A colorful illustration of a man with dark hair, wearing a red shirt and brown pants, sitting in a rainbow-colored hammock. He is holding and reading a newspaper titled "TRICOLOR" with the headline "¿Antes o después el fútbol va a ser 10?". A small yellow and black bird is perched on a tree branch above him. A baseball glove and a baseball are on the grass at the base of the tree. The background is a blue sky with green foliage at the top and bottom.

# *Tales of The spiders salesboy*

*Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías*

compiled by

**Orlando Oramas León  
y Jorge Legaña Alonso**



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Orlando Oramas León y Jorge Legañoa Alonso

*Tales of  
The spiders  
salesboy*

English Version:  
**María Eugenia Acero Colomine**

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## *Presentation*

It is an honor for the Ministry of People's Power for External Relations, and for me as an inhabitant of this loving, warrior and sovereign people, to present this work compiled by Orlando Oramas León and Jorge Legañoa Alonso, about the life history of Commander Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías, narrated by himself. The novelty of this beautiful edition, beyond the graphic and editorial treatment, is that we also produced an English version. This is aimed beyond reaching the English speaking peoples with the real life of a boy who used to sell sweet spiders. His cause surpassed frontiers as a prophet, aimed at sending a message of peace and love to humankind.

*Cuentos del arañero* and *The Tales of the Spiders Salesboy* is edited ten years after Hugo Chávez Frías passing to immortality. We present it, framed within this commemoration and the encounter in Caracas in March 2023. We reaffirm, from Venezuela, our diplomacy for peace, necessary among the peoples. These flags are still valid more than ever.

This anniversary arrives when the peace of the world is seriously threatened. It is the right time to remember the legacy Hugo Chávez spread and defended bravely, without complexes: The social justice, the participative democracy, the protagonism of

the People's Power, the democratization of communication, the defense of the independence and the descolonization as well as the creation of a multipolar and multicentric world.

Above all, this book helps feed the documentary memory not only of the joyous, fierce and transparent personality of an integral revolutionary, but also of a moment in the Venezuelan history led by him: Full of decisive events and changes.

March 05th is not a time for celebration, but to revisit his legacy, his people, his comrades in arms and his followers in different places of the planet. In sum, it is a time for Chávez people to embrace the peoples of the world that fight for their liberation.

**Yván Gil Pinto**

Chancellor of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

*If I could be born again and ask for the place,  
I would say God Father: "Send me to the same  
place. The same unforgettable little house with  
palms, with the same dirt floor, the mud walls,  
the wooden cot and a mattress made of straw  
and foam. Also, a big yard full of fruit trees.  
And a grandmother full of love, and a mother  
and a father full of love, and siblings, and a little  
peasant village by the river.*



## *Foreword*

“Allow me these confidences very from the soul. For I speak with the people, although I don’t see them I know you are there, over there, listening to Hugo: Hugo, the friend, not the President. The friend, the soldier”.

This is how *Tales of the Spiders Salesboy* begins, as a preview of this book that shows Chávez told by himself.

More than 300 editions of the *Aló Presidente* program fed this compilation; pages with autobiographical anecdotes and the imprint of someone who has marked the recent history of Venezuela.

There are many passions that overflow in the speech of the Bolivarian leader: family, baseball, the Armed Forces, the cult of heroes, heroes, infinite love for Venezuela and, above all, for the broad excluded masses.

It is a journey that begins with its roots in Sabaneta de Barinas, in that palm tree house with a dirt floor, with the topocho at hand. “Poor, but happy.” And grandmother Rosa Inés, the “old mother”, the family, childhood friends; the vivid image of hundreds of thousands of humble homes in the small villages of the plain.

Since then, the sensitive, observant Chávez, who absorbs like a sponge, feeds on his origins and carries with them over the years, the vicissitudes and stages of a life of battle.

In those days, the passion for history was forged, which stems from family legends, Maisanta, “the last man on horseback”, and his scapular more than a hundred years old.

“Zamora passed through here”, the grandmother would say, and the imagination dazzled that boy who climbed the highest pole in the patio, scanning a horizon in which he later rediscovered Bolívar along the paths of the homeland.

