

# A detail reflection of my neighbourhood

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Una detallada Reflexión de mi barrio

## Part 1

### Images and memories of my barrio: Calle Esperanza (Hope St.)

What follows is a recollection of images and memories of Carlos's barrio during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. It is a vivid account of a cultural microcosm of life as found even today in the thousands of barrios of Chile and Latin America. "*In **calle Esperanza** there was a rich variety of things, people and situations interacting daily with one another and forging, at the end of a lengthy period of time, a unique story.*" This is part of this story as Carlos remembers it many years later in Scotland, his adopted country for the last 30 years. It is written in an anecdotal and ethnological form contained within the cultural and historical context of Chile.

### *What is a barrio?* (A rough guide)

A barrio can be a geographical location in a given city. It is determined by several factors - By the type of people that live in it: upper, middle, working class or a mixture of the three, by the physical location of the barrio within a given city or by the specific features of a given barrio: barrio pobre (poor), barrio rico (rich), bohemia, comercial or barrio aburrido (dull) etc. Santiago is a real mixture, as many other cities are. It is made up of many barrios, many of them very different and very distinctive from one another: Barrio Bellavista (bohemian), Barrio Brazil (middle class), La Legua (Barrio working class), Barrio Yungay (working and middle class).

Let explore some Santiaguino barrios according to the location and the type of people that live in them: **The barrios altos** commonly known as barrios **jaibones** (from the English word 'high' meaning alto) are economically affluent. Typical areas of barrios **altos** or **jaibones** were Vitacura, Providencia, Las Condes, Lo Curro and a more recent one, La Dehesa. In these places abound the "nanas" maids who made the Chilean writer Jose Donoso a good subject to write about. Probably the wealthiest and most influential people in Chile live there. The dictator Pinochet owns a house there (he owns several). In La Dehesa houses can easily cost several million pounds. All these barrios are located towards the Andes Mountains where the quality of the air is better. Typical middle class areas of Santiago before Carlos left Chile were Ñuñoa, La Reina, Providencia etc. Here too the "nanas" are plentiful. Typical working class areas of Santiago were, **Renca, Barrancas, Cerro Navia, Carrascal, La Cisterna, La Pintana, and San Miguel**. These are the Barrios supplying the well off with "nanas" and manual workers. In these areas the quality of the air is very bad and they represent some of the poorest and most deprived barrios in all of Chile. However, it should be wrong to assume that in them we are only going to find poor people far from it, in these barrios we are also going to find all type of professional people living in very nice houses and apartments. They too may have "nanas".

*" I would say that barrio also means belonging, means appreciation, hate, love, good and bad memories and, very importantly, it means the history of the people who populate it.*

## Carlos's street

Was part of the larger barrio called barrio Yungay a barrio which was born, according to Jaime Aymerich\*, in the 1840s, designed by the French architect Jean Herbage and it got its name to commemorate a battle that had taken place some years earlier in Yungay (Peru) between Chile and a Peruvian-Bolivian alliance. It is situated next to the barrio of Balmaceda also built in the 19th century. It was within walking distance from the barrio Brazil. The barrio Brazil was middle class and had its origins in the 19th century. At one time this barrio housed the richest people of Santiago. Interesting European architecture was noticeable in many of the buildings. Carlos's barrio in his childhood was a mini-world located in Esperanza Street between Mapocho St. in the south and Yungay St. in the North. This mini barrio was near to many interesting places such as San Pablo St and Matucana St., La Quinta Normal, La estación Yungay, la Plaza Yungay known as La Plaza del Roto, La Plaza Brazil and well known shopping areas in San Pablo St between the street of Matucana avenue and Lord Cochrane Street and Matucana St, and between La Estacion Central in the south and Balmaceda road in the north. An equivalent of these streets in Edinburgh would be Leith Walk, Great Junction Street: In a small plaza in front of the Estacion Yungay was found the Avenida Matta "bus" terminal (**el paradero de las micros**) it was also a favourite meeting place for children to arrange fights after school. Carlos was one of them. All the places mentioned were relatively near to very populous and popular barrios such as **la Quinta Normal**, **la Estación Central**, **Carrascal** etc. In **Carrascal** there was a bridge, a paper mill (**la papelera**), a factory belonging to a well known multinational, La Indus-Laver (or UniLever as we know it in Scotland). In San Pablo St. there were **librerías**, (book shops) **farmacias**, (chemists) **zapaterías**, (shoe shops), **talabarterías** (leather-goodshops), **abarrarotes**, (grocers), **ferreterías** (ironmongers), **sastrerías**, (tailors' shops), **yerberías**, (herbalists' shops) **compra y venta**, (selling and buying of assorted goods), **mueblerías**, (furniture shops) and, of course, restaurants, cafes, cinemas (called teatros) and dance halls, such as the famous "Fronton" which was placed in San Pablo St. near Matucana Street near the San Camilo Cafeteria shop. Esperanza St. was within walking distance from other mini barrios such as Libertad St, Sotomayor, Cueto, St., Herrera St., Maipu St., Chacabuco St. Carlos Street, that is, Esperanza St., was located about 35 minutes walk or about 20 minutes by bus from **Plaza de Armas**. During Carlos' time in Chile, it was the most important square of Santiago, and a key feature of the city centre. Esperanza St. was in many respects an industrial barrio, with many small factories with small and big businesses which provided jobs for the people of the area. Here we could find for example Tizona, the biggest guitar factory in Chile at the time, and **La lechera del Sur**, a large dairy product factory: "*I worked for six years at Tizona*". Esperanza St. was a working class because the majority of the people earned their living in factories, offices, shops, street markets, etc:

\* Jaime Aymerich Hegnahuer is a Professor of sociology at the Universidad de Chile and the Universidad Bolivariana. Look at the internet for: "El Barrio Yungay y sus funciones particulares".

*“Yes! It is interesting to note that in Esperanza St between Balmaceda Avenue and Mapocho Street, a distance of about a kilometre, we could find, intermingled together, a good mixture of deprived and middle class areas with very poor people on the one hand and very well educated people with professional and skill jobs (teachers, accountants etc) on the other. Some of these people lived in fairly good old houses, some of them with large patios with fruits trees included”*

Not far from Esperanza St. there were a number of middle-class streets, like **la calle Catedral**, a street that, in a not very distant past, was very popular with the middle classes of Santiago. Esperanza St. during the 50s, 60s and early 70s was located minutes away from one of the most notorious and poorest shanty towns of the city of Santiago (which at that time had a population of 3.5 million people): the famous ‘población’ **La Nueva Matucana**. Shanty towns are known in Chile as **poblaciones callampas** that is, mushrooming communities. The name derives from the idea that this type of dwelling sprung fast in cities like the mushrooms do near the trees. These shanty towns are often made of various types of huts or sheds, made of wood, plastic, cardboard or other types of similar material thrown out as waste by the factories of the industrial cities. These materials are then picked up by the poor in order to build their modest dwellings on waste land. **La Nueva Matucana** was situated on the banks of the Mapocho River, that boring dirty river which descends all the way from the Andes Mountain on its journey to the sea not far from (**un basural**) and the popular railway track connecting Santiago and Valparaíso and the **Mapocho** railway station with **Central** railway station via a very long tunnel which run all the way below Matucana Street and underneath the extreme popular Quinta Normal, the big park which Carlos was so fond of in his childhood.

*“Many people who live in shanty towns are from rural and remote areas. Many families come to live in the shanty-towns of the cities in order to find jobs, better health services and schools for their children, in other words, people come in search of better opportunities and prosperity”.*

**La Nueva Matucana** was a big shanty and famous because it was supposed to be “the” place where some of the most notorious delinquents from Santiago used to live. In point of fact, many “bad” people (**gente de mal vivir**) did live there. It would be wrong, however, to assume that all the people there were delinquents. On the contrary, the great majority were working people and their only sin was to be very poor and unable to afford a decent place to live. In Chile, as in the rest of Latin America, working people who come from very distant rural areas in search of a better future end up living in shanty towns from which they expect one day to move on. **La Nueva Matucana** was typical of this phenomenon. A famous character of **la Matucana** was **El Cholo bandido** a handsome, dark skinned, curly haired man famous for his many gold teeth. He was feared (**temido**) by all in the barrio and had been in prison (**en cana**). However Carlos does not remember him doing anything wrong. Another famous inhabitant of this shanty was the French priest and painter Antoine Knibily. *“Mr Knibily came to live here in 1958 to do pastoral work. He lived here for 16 years. His work had been exhibited in many famous art galleries of the world: Japan, France, Japan, Chile and the United States.”*

Not far from Esperanza St. and La Nueva Matucana was **La Escuela Alemana no 16**, (Libertad St.) where Carlos went to Primary School for the first three years. From

there he moved to another school in Herrera St. to finish Primary education before joining the so called workforce of Chile.

