

37. Jose Peña

Well, you see, I lived through the entire plebiscite process. My father was in the military, so I lived in a place where only military lived, and it was like a fortified area. There were guards stationed at every corner who were supposed to protect us because we were part of the military family and all that. So I experienced the plebiscite process in a transition from living in that place to moving to a civilian area, I mean, leaving this neighborhood where there were only military people and going to a place where there were ordinary people. So I didn't understand many of the things that were happening. One of the things that impressed me was how entertaining the campaign ads on TV were, both the "Yes" and the "No" campaigns. For me, it was a great pastime because it was before the news, in the late afternoon. It was like a family gathering, I remember. Obviously, we couldn't talk about it. I felt there was a certain sense of persecution because, of course, one couldn't express their political opinion anywhere. And as a child who had been raised in a bubble, I never really understood what was happening in the country. I lived close to military personnel because my father was in the military, and that was the explanation I gave myself. When we moved, we went to live near my grandmother's house. We watched the campaign ads there, the "Yes" and the "No" ads.

So, to me, they seemed great because there were colors, there were bands. I remember that I got to know a band called De Quirusa, and they were like proper rappers, and rap was something that didn't exist or was not known. So, I remember being really fascinated by those things. On the day of the plebiscite, I remember that everyone went to vote, but the children didn't come out. The children, the ones who were in the house where I was, everyone else was playing and waiting expectantly because I feel like the people who lived in that place weren't so scared, but rather they had a lot of enthusiasm. There was hope that things were going to change. So, I remember people crying and all that. But I remember that they didn't let me go out to celebrate. It was a working-class neighborhood, where there were also poorer people. So, there were people who were very indignant about the dictatorship. At that time, it was Conchalí, actually, because the municipality of Recoleta didn't exist yet. Conchalí was like a complex of apartment buildings where many people lived. So, in a few square meters, there were many people, lots of children, lots of adults. I remember that in the apartment below, there was a lady who supported Pinochet, and she would put up posters of Pinochet and vote "Yes," and I don't know what else.

And we lived in fear that, as a retaliation against the person who lived below our apartment, we would be affected by a bomb or something, you know. Because the lady and everyone talked about this lady who was a bit crazy because she watered the plants on rainy days. I remember that was very interesting. The pro-Pinochet lady was considered crazy because, well, she would water even on rainy days. Of course, what she said was that the water would clean places where people gathered, you know, but she watered even when it rained. Everything was wet, and so she was the crazy lady. And, of course, they didn't let me celebrate, they didn't let me go out to celebrate because it could be dangerous. So, all my friends were celebrating, and there were like marches happening between the apartment blocks, around the block. Not exactly drumming bands, but there were marches, a small march, celebrating and saying that the tyrant had fallen, "and he will fall, and he will fall," and I remember perfectly, "and he has fallen," and they sang, "and he has fallen." On the day of the plebiscite, they started singing, "and he has fallen, the tyrant has fallen." So, of course, I remember feeling frustrated after going through the whole process of getting excited with the campaign ads, of identifying with them. In fact, I was a child, I didn't understand anything, but I identified with the "No" side, of course, because the "Yes" side was

strange, there were people I didn't like, it was reserved, it was more Pinochet. The campaign ads for the "No" side, on the other hand, had actors, artists. And in fact, shortly before leaving the military housing complex, I started visiting a theater company called Teatro Q. My parents had separated, so we didn't have to move houses because of that. In the midst of the loneliness that children experience when their parents separate, I began visiting a theater company called Teatro Q, which was two blocks away from the military housing complex. So, I would sneak away because I would ask for a 10-peso coin, I remember that was the voluntary contribution one had to leave, and I would go around the whole housing complex following the theater company's procession. Obviously, they didn't pass by the military housing, but they would go near there and invite people to come and see the play, which was Romeo and Juliet. Samuel Villarroel was the protagonist, with Loreto Araya as Juliet, and since I went every day, I memorized the entire play. I knew it from start to finish, from the moment they shouted "shit, shit, shit" as actors. Before joining them, I would shout "shit shit shit" there. And that's when I started to realize that there was something against someone, you know? It was like the actors were speaking out against something.

After the play, they would stay and play the guitar, singing "La Cigarra". I remember, for example, that I heard "La Cigarra" there for the first time, and I loved it and knew the song and I would sing it, even though I had no idea about the context of the song or anything like that. But I sang it with great enthusiasm. That's when I started to understand that I was experiencing a process, which was the plebiscite. Soon after that, my parents separated. We had to leave the military housing complex and go to my maternal grandmother's house. And there, amidst all the excitement about the upcoming plebiscite and the fall of the dictator, there was a festive atmosphere.

There was hope. Unlike in the military housing complex, here people had hope. They knew that the No side would win. I remember once I said to my grandmother, who worked for the Air Force as a cook in a military cafeteria, just to say something as a child, I said, "Why don't you vote No?" She immediately hushed me and told me never to say that again out loud because someone might overhear and she could get into trouble at work since she was associated with the military and worked in a military facility.

So there, for me, the most significant thing was the campaign. I understood that there was a big commotion, that there was the Yes side against the No side, and that we were living under a dictatorship. I don't remember anything about disappearances, deaths, or anything like that because it wasn't something that was discussed in my household. I didn't understand those things until I was older, in high school, when I learned about it. I realized there were arrests and disappearances when the Valech reports and everything that started with the transition to democracy. That's when I began to find out. Before that, I was just a child who played among the military and felt protected by them. So, I didn't have that perspective. It's like an anecdote that I can tell about the day of the plebiscite within the general context of the time.

I remembered something else. My dad and mom, since my dad was in the military, he was compelled. Well, I don't think he was forced. I believe he did it willingly, but there was a huge demonstration that I remember seeing on TV, in support of Pinochet. Do you remember? There were many people, and it seemed very massive. Then, my dad confessed to me that, in essence, the people who were there were the military and the families of the military, encouraged by almost like a military order, to attend the demonstration dressed as civilians and with their families to support the dictatorship. I remember

seeing for the first time signs on sticks, with a picture of Pinochet, and they were left in the bathroom of my house after the march. Well, my house was in turmoil, and my parents were really upset. They were separating, and it happened in '88, '87, '88, '89. I think they officially separated in '88. It was a double ending, clearly. And, in fact, I experienced the end of the dictatorship thinking that my parents had separated for good, that we wouldn't move to another house, and it was a celebration, you know? [other speaker] "You were like 9 or 10 years old, right?" Yeah, around 9 or 10 years old. I was in fourth or fifth grade, I understood, you know? I could already read, I knew what the signs said, and all that. I was starting to understand many things.