Because Hugo Chávez Frías brought Bolívar back, stripped him of the stone armor of sculptures, lowered him from the immobile pedestals of the squares, submerged himself next to him and made him substance in the torrent of people, who appropriated the name, thought and work of the Liberator.

The President of Venezuela recalls the national history like nobody else; he interprets it, explains it, delves into its protagonists, battles, contradictions, with a vision of the

interconnection between the past, the present and the future, with a transforming perspective.

Chávez is a researcher and historian who transcends the molds of the academy. And this would not have been possible without him passing through the barracks, as a soldier of the “troops of the Liberation Army of Venezuela,” as he once snapped, demanding respect, from a corrupt “adeco” governor.

That “Bachaco” or “Goofy”, reached to the Military Academy, in Caracas, with the illusion of becoming a ball player at the Major Leagues. But, together to the uniform, his dreams widened taking from the tradition, discipline, friendship and, above all, the injustices lived and faced in the compliance of the duty.

Thus we find him as a second lieutenant in 1975, in La Marqueseña, Barinas, in the “former lands of the Marquis of Boconó”. Magical lands marked by trails of legends, combats, spilled blood and also by the wonderful reality: “Here I discovered a car one day in the mountains, a black Mercedes Benz. We cleaned it, we opened the trunk with a screwdriver and I got some books on Marx, on Lenin; I got this book over there, I read it here: Time of Ezequiel Zamora, by that great revolutionary Federico Brito Figueroa. That second lieutenant Chávez started reading here, he started talking to the soldiers there.”



To speak means to forge consciences, unite wills, sow the seeds of the Bolivarian Movement that was sworn in in the Rain Tree de Güere, and the baptism of fire on February 4th, 1992, when the “for now” set the tone for future.

Chávez talks, speaks familiarly, narrates in detail, sometimes goes ahead, goes back, superimposes stories; he breaks the subject-verb-predicate grammatical logic. It is part of his style, his narrative technique, with which he keeps you guessing, teaches, argues, makes you think and convinces. It is, without a doubt, a phenomenon of direct, close, permanent communication with her people.

A pure llanero, proud of his origins, Chávez is also a story teller. He assures that he doesn't exaggerate. But Fidel Castro, who knows him well, stresses that his Venezuelan friend, “fills” at least the stories that involves both of them.

These “fillings” occur specially when the stories relate him personally. Like the snake that, in his own words, was about to devour him in his cradle, there at the Sabaneta house with dirt floor. “They hung the boa to the roof and the tail reached the floor. It was thick as a tire”, he remembers. “I'm alive by miracle”.

Or that Arauca alligator, that began to grow in every story, amidst the belief and disbelief of the audience: “45 mts long I counted at a glance”.

Then, the tales gain intensity, because he recalls them as if he was living them in real time. Then, the sounds arrive: “Pac”, when his father scores the bolas criollas. “ass”, the whistle of the boa; “uuh” the ghosts of Sabaneta, “Pum” flies the chapita far; “Ta, ta, ta”, Evo talks nonstop; “ra, ra, ra”, put four battalions into the gringos on the flank.

Toggether to the sound, there are also the corridos, the couplets, the songs. “I sing very bad”, he publicly confessed. But then he added, “As that llanero said, ‘Chávez sings badly, but beautiful”.

The truth is, it is hard to find another head of state who sings more in public, from the national anthem to rancheras, modern ballads, and, above all, the stanzas of Venezuelan folk singing, of which he has been a champion promoter. The people’s singer, then.

And, of course! The language. The language of the president, the political leader, the forger of consciousness, the teacher, the declamator, the poet. But also the language of the common citizen

and the “vegüero” from deep the fields. Therefore, the pleasant use of terms that belong to the popular speaking, although the dictionary doesn’t recognize them: “jamaqueo”, “choreto”, “jalamecate”, “firifirito”, “espatilla’o”, “esperola’o”, “kilúo”, and many others that were translated to the common English.