During the coup of General Pinochet many people from this shanty town were assassinated. Here we some of them:

Alvaro Javier Acuña Torres, 25 years, married with two children, a painter.

Miguel Hernán Moreno Caviedes, 18 years, unemployed, single.

Miguel Zaldivar Arriagada, 28 years. Was about to marry on the 25th of septiembre, has a wife and was pregnant. He worked in a lamp factory.

Carlos René León Morales, 28 years. A cobbler. Married to Patricia Cárcamo who was waiting for a child.

Sergio Emilio Aguilar Nuñez, born in 1945, single.

José Oscar Machuca Espinoza, 27 years. He worked in "ATLÁNTIDA" a Pasta factory.

Jose Alfredo Vidal Molina, 27 years, a worker, married and two children

José Sergio Alegría Higuera, 24 years. He worked in la Frutera.

Luis Eleuterio Mardonado Gallardo, born in 1952. worked in la Frutera.

*"Los dos últimos muchachos de arriba vivían muy cerca. Salieron juntos en la tarde del 11 de octubre para ir al teatro. "Se supone que los tomaron por Matucana. Deben haber sido fusilados en la noche del 11 de octubre y quedaron en el Mapocho hasta el 12 de octubre a las 12:30 horas en que fueron reconocidos por sus familiares".*

*"The last two boys above lived near to each other. On the evening of the 11<sup>th</sup> of October they went out together to the cinema. It is believed that they were detained in Matucana Road. They must have been shot dead on the night of the 11<sup>th</sup> of October and left in the Mapocho river until about 12.30 of the 12<sup>th</sup> of October date in which were recognised by their relatives".*

### ***Esperanza Street, its architecture and that of the "conventillos".***

Carlos believes that most of the houses in the area were built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and others in the first quarter of the 20s century. They were made of different materials: **adobe**, **ladrillos** (bricks) and **cemento** (cement). The houses were very different from each other. From an architectural point of view, there was no specific style defining the barrio Esperanza. Perhaps the most noticeable feature was that most of the houses were single storey. Another prominent feature was that a number of the houses had beside them a **cité** at time called **pasaje**.

These **cités** or **pasajes** were entrances, sometimes with a gate, followed by what appeared to be a long rectangular narrow patio with well maintained rooms on both sides like little small cells. Within, one could see that they were very crowded, tiny flats of one or two rooms with a minute patio, occasionally converted into a very small living room. Some, but not all, of these **cités** in Esperanza St. were similar to tiny and very crowded shantytowns and were known as **Conventillos**. They were very rundown and dirty places, often without electricity. They were dominated in the middle by a wooden rectangular open box called the **alteza**, resting on two wooden-legged platform called **caballetes**. The **alteza** was used by all the people of the **conventillo** either to wash their clothes, using **Jabòn Gringo** ("Gringo soap") - a job normally done by the women - or to wash their bodies as satisfactorily as they could manage. The **alteza** was commonly placed in the middle of the **conventillo** beside a water tap and the drainage system. At the rear of the **conventillo**, one would typically

find three little compartments with wooden doors. These were the smelly, dirty toilets and an improvised shower. It was here where people could empty the well known **bacinicas**, the portable metal containers used at night as chamber pots. *“In those days one could see plenty of dogs, cats and rats. Of course, many of these little rooms were kept clean inside and had a wooden floor. These conventillos had many visitors. There were people selling different types of merchandise to be paid for in instalments and also duos of legless or blind musicians playing with guitar and maracas. I adored them.”* In Argentina, for example, these **conventillos** were “the” places where the European immigrants and rural **Gauchos** lived together, helping to develop the famous tango music, as the communal patios were used to practice the dance.

The most important and interesting building was in the corner of Eperanza St and Yungay St. It was that of **La Iglesia de Yungay** - a very tall Catholic church, made of **ladrillos** (bricks) and dominated by a huge tower. In Carlos’s time it was a convent for girls, run by the Carmelites. Carlos used to be an altar boy and went to mass every day before going to school. *“From time to time we used to hear stories that some of the girls from the **convento** had committed suicide, but I cannot confirm this.”* **La Iglesia Yungay** was an imposing presence amid very poor buildings of the barrio.

Not very far from the barrio there was the metal structure covering **La Estación Central**, (an important Santiago railway station between **Alameda** Road and **Matucana** Road. This huge structure had been designed by Gustav Eiffel and prefabricated in France by Le Creuzot Company. It was installed in Chile in 1897. Inside the park known as **la Quinta Normal**, very close to **Esperanza** Street, there were fine neo-classical buildings such as the one housing the **Museo de Historia Natural** (which contains the embalmed dog of a former president of Chile) and another building built by Eiffel’s workshops in Paris. Many structures, including bridges and churches, were built by Eiffel’s workshops in Paris and shipped to Chile and other parts of Latin America.

### ***The houses of the barrio.***

Few of them were in good condition and many were in great need of repair. Houses in poor barrios are commonly damaged or destroyed by earthquakes and, indeed, the poor state of the barrio houses was mainly due to the great numbers of **temblores** shaking buildings constructed with the poorest quality materials. Houses in the barrios of Santiago almost always looked run down, as the people did not have **plata** (money) to fix them and the State could not afford to provide grants for this purpose.

### ***Who were the people who lived in calle Esperanza?***

Children, children and more children. They were the soul of the street, although some of them would die at a very early age. There were also many unskilled people without a specific profession, who had occasional odd jobs and who were generally good **“para el copete”** (at raising a glass). These people would work in factories as **obreros**, or in the street markets (**ferias libres**). Then there were the hard-working skilled and professional people who did have permanent jobs in offices and regular incomes - not sufficient, however, to move up the social ladder to the barrios **jaibones** for example. These people were technicians, mechanics, electricians, and two or three

of them were teachers at university level. There were also the unemployed by their own choice and the ‘**curaditos**,’ several of whom had acute cirrhosis of the liver.

**Los patos malos** or **Los malulos** (the Bad Guys) were a special feature of the barrio. These were, in general, youngsters from working families. Why were they different from the rest? They were individuals who, from time to time, would function “outside the law”. In many ways they represented a threat. Some of them would bully people and give the barrio a bad name. Because of this, they were singled out by the majority of the inhabitants of the barrio. These people were often thieves with different specialities: **Cuenteros, lanzas a chorro, monreros, escaperos**. They would operate outside their own barrio. (At the time, there was a code of conduct in this respect). There was also another category of **patos malos** who from time to time would operate inside the barrio, but mainly targeting outsiders. These were called **los cogoteros** and they carried knives or other types of blades, such as **cortaplumas** and **estoques**, useful weapons **para el cogoteo**. There were also the **cuchilleros** who were always ready for a fight with knives if the occasion arose. Although all these people were present in the barrio of Calle Esperanza during Carlos’s youth, none of them committed any murder or was jailed for a long term.

“It is important to remember that most people in Esperanza Street were honest and hard worker people”.

### **Las putas (The prostitutes)**

Another important group of people who lived in the barrio were the prostitutes. They were very few in number but quite noticeable. However, no prostitution took place in the barrio itself as, not far from the barrio Esperanza, there were several well known brothels in **Maipu** St. near Alameda Av: they were known as **Las putas de calle Maipu**. The writer Edward Bello mentioned them in his work *El Roto* during the year of 1908 and 1915. In the direction of Lord Cochrane St. there were **las casas de puta** of **calle San Martin** - an up market type of brothel. Both areas were used by all types of working people. One of the ‘ladies’ who used to run one of the whorehouses of Maipu St was a famous character of calle Esperanza. She was a ‘**cabrona**’, (a “madame”). **La Chela**, as she was known in the barrio, was a well built and popular woman with **un tajo en la cara**, (a scar across her face) and she could readily face up to anybody, including a man with a knife in his hand, and take him on. Carlos does not have bad memories of her because, in the barrio, La Chela’s habit was to defend the weakest people of the street. **Ir a putas** (visiting prostitutes), in Carlos’s time, was one the most important experiences for any male youth. There were several worries about it, though, and the main one was catching venereal deceases, although AIDS was unknown then. However few men would go to houses of prostitution openly. One deterrent factor for young men was their religious background, Chile being a very Catholic country. In the barrio, there were also a few homosexuals, referred to as **los maricones**. These men were very vulnerable and very much exposed to abuse from people like **los patos malos**. These homosexuals usually earned a living as workers and one of them used to run one of the several **pensiones** in the barrio. **Una pension** is run by a person in his/her house and consists of providing lunches to one’s **pensionistas**, mainly workers from the many factories based in the barrio. Carlos’s step-mother used to run a **pensión** and, every Saturday about midday, he would accompany her outside the factories to wait to be paid when the workers collected their weekly wage. Some of the factories of Esperanza St. were: **Virutex** (producing

**virutillas**, the fine steel wool pads used to clean pots and pans), **Boronoff, La lechera del Sur, Tizona, La litografía Fernandes and La fundición Libertad**. The Virutex plant was famous because of the frequent fires that would break out there at night, with people on the night shift locked inside. Carlos remembers more than one person being killed in these circumstances.

