to vote, and they let him pass, like, among the first ones, and then the old man came out with the cane on his shoulder, passing it to everyone, and I joined the line where he had been. And the old man voted in no time, and my brother told me he made a big deal out of it. So, I remember the day was intense. I remember playing ball with the kids, my friends, in the street, just playing ball in the street, and then there was this desperate feeling to find out what had happened.

So, you were like, "Hey, what happened?" and there was uncertainty because you didn't have information about it. You would watch those typical political programs where they would talk about it, you know, and you didn't know who had won, who hadn't. They would give a percentage of the "Yes" winning when in reality it was the "No" that was leading, so the electoral process was strange. Then you would think, "What's going on?" And suddenly, if I'm not mistaken, I don't remember well, the power went out. Some people say the power went out. I don't have a clear memory of whether the power went out in this area. But I do remember that they aired something. It was really bizarre. I used to watch channel 13 a lot more than channel 7 at home. And I remember they showed "The Coyote and the Road Runner." Like, 40 minutes of cartoons at that time. I also remember someone in my house saying, "Hey,

turn on Radio Cooperativa." It was like they said, "Cooperativa's news is reporting." It was more reliable, like if there was a certain news, you trusted it and believed it. And during times of protest, for example, you would listen to Cooperativa on a battery-powered radio when there was no electricity.

And why? You believed it because Cooperativa was saying it. And well, after that, I think I went to bed, to sleep, without knowing who had won. And the next day, I found out that the "No" had won, and it was a joyous moment. I remember that night, the next day, celebrating with my neighbors along a street called Paseo Bronner, like, not exactly a drumming group, but like a march, going through Bronner, celebrating and all that, playing the horn and chanting, "It fell, it fell," you know, and that was it. And I remember that my brother, it seemed like he didn't participate in the celebration that my mom and I had attended, and I realized that he was for the "Yes." So I said to him, "Aren't you going to celebrate? Aren't you happy?" And he told me no. So I realized that he had a different political inclination, but we got along really well, he had his thoughts and I had mine. But as they say, at the table, we don't discuss politics, football, or religion. Everyone has their own way of thinking. And that's when I realized that he had a different mindset. And that was, like, the next day. But then, there, you start seeing the news, of course, the victory and all that stuff. The joy, well, in quotes.