Is he funny? A friend asked, when knowing about the idea of this book. Chávez is eloquent, he laughs at himself; he celebrates jokes about his person. But he also grabs belly laughs to the audience when he made fun at his adversaries. He already said it once in one of his speeches: “ The Revolution is love and humor”

However, *Tales of the Spiders Salesboy* is a very serious business. Chávez suffers in his pages. He feels the pain of his people, of the boy who dies without medical attention. “It is hell in here!” The President regrets, who in the first years of his government finds tragedy everywhere, the gruesome heritage of the Fourth Republic.

“As always, there is the mass of the people. I throw myself over the mass. I hug them, I sweat with them, I cry with them and I find myself .For there is the drama, there is the pain, and

I want to feel **that pain. For that pain, together to the love I feel**, will give us strength to fight a thousand years if we had to fight”, he claimed those days.

From those times comes the friendship with Fidel, a dearly relation of a higher sensitivity. Regarding that and more, there is a lot to say. But it's better that Chávez himself, the Sabaneta spiders salesboy tells us.

*Orlando Oramas León*  
*Jorge Legañoa Alonso*  
June, 2012

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# *Family stories*



## **Confidences**

**L**et me share with you these confidences from the core of my soul. I speak with the people, although I don't see them. I know you are there sitting around, over there, listening to Hugo: Hugo, the friend. Not the President, but the friend, the soldier.

I visited yesterday the grave of y grandma Rosa. I didn't want to make much noise, for there is always a beautiful scandal: People on a truck and red berets. I asked, "Please, sir, I want to visit the old Rosa Inés alone with my father". We arrived there and a young man with children and a shovel came. He was cleaning tombs. That's their job. He was tenderly cleaning the Bush next to my grandma's tomb, when he said: "President, you loved her very much. You mention her often, don't you?". "Of course, I loved her then and now. She's inside of me"

I was also very happy to see again this kid. What was his name? He was "skinny". A year ago, I also came to send flowers to my grandmother. He said, "Thanks, Chávez. I have a house. See the roof over there". It was a house with a red roof. The boy had a house, a brother, his mother, his father and two other kids who clean tombs I grabbed him and asked, "Don't you

have a house?" Of course! There are so any homeless around. My Goodness! I wish I could fix that fast for every child in Venezuela!

I asked General Gonzalez de León and the Governor to attend to the case of that child. He told me with those little eyes: "Chávez, I have no home. Chávez, I want to study", "Chávez, my mother is starving", and well, he told me so many things with those little eyes that moved my soul . And I made them proceed with a social study. That boy already has a house and you can see the red roof. "There it is. Chávez, come visit me". And I told him: "I don't have time dear, but some other day I will come". I hope I can visit him someday!

There were we: Praying in front of y grandmother's grave. I was born in the house of that old woman, Rosa Inés Chávez. It was a palm house, with a dirt floor, a dirt wall, with ailerons, with many birds flying all over the place, white pigeons. It was a yard with many trees: plum trees, tangerine, mango, orange, avocado, , grapefruit, semmerucus, roses, corn. There I learned to plant corn, to fight the pests that damaged the corn, to grind the corn to make cachapas (corn cakes).

From there I would go out with my wheelbarrow full of milk and oranges to sell them at the Ice cream store. They would

give me a nacelles as a bonus. It was my prize and a “locha”: a 12 1/5 coin to buy stuff. Well, that’s where I come from. When I die I to be taken there, to the village of Sabaneta de Barinas, and I will settle for something very simple, like my grandmother Rosa Inés.

### ***Our own roots***

**M**y grandma Rosa Inés used to say: “Don’t climb those trees, boy!”. I used to climb up high. There was a fig tree in the yard where I grew up. It was a beautiful yard, and we used to climb all those trees. The fig tree was the highest, and we used to look for the higher branches. There were lianas and a “topocho” tree (small and thick bananas). The topocho bushes have a soft and spongy trunk, like a mattress.