A typical group of the barrio were the so called **hijos de puta** (“sons of bitches”), men who beat their wives and children when drunk. This, unfortunately, was a recurrent situation in the poorer families.

In the barrio there were also **los tiraos al lacho**, the macho type who were always ready to shout compliments (the popular “**piropos**”) at a beautiful girl,: “ **Mijiiiita rica la acompaño!** “. Also very much part of the barrio were the so called **buenos pa'l hueveo** (also known as **buenos pa'l columpio or buenos pa' la talla**), people who were good at telling jokes or poking fun at their friends. In the latter category were some of Carlos's friends like el Perico, el Iván, el Negro José, el Guatón Nelson, el Catrutro etc. And then there were **las cabras bonitas**, the nice looking girls! It must be said that the barrio Esperanza was adorned by a bunch of very pretty girls. These were the ones that tended to marry first.

### **Streets entertainments**

#### **Juegos (games)**

Barrios are very lively places and Esperanza St. was far from boring. In an era when television did not exist, vehicles were few and the weather was so good that people spent a great deal of time playing in the streets, adults and children amused themselves playing different games outside their houses. These games cost almost nothing and were very enjoyable. In those days, boys played their own games and girls different ones, but sometimes they would play together such as : **el juego de las naciones, jugar al alto** - both games played with a ball - or **el “un dos tres momias !”**

#### **Volantines (kites)**

A popular game mainly for boys and adults was **elevar volantines\*** (flying kites) and **echar comisiones** (a form of kite warfare). The tradition of playing with kites in Chile is interesting since it is not a matter of just launching a kite and trying to keep it high in the sky. That would be very boring. Once a kite is very high up, a boy would immediately have expected to **echar comisiones**, that is, to try to attack, or be attacked in the sky by, somebody else's kite flown on a special type of string called **hilo curado** (“treated string”). There were even children and adults who, instead of using **hilo curado**, used very fine copper wire. This practice was always condemned by the police and the media, as this metal wire frequently came into contact with the live electricity cables carried on posts in the streets, with tragic consequences. Around September (spring time in central Chile) it was common to see a number of kites very high in the sky playing the game of **echando comisiones**. The kite was controlled from the ground and the aim was to place the kite string on top of, or underneath, someone else's kite string. Once the connection was established in the sky both players, separated by several streets, began to manipulate their own kites by pulling the string very slowly back and forward like a saw.

*“Kites arrived in Chile a long time ago and proved to be a very popular game. An edict of the 2nd of October of 1875 proclaimed that anybody found on the roof of the houses and causing damage to it as a result of flying*

*kites, was going to be put in prison for six days. This measure was taken because of the numbers of accident, involving people walking in the streets, caused by broken tiles falling down from the roof.*

But before this could take place there was, of course, a preparation period called **curar el hilo**, treating the string with powdered glass and glue (**cola**). After the treatment, the string became known as **hilo curado** and was ready to be used. The best glass for treating the string was that from fluorescent lighting tubes. The thickness of the string was very important too, with number 10 being used for standard kites (very light). Number 4, was better but a little heavier for light kites and number 0 was the standard one for heavier and most sophisticated kites called **pavos** (“turkeys”). The best known make of kite strings was **hilos Cadenas**. It was very important that the glass was ground into a powder, the finer the better. To do this, some people would smash the fluorescent tubes with a hammer and then put the small pieces of glass in a can. The can would then be sealed and taken by some of the so-called “specialists” to the railways track in Balmaceda Road, not far from Esperanza Street, where trains commuting between Santiago and Valparaíso would pass over it. (No-one considered the possible consequences). Around **la línea del tren**, one could find many **animitas** with flowers. These were tiny road-side shrines to mark the spot where someone had been run over by a train. After the glass had been pulverised, by whatever means, the **carretilla con hilo** (the reel) would then be put into a container with the warm glue or **cola** in it. Two people would then take it to two trees, separated by a couple of metres, and tie one end of the string to one of the trees. One person would then take the tin with the reel inside and walk with the glued string towards the other tree followed very closely by the other person, holding in his hand a piece of hardboard containing the powdered glass. The string, now impregnated with the glue, would slide over the glass powder and become coated by it. The two people would walk back and forth between the trees until the string ran out. After this, the string was left to dry for a couple of hours. Because of the treatment, the string had to be handled very carefully with gloves to avoid cuts to the hands. The treated string would then be stored as a ball (**pelota de hilo curado**) or in a big reel (**carrete**) as the volume of the string had increased greatly. One guy, nick-named **El camello**, from the barrio Herrera, was the champion of the **comisiones** game. In the Santiago sky it was common to see, very high up, stray kites with long pieces of string still attached to them. They had been cut off (**mandado cortado**) in battle. Children in the streets would run after them with long wooden sticks in order to try to catch the tale of the dangling string. Some of these kites would occasionally end up tangled in the electricity cables from whence they could be retrieved. Unfortunately, many children, and adults, would get electrocuted in the process.

### ***Other games***

Other games played in the barrio were: card games like **el poker**, **tele**, **el monte a la escoba**. People would meet in their homes to play cards for money throughout the night, by candlelight if necessary. Although the barrio had electricity in the street and in most houses, some homes had none, especially those in the poor **conventillos**. Another popular game played for money was dice, ‘**los dados**’. A popular game among adults and children was **Rayuela** and this was a favourite of Carlos’s. It was played either with **tejos** (heavy metal discs weighing about 100 grams and about 3 inches in diameter) or old heavy Chilean coins. These were thrown by a player from a distance of about five or six metres into a small inclined rectangular muddy area called the **cancha**, which was crossed by a thin, white cord called the **pitilla**. Each



player was allowed two tejos or two coins to be thrown at the **cancha de rayuela**, one after the other. Points were given to the player who managed to put the coins nearest the **pitilla** or, even better, to land a coin on top of the **pitilla** (a “quemada”). This game was played by a lot of people in the street, scoring points either individually or in pairs (**en parejas**).

There were also many forms of games with marbles (**el juego de las bolitas**). A well known one was “the three holes” (**los tres hoyitos**). It might be described as a type of miniature golf played, in this case, with fingers. There were also many games using **cajetillas** (discarded cigarette packets).

In the barrio, children used to assign a certain values to each type of **cajetilla** and then play different games (marbles, for example) pretending that the cigarette packets were money. Foreign and rare **cajetillas** had greater value. “*My friends and I used to go to the Cerrillo international airport to look for these cajetillas*”.

In the **bares**, people would have played **al cacho**, a game played with dice. Other games played by children were **al corre al anillo**, **al corre corre la guaraca** or simply **al luce** (hopscotch), etc.

#### *Teatros (Cinemas) in the old days they were known as biografos.*

Most people in the barrio could afford to go to the **teatro**, that is, to go to the cinemas of the barrio. Famous **teatros** included **El teatro Minerva**, located in Chacabuco and San Pablo, **El teatro Colón** (Maipu con San Pablo), **El teatro O’Higgins** (Ricardo Cumming con San Pablo). Here, people like Carlos and ‘los cabros’ could spend hours watching the latest Mexican films “**de Rancheros**” with famous Mexican singers of the time : **Miguel Aceves Mejia**, **Luis Aguilar**, **Rosita Quintana**, some directed by the Mexican-based Chilean **Tito Davidson**. Favourite Mexican films included those of Mexican actor and comedian **Mario Moreno Cantinflas**. There were also **las películas de jovencito** (American cowboy films). Films with the young Spanish star **Joselito** and the Argentinean **Libertad Lamarque** were also very successful.

#### *Aficionados al fútbol (Football fanatics).*

The majority of boys and men of the barrio Esperanza were **aficionados al fútbol**. In those days there was no real sporting alternative to this game.