Do you know what did I do? I used to jump with my siblings and Laurencio Pérez, whose nickname was “The Chinese guy”. The only one who didn’t climb was the “Fat Boy Capon”. The Fat Boy couldn’t go up. He owned the only bat and the only Wilson ball. For this reason, he was the fourth bat in spite of failing. We jumped and yelled “Baruuu, Baruuu”. We were Barú, the Man of



the Jungle. We preferred to be Barú, rather than Tarzan. Barú was African. We dropped against the topocho trees and y poor granda, rest in peace, put her hands on her head: "You'll kill yourself, boy! Get down from there! The devil is on the loose!"

Sometimes I was afraid to think that the devil was actually around. Of course, Christ is also on the loose, and Christ always beats the devil like Florentino defeated the devil. She used to nag us a lot: She pulled us under the trees However, at night she would sit us on the parapet of the palm house, when the electricity from the Sabaneta power plant, which was close to the house, would go out. When Don Mauricio Herrera passed by on a bicycle, one knew that they were going to turn off the plant. "Don Mauricio passed by", and it was like clockwork. He passed by every night at eight o'clock sharp. I remember that he would turn off the first time, that was the warning. It was like a retreat, like when you are over there and they blow the bugle. Then came two blackouts, rur, rur, and the third one was when the power went out in the village.

Then, the candles or kerosene lamp were lit, and our grandma was ready with her stories. We asked her, "Grandma, tell us your stories". She used to speak about the cape Zamora and her grandfather Chávez. He left with the cape Zamora and never returned. When I was a child, I remember the gossips of the elder women: "That man was evil, he left his woman and children alone".

My grandmother's grandpa left with a man named Zammora and never returned. He left his children when they were little and his woman survived by selling toposchos and fishing in the river. I also heard the comments of my grandmothers, the Frías. They spoke about an evil man called Pedro Pérez Delgado, who had two children with Claudina Infante and left. The children were little and he never returned. I had the belief that those men were evil, but when I researched in the history books, they weren't evil at all. They were soldiers. Those are legends. These stories come from our own roots.

### ***I would come and pick you up***

**M**y grandmother Rosa Inés taught Adán and me to read and write before we went to school. She was our first teacher. She would say: "You must learn, Huguito". The little round letters she made. Maybe that's where my passion for reading comes from, for good writing, good spelling, not making any single mistake. Some people suffer because of me. I'm very strict with the accent, the comma, the form of the prose even, and of the verse from time to time. She used to tell me, when I was already a military man: "Huguito, get out of there, you are not good for that". But I liked the Army, and I asked

her: "Why am I not good for that, grandmother?" "You are very headstrong, you invent a lot". Later, when, as a lieutenant, on vacation, I arrived one day home with other cadets; we sat there and I played Alí Primera: "Soldier, turn the rifle against the oligarch". She had that innate intelligence of our people and heard the song of Alí Primera. The comrades left and she told me: "Did you realize? You are going to get into trouble, because I am listening to that music and you play it to your comrades, Huguito, Huguito". Oh, Grandma! She discovered me before my time, she sensed me. She died that January 2nd, and we planted her in the midst of sprouts and dawns in 1982. I remember that I had guard duty on December 31st at Fort Tiuna, at the Academy. I liked very much to stand in the Great Hall, at the big door facing the colonnades, and watch the revelry in the solitude. At 12 o'clock at night, the group of officers would go there to embrace each other, to see the rockets from the hills of El Valle, to hear the rumors of the joy and hope of people that renew themselves every December 31st. On the 31st there was an officers' meeting to bid farewell to the year and I was sorry but I said to Colonel Tovar: "Colonel, I need a leave, as soon as those on second shift leave return". And I explained to him: "My grandmother, who is my old mother, is very ill and does not have many days left to live. I just said goodbye to her two days ago, a hug and tears and I remember she told me: 'Oh, Huguito, don't cry, maybe with so many pills I will be cured'".