#### **Pichangas callejeras** (street football).

Most adults and children enjoyed playing **pichangas**, a version of football involving a team of fifteen people per side and played on dirt-surfaced or paved streets with a ball made from cloth, called a ‘**pelota de trapo**’. Pablo Neruda unfortunately forgot to write an ‘ode’ to the **pelota de trapo**, so Carlos wrote a ‘wee’ poem: “*Oh pelota, pelota de trapo ! tan humilde y tan redonda, que cuando fui niño, me hacías poner sin cariño, las patas sucias e hediondas.*”. **La pelota de trapo** was made of old pieces of cloth stuffed into an old sock and sewn together with strong thread. The best maker of the **pelota de trapo** was a man called Napoleón Vergara Castro, known as El Polo, who was almost like a relative to Carlos. El Polo, sadly, did not even reach his 40<sup>th</sup> birthday, dying young of alcoholism. It was Polo who introduced Carlos to football, and taught him to be a fan of Colo Colo and to enjoy **los paseos**

**dominicales**, Sunday trips to the beaches of Cartagena or the river Peñaflo. As a young boy, Carlos adored Polo.

This **Pichangas callejeras** were a very enjoyable and very popular pastime. During the day, there were several ‘pichangas’: for children in the afternoon and for the adults in the evening. Carlos played in both pichangas as a goal keeper - which is why, today, he has problems with his knees! Among the **pichangeros** (the players), the most famous were the **pichuleros**, those who were specially skilled with the **pelota de trapo**. The children’s pichanga was played at about three in the afternoon (normally after the school homework was done) until five o’clock, when it was time to go home for tea (**‘para tomar onces’**). Mothers would have already been to the bakery **‘panadería’**, to buy warm bread straight from the oven (**‘pan calentito recién salido del horno’**). Carlos was fond of a certain type of bread rolls called **las alluyas**; he also favoured **las marraquetas** but was not very fond of **las colizas** (also a slang term for homosexuals in Chile). **Las colizas** were square in shape, the only reason young Carlos didn’t like them! All these types of bread, especially when they were hot and just out of the oven, were very good **‘para las onces’**. A typical **once** “elevenenses” in the barrio would consist of tea with powdered milk - perhaps the very same powdered milk sent to Chile by the Kennedy administration under the paternalistic **“Alianza para el Progreso”** (“Alliance for Progress”) programme, designed to keep the Chilean poor quiet – plus freshly baked bread with cheese or ham and avocado. Carlos grew up with ‘Milo’ and ‘Quaker’ (porridge) and he used to eat excellent and succulent sandwiches or **‘sanguches’** made with **‘palta’** (avocado pear), ham and cheese. He also ate a lot of a type of quince jam called **‘Dulce de membrillo’**.

The ‘pichanga’ for adults was played in the evenings after they had returned from a hard day’s work and after their tea which may have consisted of a soup (**una sopa**) or stew (**cazuela**), or maybe beans (**un plato de porotos con riendas**) or steak and fried egg (**un bistec a lo pobre**), or perhaps simply lentils (**un plato de lentejas**), etc. The only time when the ‘pichanga’, played by the children or the adults, would stop was when the police (**los pacos**) would appear in their black and white police car known affectionately in the barrio as **‘la Juanita’** or **‘la patrulla’** - and the players would then scatter, screaming ‘Run for it! The cops are here!’ (**“Arranca, arranca, ‘vienen los pacos’, ...vienen los pacos culiaaos”**). At that time, it was forbidden to play football in the street (or to be drunk in the street) and the police would have taken you into custody (**preso**). However, many a time the cops would end up watching the pichanga without any of the players realising that they were being observed until, of course, someone would eventually notice them and raise the alarm: **“Huevones los pacos ! los pacos !”**. The **carabineros** or **pacos** were always seen as an oppressive force in the barrios and often abused their power by beating people up in a totally illegal fashion. Carlos’s father was once arrested for being drunk, taken into a police car, a **Juanita**, and beaten with a stick (**lumeado** or **apaleado**) because he complained.

The pichanga would also stop when a group of thirty or more cows, under the watchful eye of the Chilean version of a cowboy on horseback, would pass through Esperanza Street on its way to the slaughterhouse in nearby Balmaceda Street. The players used to scream: **“Paren, paren... vienen las vacas..culia .! vienen las vacas!”** (“Stop, stop, the cows are coming ! ...the fucking cows are coming!”). The pichanga would also be interrupted when the ball ended up in the premises of **‘la**

**lechera del Sur**’, a big depot of dairy products. In this case, a younger player, the ball-retrieval specialist, would climb the wall after nightfall and jump into the yard ‘**patio**’ of la lechera to collect the ball and pass it over the wall to the other players waiting in the street. There was another occasion when everything would come to a standstill. This was when a strong earth tremor (**temblor**) would strike the city. The **pichangeros** would then shout very loudly: “ ‘*ta ..temblandooo!*’... ‘ ‘*ta... temblandooo!*’”, as famously happened on the 21<sup>st</sup> of May, 1960 when Chile was organising the 1962 Football World Cup. Large earth tremors are a fact of life in Chile. What was the response on these occasions, apart from shouting “*ta temblandooo !*’... ? Often it was to fall on one’s knees and pray to God (**a Dios**). Even the so called ‘bad guys’ of the barrio would address a little prayer to God - “*Ruega por nosotros madre de Dios...*” (“Mother of God, pray for us...”)

There was also a completely different sort of “**pichanga**”. A **pichanga** could also refer to a certain type of food - an assortment of cold cuts of onions, pickles, and cold meats served in a big serving dish. Thus, when people in the barrio would feel like eating something and socialising at the same time, they would say : “**Vamos a comer una Pichanga**”. During the 50s and 60s there were several good places to go and enjoy a “pichanga” and these were known to the **Cabros** (the “Lads”) of the barrio as “**picadas**” - places only known to some people (or so they thought), which had good food at a reasonable price. Some good places were **El chancho con chaleco** (“The Pig in a Waistcoat”) and **Los Buenos Muchachos** (“The Good Fellows”).

#### ***Football clubs of the barrio Esperanza. (Clubes deportivos)***

In Esperanza St, there were many football clubs like El Unidos Venceremos, El Ciclón Esperanza, El Grupo Móvil, El Real Madrid. Not far away there were also El Viscaya and The Unión Herrera, all names suggestive of a great deal of energy, solidarity, internationalism and not a few kicks in the bollocks and on the ankles (**patadas en las huevas y en los tobillos**). “*I played in most of them as a goalkeeper and in several different internal divisions. A football club had three divisions for the children and three divisions for the adults (primera, segunda, tercera). Children usually played in the morning and adults in the afternoon. Primera was “the” team to be associated with - the best players played in primera.*” These clubs were formally run football clubs with large numbers of people participating, either as players or as organisers. Most of the clubs used to rent a reasonably large room, called a **secretaría**. These **secreterías**, staffed daily by a member of the club (a **socio**), were full of activity by night. They were furnished with little tables to allow the **socios** to play games such as cards or dominoes and usually, in the middle of the room, there would be a table tennis table (**una mesa de ping pong**). During the week little table tennis tournaments took place there.

These **secreterías** were full of trophies and old photos. They had radios to allow the **futboleros** to listen to music - Argentinean tangos, Cuban cha-cha-cha, Mexican rancheras and boleros. “*These football clubs were usually very well organised and the people who ran them were democratically elected at open meetings. These meetings involved a great deal of discussion and compromise and were an excellent political training! Four main positions were open to run the clubs, and the holders of these would in turn form the so-called directiva. The directiva would consist of a President, a Secretary, and a Treasurer. In addition, there were other important places to be filled by democratic choice, based on the skills of the candidates.*

These were the **utilero** (in charge of looking after the club strips), the **botiquero** (in charge of First Aid on the pitch), and the **aguatero** (who supplied water to the players the field). These sport clubs (**clubes deportivos**) played a very important social role in the community of the *barrio*. They used to organise whole-day family trips, called **paseos**, outside of Santiago. The club would hire one or two **micros** (the peculiar Chilean name for the even more peculiar buses) for that purpose. If a **paseo** had been organised, the word would go round: “*la micro sale a las seis de la mañana*” (“the bus will leave at six in the morning”). However, the real meaning would be “the bus will leave at 7 in the morning” - Chileans are never on time. These were very enjoyable family trips that did not cost much and were a great opportunity to enjoy the beautiful Chilean countryside, since the people of the *barrio* generally did not have the means to go on holiday. Another social activity involved organising parties in the **secreterias**, such as dances and dinners. (**bailes, malones, comilonas**). At Christmas and New Year, dancing was organised in the streets with the permission of the Police. A good section of the street was marked off with white paint to make the dance-floor. Above it, there were colourful decorations with rows of multicoloured bulbs and loud music coming from amplifiers owned by the club. “*I used to love these all-night dances. There was so much happiness among children and adults. Unfortunately, these dances would sometimes end up with some adults becoming very drunk and heated discussions would develop into street fights with knives, known as peleas a chuzasos or fights with bottles (peleas a botellazos). Of course, the people involved in these fights were the so called “patos malos”*”.