But no, there was no cure, we knew she was leaving, she was already leaving. And the good Colonel told me: “Chávez, go”. I was head of sports and at that time there was no great sports commitment. Then he told me: “Go on January 5th when the others arrive”. The first day I went to visit my Colonel Hugo Enrique Trejo in Macuto. He had a little house there; he was like another father of mine, a mentor, the great military leader of the 50’s. We talked there for the first time. In the afternoon I went to Villa de Cura to visit my great aunt Ana, Pedro Perez Delgado’s daughter. While there I went out to shave, because I was very hairy, to return in the afternoon to the Academy. When I returned, I already had the news: “Grandma has died”. So we sowed her the next day. I was already committed to the Revolution, that’s why I wrote these lines to her:

Maybe one day, my dear old lady, I will lead my steps to your site, with the arms up high and in joy put on your grave a great crown of green laurels: That would be my victory and your victory and your people’s, and your history; then, through the alley the waters of the Boconó river will retin, like it watered your fields in other times. Through its riverbanks the happy singing of the skylark and the sweet twit of the bluebirds and the clear laughter of your old parrot. Then, your old house, your white pigeons will soar, and “Guardian” will bark under the fig. The almond tree will grow next to the orange grove,

and the plum tree next to the topochal, and the mandarin trees next to your pineapple tree, and the acerola will redden next to your rose bush, and the straw will grow under your cornfield, and then the happy smile of your absent face will fill this hot plain with lights; and a great ride will suddenly come out and the Federals will come, with Zamora at the front, and the guerrillas of Maisanta, with all his people, and the blond Páez, with his thousand brave men; or perhaps never, my old woman, so much happiness will come to this place, and then, only then, at the end of my life I would come to look for you, my mother Rosa, I would come to your grave and water it with sweat and blood, and I would find consolation in your motherly love, and I would tell you of my disillusionment among mortals, and then you would open your arms and embrace me like in the days of an infant, and you would lull me with your tender song and take me to other places...

## ***La negra Inés***

I had a grandmother we used to call “la negra Inés” (the nigrant Inés). She was an outrageous black woman. She was famous along the plains. Almost a hundred years have passed, and she is still remembered by the poets of the plains: La negra Inés, at the acerola house, by the church. That is a beautiful, deep and far memory.

It is said that la negra Inés, my great grandmother, was the daughter of an African man who passed by those plains. It is not just a saying, it was true: When 100 people in a same village say the same, it turns out to be true. Maybe I will never know the name of that African grandpa, who belonged to the Mandingas. So I end up to be also a Mandinga. La negra was the mother of my grandmother Rosa Inés Chávez, who was between indigenous and black. The dad of my grandmother, Rosa Inés, was an Italian guy who picked up La negra Inés and they lived together for a while. They had Rosa Inés and Ramón Chávez, and I remember him. I saw him die. He had an attack, as they used to say.

Uncle Ramón used to make me the comets. He was very sick on a hammock, and he says: “Huguito, help me go to the bathroom in the back”. I take him and say to him: “Uncle,

here it is". But he continued to walk to the fence. He could not see and he fell. I ran to my grandma: "Mamá Rosa, mamá Rosa, my uncle had an attack". When the doctor came, found I don't know where, my uncle Ramón Chávez was already dead.

### ***Alive by miracle***

*M*y mother says that I'm alive by miracle. By miracle I'm alive. One day, she was in the kitchen, and I was just a baby. Adán was more than a year old. I was on a hammock, crying and my mom tells Adán, "Go cradle the baby". My mom heard my yelling, and she ran to see. The hammock was hanging over the bed. Adán was heavy, and pulled the hammock by the strings. He cradled me, but vertically, and I, the poor baby, jumped as a human bullet. My mom found me peed on in that corner. Thank God the walls and the floor were made by mud and dirt. That was Adán.

After a few days, my mom recalls she was there at midnight. It was dark. My dad hadn't arrived yet. I was on the cradle. Adán was with my grandmother in the other room. My mom

hears a noise in the dark like “aaaas, aaas!”. Then she turns on the lantern. When she checks under my cradle, It was a boa, man! My mom grabbed me and she ran outside. She called my uncle Ramón Chávez, rest in peace, who killed the snake with a machete or a stick. They hanged the boa by the roof and the tail on the floor. She was as thick as a tire. This snake used to harass the rabbits of my grandma. She had already eaten several hens and she was now looking for a little zambo! I’m alive by miracle.

### ***Excel or consider yourself flunked***

When my father was a 4th grade teacher, he checked my exams over and over again, with more rigor than the others. I sometimes claimed for justice, an equal treatment; but my father was harder with me. It had to be that way. It was a great lesson for me and my siblings. He said, “If you don’t excel, consider yourself flunked”. One of my motivations was to watch on weekends the movies “Tin Tan” “Chucho, El Roto” “The Black Eagle” in the only movie theater of the village: The Cinema Bolívar of Sabaneta. The ticket costed 50 cents.



My dad would take us. But when my grades were below 20, I wouldn't go to the cinema. I don't forget I missed the movie "Neutron", because I didn't get the maximum grade in a test. I cried a lot. My grandma consoled me: "Ay, Huguito!"

### ***The Spiders Salesboy***

**Y**ou know I used to sell spiders (dessert of papaya sweet with the form of spiders). Since my early age I have a notion of the productive economy and how to sell something, how to put it in the market. My grandmother finished the spiders and I ran to the street. Where would I go then? To the graveyard? I would be crazy. Maybe there would be a lady arranging a grave or a funeral. In case of a funeral, I would take the chance, right? But no. Then, where? To the skittles. My dad scolded me several times, "What are you doing here?" "I'm selling spiders, dad". Every afternoon, at five, the men of the village appeared there. My dad used top lay skittles, he's left handed and he launched well.

I used to sell half at the skittles, and then to the movies. The people used to gather at the Bolívar square. At the entrance of the mass I was selling my "hot spiders". I used even to add

couplets: “Hot spiders, for the toothless old women” “Tasty spiders for the pretty girls” “Sweet spiders”. I invented songs, but I have forgotten the couplets. I used to sing to the girls. Specially to Ernestina Sanetti. Ernestina Sanetti and Telma Gonzáles were the prettiest girls of the village. Then, I sold my spiders at the market and to the gatherings.

How can I forget Sabaneta parties! I was the altar boy. I rang the bells. During holidays, they had to be rung very hard. My grandma said, “Huguito, go get more papaya!”. In normal days, I used to sell no more than twenty sweet spiders. They costed 2,5 Bolivars. I used to sell up to one hundred daily spiders during holidays instead. My grandmother used to wake up very early. I helped her, and I ate the legs of the spiders. I gave one to Hilda, for I had a crush on her. Everyday I gained two “lo-chas” (coins of 12.5 cents). With that money, I jumped on the rollercoaster and roll around that moon. I liked to go to the circus, and to see the beautiful trapeze girls. Any other time an elephant or a tiger came to the village. I lived on those illusions. Patronal feasts were an emergency. We had to find papayas even by the river. We used to sell a lot, because we didn’t have any competition. The only house to make sweet spiders in that village was Rosa Inés Chávez’s. Yes, we were a monopoly.

### ***Honorable people***

**I** remember that sometimes I bought on credit. We lived on what my father gave us, he was a teacher in the mountains. Imagine a salary of one hundred bolivars! My grandmother made sweets, we sold spiders, tablets, majarete (dessert made with corn, coconut and cinnamon), coconut sweet, and fruits. We sold a lot of fruits because the yard, where I was a happy child, was a yard full of fruit trees of all kinds and that's what we lived on.

There were hard times when grandma could not make the sweet. I would say to Luis Alfonso, the clerk, where I bought all my life: "Luis Alfonso, I've come to give you a bolivar of bananas". And he would write it down, because we were going through a difficult situation. But then I would get my act together, as we used to say. My grandmother made double sweets, I sold faster and we paid her the locha or the bolivita that Luis Alfonso had given us. Humble people are honorable.

### ***Poor, yet happy***

Not long ago, we were eating mangoes with the Governor at the house of the King, in Jamaica. there were a lot of mangos. I told the Governor that I my childhood had been poor, yet happy. I wandered by the trees, having mangos, oranges and plums. We were very poor. I only had a daily locha to go to the highschool. With that money, I could buy a soda and maybe a piece of bread.