**“Como el Colo Colo no hay?”**

The majority of adults and children, including Carlos, were supporters of the Colo Colo Football Club, whose motto is: “*Como el Colo Colo no hay ! (Chorus) ALL RIGHT !!... “ Quién es Colo Colo ?” (chorus) CHILE!! , ... “Quién es Chile ?” (chorus) COLO COLO!!*. Colo Colo, nicknamed **El Indio**, is the most popular football club in Chile. (Colo Colo was a Mapuche leader who, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, organised armed resistance against the Spanish conquistadors when they arrived in Chile). Other people in the *barrio* were supporters either of Universidad de Chile or Universidad Católica.

### ***Famous personalities of the barrio***

In Carlos’s *barrio*, there were several well-known artists and **sportsmen** - working people who did not receive any aid from the Chilean State. Among the famous performers living in the *barrio* was: ‘**El tony Caluga**’. This **payaso**, the most famous clown in Chile at the time, was a man of great generosity, who used to invite all the “**cabros**” of the *barrio* to his own circus - the Politeama, where Carlos performed in public for the first time with Abraham - “**Tony Caluga chico**” (the son of Tony Caluga Senior). **Tony Caluga chico**, apart from being an excellent clown like his father, was also a fine accordion player. Not far from Caluga’s home lived the great drummer **Patricio Salazar**, who played in famous bands of the 70s like “**Los Primos**”. He was a regular in the orchestras of Chilean musical director Horacio Saavedra, who played at the well-known Chilean song contest: The Festival of Viña del Mar, at which a French song, during the 70s, entitled *Laissez-moi le temp* and recorded at a later stage by Frank Sinatra as “*Let me try again*” came as a poor second behind a Chilean song. As a matter of interest Shakira took part in this Festival when she was 16.

In Carlos's barrio there were well known sportsmen among them the brothers **Armando and Patricio Cornejo** the tennis players. The latter was a regular in the Chilean Davis Cup team, a regular at Wimbledon during the 60s and the 70s and, until recently, the coach of the Chilean Davis Cup Team, managing, among others, Marcelo ("El Chino") Rios, a former World Number One. The Cornejo brothers lived in one of the **pasajes** of the barrio Esperanza during the 60s and used to practice and play tennis in "La **Quinta Normal**", a **Santiaguino** park in Matucana Road, not far from the **Estación Central**. La Quinta Normal was a popular play-space for the children of the barrios of Quinta Normal and beyond and a very popular gathering point for the **Mapuches**, the native people of Chile. In the 60s and 70s, the Mapuche people would meet there on Sundays to socialise among themselves and there, too, they were all too frequently exposed to racist remarks from many **Chilenos**. In Esperanza St. lived **Rene Hormazal**, known in the barrio as "el Chaucha", a rather handsome footballer, who played for Universidad Catolica in the 70s. He died very young of a heart attack during a match. Rene was the brother of the football legend, "**Cua Cua**" **Hormazabal**, who played for Colo Colo. "Cua Cua" – or "**El Cuarenta**" as he was also known among his friends - lived at the junction of Libertad St. and Yungay St., just round the corner from Esperanza Street.

### *People to be remembered with affection.*

In the street there was the man who rented **monopatines**, a type of skate board with handlebars, and **bicicletas**. "*To hire **patines** was very enjoyable. I remember that the business was run from a private house*". Carlos remembers with affection many other characters too. He remembers the lonely, bearded poet who was in love with **Señora Maria**, the married lady who used to have a small '**boliche**' (kiosk) which specialised in selling and exchanging '**revistas**' - magazines like "Condorito", "El Pato Donald", "El Llanero Solitario", "Roy Rogers", "Superman", "La pequeña Lulu", "el peneca" or novels by Corin Tellado etc. Carlos also remembers PACO, the professional name of one of the most successful painters of **letreros comerciales**. These were colourful, rectangular adverts made from canvas (**lona**) that went to adorn many of Santiago's commercial shops. Esperanza St. and Mapocho St. were always very busy places, with many **letreros** laid out to dry on the **acera** (the pavement). "El cabezon" was one of Paco's helper. "*All these people, with different interests in life and belonging to different social conditions, used to mix very well in the barrio and none of them seemed to interfere in each other's business. The motto of the barrio was very simply: '**Cada uno por su lado**' ("Each to his own"). Football and music seemed to unite them all.*"

### **Radio Programmes and music.**

Among the programmes broadcast on the Santiago radio stations were radionovelas and the **comedias**. A popular **radio novela** during the 60s was "**Conventillo**", which was particularly successful because it was about the daily social dramas taking place in one of the infamous conventillos, just like those in Esperanza Street. Carlos cannot recall if this radio drama was put on by the famous Arturo Moya Grau Theatre Company, nor can he establish if, as he suspects, "Conventillo" was based on Luis Cornejo G's brilliant social novel "**Barrio bravo**", first published in 1955 and set in the barrio of Vivaceta in Santiago. Another popular radio drama dealt with the life of Carlos Gardel, one of the most famous Latin American singers of all time. This handsome, French-born Argentinean tango singer was killed in an air crash at

Medellín, Colombia in 1935. A famous comic radio programme was “**El patrás pa’ helante**”, seen by Carlos in a live show at the Teatro Colón (not to be confused with the famous opera house in Buenos Aires).

*“I was also very fond of terror radio programmes such as *La Tercera Oreja y Lo que cuenta el Viento*, the latest based on traditional stories from the Chilean country side. With my mother we used to listen to humorous radio programmes too such as *Radiotanda* and how can I forget the *Eduardo de Calixto* lunch time programme *Hogar Dulce hogar?*”*

### *Some idea of the music being played on Santiaguino radio stations.*

The music that people used to listen to in all the barrios of Chile was an extraordinary mix of what recently has been pompously called, in Europe, “World Music” - which is the “discovery”, for commercial purposes, of all music which is not regarded as “Western”. Until the 60s, the people of the barrios of Chile were able to listen to the music of many Latin American countries, including Mexico, Cuba, Brazil, Perú, Argentina, Paraguay, Venezuela and the music of Chile itself. In addition, Carlos’s mother would often listen to Arabic music on Santiago radio. This was because of the existence in Chile of a rich and powerful Arab community known as “Los turcos”. The music that people in the barrio used to dance to during the 50s and 60s included Mexican corridos and rancheras, Argentineans tangos, Peruvian walses, Cuban cha-cha-cha and boleros, Dominican Republic merengues, Brazilian sambas and baiones, etc. Here are just a few of the famous songs played on Santiago’s radio stations in those days. (The composer’s name and nationality are given for educational purposes). *Noche de Ronda, Solamente una vez* by Agustin Lara, the mexican composer of *Granada. Capullito de Alelí, El Cumbanchero, Lamento Boricano* by the Puerto Rican composer Rafael Hernandez. *Siboney* by Cuban Composer Ernesto Lecuona, *Bésame Mucho* by Mexican composer Consuelo Velásquez. *Vereda Tropical* by Mexican Gonzalo Curiel. In addition, a great deal of tango music played by the great Argentinean orchestras such as those of Francisco Canaro, Miguel Caló, Anibal Troilo, Juan D’Arienzo etc. The most famous tango of all, *La Cumparsita*, by Uruguayan composer Gerardo Matos Rodríguez, was very popular. The famous Peruvian Waltz *La flor de la Canela* by the great Peruvian composer Chabuca Agranda was also very popular at the time. Peruvian singers such as Abelardo Nuñez and Jesús Vasquez were very popular too, as was the Ecuadorian singer Julio Jaramillo. Mariachi music was very popular in the barrio especially with the **curaditos** who loved to sing the songs of Jorge Negrete, Pedro Infante, Cuco Sánchez, Miguel Aceves Mejías or that of the trio Los Panchos. People used to dance to the sound of bands such as Cuban La Sonora Matanzera. *“I loved the voice of Luis Alberto Martínez and his famous bolero Amigos de que”*. The true star of bolero music was Lucho Gatica, one of the most accomplished bolero singers in all of Latin America. (*Contigo en la distancia, La barca, Sabor a mí*, etc.) This kind of music was the ultimate accolade to the ears of the people of the barrio. After the 1960s, however, all these music began to fade away in Chile and Latin America and the music of the United States, known to Chileans as **La Nueva Ola** (the NewWave) began to penetrate the musical consciousness of the people. The “Latin”music did not disappear completely but began to be relegated to the back seat, giving way to the music of Bill Haley and his Comets, Elvis Presley, Dean Read, ( Famous in Russia) Paul Anka, Brenda Lee, Connie Francis, Ricardito (Little Richard) and company. It