Afterwards, we went in the afternoon right away from the school to the stadium "La Carolina", in Barinas, were a great soccer is played nowadays. That place is surrounded by mangos and mangas (big mango), and that was our dinner: The ones practicing. I used to take my briefcase and my old baseball pieces: my old glove, a tshirt, a cap. Those mangas were huge. We took a flowerpot and began to knock down mangas, my friend. And then, time to eat! Sometimes I could afford a sweet bread or pastries with sugar.

### ***The virgin of solitude***

I remember my grandmother Rosa Inés when we arrived to the house of the big palms, were I was born. It was very fresh. But we came from some activity, some visit to the neighbors,

and the house was alone. My grandma opened the door and she said, "Good morning, or good evening, Virgin of the Solitude". She used to speak to the Virgin of the Solitude, who took care of the house when it was alone.

### ***The ghosts of Sabaneta***

**I** was recalling my friend Alfredo Aldana, in Sabaneta, the "Chiche" Frías, "Pancho" Bastidas, "Cigarrón" Tapia. I was a kid of 10 years old. They were teenagers of 14 or 15. At night, they put a white sheet. I saw them, because my cousin "Chiche" Frías was one of them. After Mauricio Herrera, rest in peace, turned the electric plant of the village off, they ran with the white sheet around Sabaneta making "uuuuuuuh!". They ran around the square, the graveyard. They were mean, mischievous. We knew it was them, but I kept quiet. In that time more than one ghost jumped a fence out of love affairs. One night, they put a candle by the alley to my poor old lady. I think it was my cousin Adrián Frías, who also wore a costume. They pit a candle in the yard of my grandmother. She was very scared. "Can you see? Those are the dead!" I had to tell her the truth. "No, grandma, those are the boys. They want to take away a sack of oranges, then they put a candle to scare people off the yard". The ghosts of Sabaneta.

## ***The first speech***

I remember the first time I gave a speech, when the first bishop arrived in Sabaneta de Barinas. I was in sixth grade and they asked me to read a few words, to welcome Bishop González Ramírez, that was his name. And that same year, on March 12th, 1966, I also had to read a speech in the Plaza Bolívar, in Sabaneta de Barinas, on behalf of the boys of the Julián Pino School, where I did my elementary school. I will never forget a phrase of that speech written by my father: “The flag that Miranda brought and that Bolívar led with glory”. That was engraved in my memory forever.

## ***Ofasa***

Family tales. We must get together some time. Now I don't have the time. Sometimes, the family suffers the impact of all this. From here, greetings and memories to my brothers. We used to call Aníbal “Catfish mouth”. Nacho, “Churro mogotero”. Nacho was skinny and with big back. I was called “Goofy” or “Plumcot”. Adán was called “Macha macha”. The negro Argenis was called “The Indian” or “Curicara”. My younger brother Adelis was called “Ofasa”.

You know why? Ofasa was an international thing, an office. I think he roothed the yankees, I'm not sure. I guess it was something weird, because it was a humanitarian aid office and there was an advertisement on the radio, in Barinas: "Ofasa will visit your home". "Ofasa assists humankind". Adelis was little. He wanted eight or nine years old. He was too curious and he wanted to be in everything. Then comes a lady who lived on the streets, a beggar asking for clothes and food in the houses. Adelis was at the window of the bedroom, and then he says, "Mamá Rosa, Mamá Rosa, there comes Ofasa!". Because the radio he heard "Ofasa will come to your house. Ofasa assists the humankind". Therefore, we call him "Ofasa".

### ***An ideological issue***

**Y**ou know that I'm ugly. But a friend of mine in Barinas was three times uglier than me. We had to make extra efforts in the parties. Other guys just combed their hair by one side and things like that. Besides, we were always wearing the very same old clothes, some rubber boots. We had to make an extra effort to invite a girl to dance, take her by the hand. It was a huge effort. But my friend, who was three times uglier than me, suspected that the girls would not dance with him nor accept a

conversation with him. We were 14 years old, just kids. He said, "I don't dance with any girl until she's ideologically defined" He was then beginning the road of the Marxism. He was the son of a well respected professor in Barinas.