was also the time when Chilean singers and bands began to acquire English names: Los Carr Twins, Danny Chilean, Larry Wilson, Pat Henry y sus diablos azules, Peter Rock, Los Rambles, The Blue Splendours, and The Red Juniors. Of course, not all Chilean singers decided to change their names and some continued to use their Spanish names. Here are some of them: Luis Dimas, Sergio Inostroza, Cecilia, Fresia Soto and the wonderful guitarist Oscar Arriegada and his band, etc. But it was not only U.S. music that began to infiltrate the musical taste of the working class of the barrios. At the same time, the European pop scene appeared in force to produce what was then known as **la música colérica** or “angry music”. *“I was a colérico in my youth”* says Carlos. The mellow music of Italy, through the famous San Remo song contest, began also to make a big impact on Chilean musical taste, although the music of Renato Carosone was already known in Chile. **El Festival de San Remo** and **Canzonissima** were favourite programmes on Chilean television. (Television was introduced into Chile at the beginning of the 1960s.) Very few people in the barrio Esperanza had a TV set in those days. Among the few were the Echegaray family, well-known in the barrio because the whole family were very tall (over 2 metres in height). Along with Italian music and singers came the music of other European countries - France, Spain and Britain, with several Scottish pop groups among them, such as Middle of the Road, Marmalade, and Scottish singing stars such as Lulu and Donovan were well known. Already living and singing in Chile in the 60s and 70s was the Scottish musician: Robert Ingles, from Elgin in the North of Scotland and known to Chileans as Roberto Inglés. *“I have a wonderful collection of 78 records when Roberto Inglés was with his orchestra a regular performer at the Savoy Hotel in London. Can you believe that I have played music at Elguin and at the savoy Hotel in London?”*

In those days Carlos began to be influenced by other people’s music and the trend of the day consisted in imitating everything that was foreign. Towards the end of the 60s, a new type of music began to compete in Chile with the so called new wave music. It was called “Neo-folklore” and was a sort of South American reaction to the new music of the North Hemisphere. It came from Argentina and, as a result, Carlos began to hear the music of Los Chalchaleros and, from Chile, the music of Los Cuatro Cuartos. The Neo Folklore had a great impact on Carlos and his friends. The songs had cultural elements that Chileans or Argentineans could relate to - the Spanish language, for example. Carlos and his friends began to go every Sunday to different radio stations in Santiago to see artists performing live. Some of these stations were : La Radio del Pacífico, Radio Minería, La Radio Cooperativa Vitalicia etc. Carlos and friends from the barrio used to go **a la caza de autografos**, hunting autographs from the famous, such as Los Cuatro Cuartos. This group specialised in singing in harmony, where the clear, high-pitched voice of Pedro Mesone contrasted wonderfully with that of Fernando Torti, who could sing very low. Among their songs, *“Que Bonita Va”* and *“Me dicen Juan Paye”* were very popular. *“These two songs are my favourites from this group because I sang them so many times with my friends, often standing on a cold winter night at the entrance of one of the citees in Esperanza St.”*

### ***Nicknames and terminologies***

Young people in the barrio Esperanza were referred to as ‘**los cabros**’ (literally, “the young he-goats”) and each of them had nicknames, some of which were very funny. :

“El huevas con sueños, el pirulo, el guatón Nelson, el guatón de los Naranjos, el pelao Orrego, el avión, el gallina, el chocolate, el cara e’ güaga, el lija, el pilla la bala, el rucio Enrique, el negro José, el perico, el pelucón, Don Chuma (Carlos’s father), el chico mote, el minuta, el Capitan Piñen, el Chamelo, el Gringo, la monona, el congo. Some of these nicknames symbolise specific physical attributes or special character traits.

Perhaps the most important elements for the young males of the barrio were: **las cabras** (the girls) also known by **los cabros del barrio** (the boys) as **las minas**. These were the girls that the boys were always looking at as possible ‘**pololas**’ (girlfriends) **para “pololear”** or **para ir a atracar al teatro**. “**Pololear**” is a verb used only in Chile to describe the action of going out with someone on a regular basis, **estar pololeando**. By contrast, ‘**atracar**’ meant finding a girl “to pass the time” with in the cinema or in a dark corner. “Passing the time” meant kissing and touching where the boys were not supposed to. Some of the girls were prominent in the barrio because they were either very beautiful or the opposite. Similarly, some of the boys were well-known for a variety of reasons. There were **los giles** (the naive ones), **los sapos** (people who would “grass” on someone), **los paracaidistas**, **los grupientos** and **los chicha fresca** etc. Many of the boys and girls were either students or workers or both at the same time. Some of them tended to marry young because it was a quick way towards total independence from their parents. After getting married, the next thing was to have children; few had them outside marriage. Carlos’s friends married very young and quite a few of them are still married to the same person and have several grandchildren (**nietos**). El Perico, Carlos’s oldest friend, is one of those people, hardly 50 and already un **abuelito**, a grandpa.

### *Alcoholism, poverty and heroes*

Alcoholism was encouraged in the barrio by a number of little wine shops called depósitos, dark and smelly places where the **curaditos** would go for a drink. However, it was the bad general economic situation of the country and the lack of opportunities to study and work which were the main factors that pushed people to drink. No policy of rehabilitation for alcoholics was known in the barrio. Poverty in the barrio Esperanza meant very low wages and salaries, limited access to education and limited access to a good health service. Poverty meant also no access to decent housing or accommodation and it could be seen at its most obvious in Esperanza St. and between the streets of Mapocho and Yungay. In these areas there were about 10 small citees, the most notorious being **El Chiflón del Diablo**, which is also the title of a famous Chilean novel by Baldomero Lillo, set in a coal mine in the south of Chile. “*I was a **Chiflónero** for many years. I lived in **El Chiflón del Diablo** with my step-mother, my father and with lots of cats and dogs*”. El Chiflón had an official name: El pasaje Santo Domingo. It was actually a long dirt cul-de-sac divided into four small citees called **pasajes**, dominated by a dirt-floored area at the entrance to the left of the Chiflón called the **solar**. Some people lived there in small houses with wooden flooring. “*I lived in the third **pasaje**, in a very tiny room with a very, very tiny patio where my mother would prepare a fire in order to cook either with coal (**carbón**) or with wood (**leña**). El Chiflón was a world on its own. It was full of children and full of honest people, with a few **malulos** in the middle, whom my father did not want me to play with. The majority were hard working people with a variety of skills. I remember **la señora Teresa**, working all day long in her living-room, making, at*



tremendous speed, small cardboard boxes for a factory. Her husband was the **secretario** of Jorge Toro, one of the most famous Chilean jockeys of the time. His job consisted of cleaning and maintaining all the equipment needed by Jorge. At the time, Chilean jockeys were the best in South America and Toro was one of them. I also remember the old blind granny of my friend Carlitos Durand, who lived with his four brothers and mother María in a very tiny, dirty and very dark room. I remember her because she used to make brown paper bags, which she took to be sold in the street market. It was quite a sight to see her walking along Esperanza St., always accompanied by one of her grandchildren, with her arms full of paper bags. In the Chiflón lived Don Pepe, a skilled electrician who normally used to work while drunk. He was the man who used to connect everyone in the Chiflón – illegally – to the main cables running above Esperanza Street on the concrete pillars or **postes**. Here, too, lived **el gringo** and **el Congo** two famous denizens of the Chiflón, who, when the sewer system became blocked, were prepared to go down, half-naked, into the sewer with a rod in order to unblock it. After the job was done, they would come up from the sewer covered in **mierda** (shit).” Someone had to volunteer to do this job, as no assistance from the State was available to the Chifloneros. “At the very end of the Chiflón, near the four **pasajes**, lived the Cordero-Rodríguez family, a very numerous and very Catholic family, among whom was my friend Rolando Rodríguez, known as **Boccaccio**, because of his large mouth (**boca grande**). Rolando was the political consciousness of the Chiflón. He was a militant of the JOC (**Juventud Obrera Católica**, a Catholic workers’ movement). He literally used to drag the boys and girls of the Chiflón, and the entire barrio, to his house for long discussions about everything and anything: love, relationships, solidarity and general topics related to the world of teenagers. He invited us to join JOC as a mean of expanding our views on social issues. JOC had leanings towards the so-called Liberation Theology (**la teología de la Liberación**). I eventually joined JOC, based, in those days, in the **calle Catedral**, not far from Brasil St. Rolando was one of five people from the barrio who were murdered by the Pinochet dictatorship. I learned about his death in 1974, when I was living in Glasgow. He was tortured and killed, together with his wife, Cathy Gallardo, his brother-in-law, Roberto Gallardo and his wife, Monica, a primary school teacher. All of them were my Jocista (JOC) friends (**compañeros mios**) and they knew what poverty was.” Sheila Cassidy, the British nun and nurse tortured by the Pinochet Regime, tells the sad story of their deaths at Villa Grimaldi, the notorious torture centre set up by Pinochet, in her 1977 book “Audacity to Believe” (William Collins, Son and Co. Ltd. London). On p.205, she writes: “One of the most blatant mass executions took place after my arrest...”

**Un lugar donde caerse muerto.** (“A place to fall down dead”)

Decent clothes and shoes were items that a great number of people in the poor barrios could not afford. **Zapatos rotos** were the norm for many kids. In some cases, people did not even have money to feed themselves. Carlos reflects that, in his case, he was fortunate as his step-mother always managed to work in order to feed him. However, things like clothes and shoes were difficult to get. “Several times my friend Iván (**el Lija**) lent me clothes to go to a party”. But poverty hit Carlos with tremendous force when his father died.

“In those days, many friends and I were working at **La litografía Fernandez**. One day I was doing overtime, when I received a telephone call from a neighbour. “You must come home immediately”. I did and, when I reached my Street, I began to run

like a madman towards my home. Another neighbour stopped me in the street and broke the terrible news to me: “Oh! Carlitos...” she said, “Your father has died!” I arrived home at our humble room in the Chiflón and saw my poor father lying semi-naked there in his bed. He was 50. My own mother had died at 30. What a destiny. I was in despair. No time for emotion, as I had to arrange his funeral. No money for it. However, I was lucky. My *sindicato* (the union) of *la litografía* had just been granted a new clause in our contract (*contrato de trabajo*) which said that the cost of the funeral of any close relative of an employee of the *litografía* would be met by the *patrón*, in this case, “Pelao” (“Baldy”) Fernández, the tough and bad-tempered boss, who used to exploit us. Fernández was a very elegant man, who used to change his car every year? (He drove beautiful, long Chevrolet Impalas). The important point is, however, that the clause was honoured and I was the first to make use of it. Today my father rests in peace in our own family tomb, in a rather posh area of the **Cementerio General**, The tomb had been bought by my great-grandfather in 1874. My *abuela* (grandmother), my father’s mother, Rosa Arredondo Cuevas, is there too. We were dreadfully poor but **con un lugar donde caerse muerto** (with a place to fall down dead)”

### ***The stupidest thing is to think that death is natural.***

Chile being a predominantly Catholic country, it is natural to wonder what kind of relationship the people had with death, in a relatively poor barrio of Santiago. This relationship was certainly a very close one, according to Carlos:

“I, and the people of the barrio, grew up with the idea of death as being a normal fact of life. Metaphorically speaking, death was a very frequent visitor to our barrio. People of all ages would die, for a variety of different reasons. When my father died, two other people from the Chiflón del Diablo had died just two weeks previously: Don Pepe, who died of alcoholism, and a relatively young mother known to us as *la Señora* Picha, who died of a curable illness. I know very well that death is a very stressful and painful experience for all of the family involved. From the emotional and from the economic point of view, a family death was always a real disaster. Both of the people who died just before my father were married, with small children to care for. Don Pepe was the breadwinner in his family and *la Señora* Picha was a housewife and mother of three small children. When someone died, the people of my barrio were in turmoil and immediately began to mobilise to assist, in whatever way possible, the affected family. This is exactly what happened when my father died. My neighbours immediately organised a collection of money on my behalf to help me pay the expenses of my father’s funeral. The collection of money for the family of the dead was a very common practice in the barrio. There was always a tremendous sense of understanding and solidarity. It was a tacit, human response because no family was in a position to say that **la muerte** was not, some day, going to enter their door.”

### **Los velorios (wakes)**

As soon as someone died, there was the **velorio** (the wake), which took place either in the home of the deceased or in the Catholic Church. If the wake was held in the house, it would normally take place in the living-room, if the house consisted of more than one room. Chairs for the people to sit on were arranged around the coffin, which would be black for an adult or white for a child. People could normally afford only

*the cheapest coffins available. The wake had its own pattern, with different activities during the three days and nights for which the **velorio** lasted, before the burial took place. This time period was to allow people of all ages to pay their last respects to the deceased. “I always thought that this was a very good practice, from a psychological viewpoint. It was a time to release our innermost emotions.” The wake allowed people to see, for the last time, through the little glass window in the coffin lid, the face of the departed. “I always thought that this practice, too, was very important.” People would go to the **velorio** to accompany the dead person in their final moments and to show support to the family being left behind. “In my view, there is a lot of merit in being able to accompany the family in their saddest moment because, suddenly, everything around them has become unreal and subjective. Inner solitude, despair, sense of loss and disappointment in the world are symptoms which do not disappear in a matter of weeks. In fact, for many it could take years to begin to accept the loss of a dear one.”*

*At a **velorio**, people will either sit in silence or talk to the others present. Very frequently, people would be weeping or simply talking about the personality and human qualities of the dead person. Rosaries dedicated to the deceased were commonly said, at different times of the day and night. For those who participated in the wake throughout the entire night (**de amanecida**), a thick soup called **ajiacó** was always served by the family of the deceased. In addition, stories, jokes and riddles would be told, in order to pass the time. Anyone who fell asleep during the wake would have their faces daubed with burnt cork (**corcho quemado**). Some alcoholic drinks, such as **aguardiente** and wine were also served at these **velorios** and coffee and tea were also normally available. Before the burial took place, the mourners would ask the local priest to say a mass in his church for the soul of the dead person.*

### **El entierro (the burial).**

*The terrible day would arrive when the black hearse, with its black horses, would appear in the street to take away the dead person. People in the barrio would say, “**Viene la carroza! Viene la carroza!**”*

*“I remember that the familiar sight of the hearse was always awaited with great anxiety in the barrio,” says Carlos. He also recalls that one or two **micros** were normally hired to take the mourners to the cemetery. In his time, only a few cars would accompany the hearse, which would be expected to head towards the famous **Avenida de la Paz** (Avenue of Peace), a very long avenue lined with palm-trees. At the cemetery, the final ritual would take place. This consisted of taking photographs of the coffin surrounded by the mourners. “This custom explains why I still have with me a good number of photographs taken in the **Cementerio General** of Santiago. They show people of all different ages’, grouped around the coffin, amid flowers and wreaths - the people I grew up with. My stepmother used to say to me about of these photographs; they are to remember the occasion (Son **para el recuerdo** ).”*

*After the pictures were taken, normally with an old-fashioned, rectangular box-camera, the funeral procession would go the place allocated for burial in one of the many so-called **patios** within the cemetery.*

### **El cementerio - o “patio de los callados”. (The cemetery – or, in Chilean slang, “the courtyard of the silent ones”)**

*“The experience of death taught me a fundamental truth about human nature and that was, that rich and poor are reduced to the same status when they die. However, the*

families of the well-off persist, especially in Catholic countries, in placing their dead in “exclusive” parts of the cemetery, with the sole purpose of perpetuating the so-called social distinctions between human beings.” In any Chilean or Latin American cemetery, one will observe that the whole area is divided up into different **barrios** which, in the cemeteries, are called **patios**. Thus, one can find the working-class, middle-class and upper-class **patios**. All these have one thing in common – silence! This deep, spiritual silence is accompanied only by the singing of birds and insects and the strong smell of eucalyptus trees, the flowers and the humid earth. The working-class **patios**, or rather, **barrios pobres**, are the resting place of working people. These **patios** are the most numerous and are allocated to the families of the dead for a short period of time, on payment of a fee. A simple metal cross inserted into the ground, with a name date and number, will mark the resting place of a working person. Poor people will sometimes save money to build a concrete enclosure around the grave, with a concrete cross at its head. These tombs are normally painted white and will have two or three rectangular holes, in which to insert glass or metal flower-holders.

The middle-class **patios**, or **barrios de la clase media**, are the ones in which **nichos** (niches) are found – where the remains are sealed within a wall. These have been bought by skilled workers and professional people, who have the means to afford them. Finally, there are the **patios altos**, or **barrios altos** – the resting-places of the rich and powerful. Here the dead repose in magnificent, elaborate, luxurious mausoleums. Some of the families of these people enjoy special visiting privileges, granted by the cemetery authorities. “One of my favourites was a mausoleum whose doors were opened at all times to allow a mother to take her daughter out and comb her hair. I take it the daughter’s body was embalmed. I remember that a comb and mirror were always on display in the mausoleum.” A **patio** was always looked after by a guardian. “His – or her – job was to water the flowers on the tombs, and this was paid for by the family of the deceased. I still remember the lady who looked after the tomb of a very close relative of mine. I always remember her because she had a very prominent moustache!”

### **El Quita Penas (The “Source of Comfort”)**

*This was a popular restaurant, located near the cemetery and much used by people who had just participated in a funeral.*

### **Pelusas, luche, cochayuyo, sapolio, virutilla and other things.**

Many children lived in Santiago in a world of their own: with no home to go to or clothes to wear, no education and no parents. They were exposed to the full force of the social system, being discriminated against, insulted by the general public, accused of thieving etc. Many of these children lived in the streets and under the bridges of the Mapocho river and they were known as **los cabros pelusas**. In contrast, most people in Carlos’s barrio could afford the minimum, but many children might eventually become pelusas:

*“I never suffered hunger and I believe the same is true for most of my friends in the Chiflon. People could afford to eat a diet consisting of fresh vegetables, fruit and a good range of pulses. An important supplement to our diet was different types of seaweed like **luche** and **cochayuyo**”.*

In addition, people from time to time could afford to buy poultry, meat or fish. At that time big supermarkets did not exist and people bought their goods either from the shops called **los almacenes** or the street markets called **ferias libres**. Carlos used to be a street seller (**vendedor ambulante**) selling **virutillas**, **sapolio** and **radios** in the streets of the popular barrio **de la Palmilla** where hundreds of gypsies (**gitanos**) lived. The following was the shout to sell radios: “**Vendo radioos Giannini, con ojo magico... Radioo con facilidades!**”,” I had to work hard to help with our budget at home”.

### **La Vega Central and Ernesto Segundo Armazan (Nene)**

Carlos also worked in **la Vega Central**, the biggest fresh produce market in Santiago:

*“On Saturdays and Sundays I used to sell steel wool (**virutilla**) and little packets of **Sapolio**, a natural, white powder used to clean pots and pans. It was very upsetting because on several occasions the police took me and others to the police station for not having a licence to sell in **la Vega**. On other occasions, inspectors working for the councils impounded the merchandise, which was then put in a large basket and taken, or so we were told, to **las monjas** (the nuns) to be given to charity. The problem was that the merchandise that they took away from us had still to be paid for to our suppliers”.*

Carlos’s step-brother Ernesto worked in La Vega Central as a **cargador** (a loader):

*“We used to call each other ‘**mi nene**’. Ernesto, according to Carlos, had incredibly beautiful green eyes and because of this he was called el **ojos verdes** (Green Eyes). He had another **apodo** (nickname), **el duraznero**. This was because he used to carry on his shoulders heavy loads like 80 kg bags of potatoes or piles of wooden cases full of apples or peaches. Once, his picture appeared in **El Clarín**, the famous left-wing Chilean newspaper of the 60s and 70s, in an article about the social conditions of **the cargadores de la Vega**. He was in Clarin because his face and physical condition represented that type of tough individuals who had been shaped by a rough life style. Ernesto was **bueno pa’l copete** (he drank a lot) and he, too, died in his 40s. In fact, he was killed in what the police called a **riña callejera** (a street fight):*

*“The only thing I know is that my step-mother, Clara, was one day asked by a detective (**un rati**) to go to the morgue to identify the body. I volunteered to go to spare her the experience. After a little search in this strange, cold and smelly place I managed to recognise him. I noticed that one of his legs was in a plaster. To my question as to whether there was any enquiry into his death the answer was a simple “no”.” From the police point of view, Ernesto was just a drunkard. “**un curahuilla**”, just a “**cargador de la Vega**” but Carlos loved him and respected his way of life. “**Mi nene** ” , said Carlos, “ used to bring me fresh fruit from the countryside, where he used to disappear for ages for seasonal work. He used to sleep in a **hospidería** (common dormitory) of the barrio Esperanza. His place of work was **la calle Lastra, el pasaje Rosas, the heart of la Vega Central.**”*

### **A Reasonable Health Service**

The people of the barrio had available, through the state, a **reasonable** Health Service,. When Carlos was a small child, he was ill for a week in the Roberto del Rio Hospital and he remembers that he was very well attended to by professional people. However, sadly, he also remembers that the great majority of the people could not

afford to have access to a medical specialist when required. If that was the case, then, people would inevitably die. Similarly, most people were unable to afford a dentist and, as a result, many people, including children, had a great number of missing teeth. The faces of a great number of people of the barrio, therefore, did not look good.

### *Happenings in the barrio.*

Drugs were unheard of in the barrio until the coming of the hippie movement during the 70s, which is when Carlos's friends began to smoke **marihuana**. However, none of the disturbances that took place in the barrio were connected to marihuana. There were the occasional street fights, which would usually involve a lot of swearing. This is a typical little exchange between three people arguing about '**una mina**' (slang for a girl)

The scene has to be imagined with a lot of barking dogs in a torrid summer afternoon and 36 **grados a la sombra** (36 C in the shade).

A : 'Que te crei vo' concha...tuu maaadre . ¿Te crei Valentino?'

B : 'Nooo. Me creo ma encachao que voo maracoo. ,

¿ *Que querii...crei voo que te tengo mieooo.. saaco e' ueaa ?*

A : ' Te saco la chucha 'huevooooon' !'

B : ' Maricón culiaó ! 'Yo te saco la tuya 'con cheee..tumaaaadre !'.

(El meti'o de siempre) C: 'No sean hueones,... no peleen,... no ven que hay 'cabros chicos mirando'

*A and B together: 'Y que te metis vos...'sapo culiao'!... hijo de la gran puta ! .e'ta e una pelea de 'ombre... andate a la 'chucha' a criar pollos... conchetumadre'. The word 'huevoón' ("with balls") is used in many countries of South America but Chileans have somehow appropriated the spirit of this particular term.*

Another typical barrio dialogue involving two '**compadres**' (friends) who are not in the least angry, but still inclined to use the word 'huevoón': **The Scene:** The corner of Mapocho '**con**' Esperanza. One of the guys is seated on top of a big stone that was a feature of this street during Carlos's youth. **The Year:** about 1965. **The Season:** a rainy winter day. **The period in time:** Before the arrival of the '**mariguaneros**' and about 8pm.

A : Hola ! huevoón ! Como estai !

B: 'toy puro huevaando aquí, huevoón, me estoy cagando 'e frío''.

A : no seai huevoón !, vamos a **la fuente 'e soda** a tomar algo, '**Las Cachas Grandes**'\* estáaa abierta pooh !

\* Big fucking.

B: Tai- ma' ..huevoón... No tengo '**plata**' ni pa' ser cantar un ciego.

A : No seai hueoón !, te pago yo. **Tengo cinco 'luca'**!

This trivial example shows that people in working class areas were in solidarity with one another.

By day or night, Carlos would see **los pacos** (the cops) normally walking in pairs along the streets. There would also be street vendors, such as the **diarieros** (newspaper sellers, one in particular was a great mouth organ player). Sometimes one could also note the arrival in the barrio of **los tiras** (plain-clothes detectives, known also as **los ratis**, usually searching for '**algún pato malo**'). Some of these detectives

would accept money from the **patos malos** in return for “a little freedom” to carry on with their activities.

These so called **patos malos** were often described in the barrios as ‘**buenos ‘pal’ choreo**’ (good at nicking stuff) and they were the type of people who spoke **Coa**, the special slang spoken by ‘**El hampa**’ (the underworld) who provided plenty of material for **la prensa roja**, that section of the press that exploits the worse aspects of society. The specialists of **la prensa roja** in those days were tabloids such as **El Clarín**, **La Tercera**, or **La Segunda**. As an example, people who spoke ‘Coa’ would use versions of the English words in expressions such as ‘**Lookea hueoón!**’ instead of ‘**mira huevón!**’.

### *La Perrera*

Carlos remembers, ‘**la Perrera**’, a nasty institution whose job consisted of clearing the streets of the stray dogs which were very much part of the community. Almost every day, usually between eleven and twelve in the morning, the infamous **Perrera** would appear in the streets of the barrio causing panic among the people. **La Perrera** was a special blue van with about three dog snatchers wearing helmets and standing on a low platform at the back of the van. They were armed with a **lasso** and ready to run behind any dogs they saw in the street. When a dog was caught, as happened many times, it was thrown into the van **sin lástima** (without mercy), amid the stones thrown at the men by the children of the barrio, who knew that unless a fine was paid, the dog would be taken to the furnaces of **la Perrera**, located in **Balmaceda Road** and **Puente Bulnes**. When people in the barrio saw smoke coming from the chimney of the **Perrera** building, they would say “*los huevoones están quemando perros*” (“The bastards are roasting dogs!”).