### ***The thought***

*M*y dad started teaching elementary school, back in Los Rastrojos. He was in sixth grade, there was no high school in Barinas. Then he got a job as a teacher in the mountains, but then he enrolled in the teacher training courses, a good thing. Not everything in the past was bad. That came long before 1958. Then my father came to Caracas in August and brought books. By the time of the earthquake of Caracas my dad was here and we cried a lot: "Caracas is over", they said on the radio. And the rumors there in Sabaneta: "Caracas is over".

Then a telegram arrived the next day: "I'm alive, I'm fine". And he brought an encyclopedia, I think it was French, "Quillet". A French friend of mine promised to get me one from that time, because those books were lost. The last one I saw was with my



brother Adan. Later I don't know, Adam himself lost it in these hurricanes that took many things away. But there were many recommendations there: philosophy, mathematics, history; it was like my Internet then.

I was a child and I used to drink those pages. And one of the recommendations there, which I applied all my life, was the following: "You think", said one of those pages. I applied it. If you are in the morning cleaning your teeth, think about what you are doing: "I am cleaning my teeth". Don't stand there as if you were a tree, which doesn't think. If you are pitching baseball, think. If you are enjoying yourself with some friends, some girlfriends, think. Thinking is key to understand what one is living, to not pass through this world as if it were a cloud that passed.

***Don't kill him!***

*M*y father was at the estate La Chavera on February 04th, 1992 in the morning, like everyday, with his pigs and four cows. Someone came by bicycle and said: "Look, Don Hugo, there is a military rebellion. Some militaries revolted". Those were kids, neighbors with some cattle too. They know me for a long time, because I always went to La Chavera on holidays to play skittles and swim in the river. The boys said, "Don Hugo, do you think Huguito might be involved?" They already suspected, for they had already talked to me at the skittles court, in the river, by bicycle, waking by those riverbanks. My dad was washing the pigsty and replied, "No, he doesn't get in trouble".

Instead, when Cecilia, our neighbor, called my mom: "Look Elena, they said in Radio Barinas that there was a military rebellion". My mom began to pray: "Huguito must be there". Mothers always know, don't they? Whereas my dad said, "Be quiet, he never gets in trouble". Instead, since my mom heard the news, she began to pray "Please, don't kill him! I'm sure he's there". I love you, mom Elena. This "delicada" (Dessert made with orange juice and cornstarch) is delicious! The hallacas (typical Venezuelan tamale) and the porridge you brought me. There is some left. Little by little. I'm not sharing with anyone.

## ***My father's fingers***

I've just talked to my father. I love him, admire him and besides I put him into this mess. My father, Hugo de los Reyes Chávez, is a retired teacher. He was raising pigs and laying hens for several years until that February 04th in the morning. He left the hens, the pigs, four cows, a small estate that costed his whole life as a teacher and joined the battle.

He was founding Bolivarian committees in every village, looking for signatures to obtain the freedom not for his son but the soldiers. I was imprisoned. I found out and I cried. I even wrote a poem called "My father's fingers". I lost it, because I was raided a few days later, and my handwritings were lost.

And he lost three fingers because the cart came off in those rivers where the hand of development has not reached. Those places still use carts, down there in the plains, in the foothills. Those were the same hands that taught me to write the vowels: a, the e, the i, the o, the u. Those same hands together with those of my mother and her love, made possible, by the hand of God, to make me come into the world together with my brothers.

## ***My old man is a warrior***

**O**n Thursday night, my father suffered a stroke when he was working as the Governor of Barinas. He always assists the people in those villages: People who live the same existential anguish we live before the tragedy of the peasants and fulfilling their responsibilities. He was surprised by an ambush of life, as I call it.

My old man stood as a warrior. We brought him that dawn to Caracas. A female doctor came to ask questions. It's vital to know that my dad never lost his mind. God willing, he's getting better. But that dawn, the doctor came and she asked, "Do you want me to whistle to you?" I saw him very worried. Deep within, I kept my hopes, for seeing him fighting with his mischievousness. Then comes the doctor again, "But can you whistle and sing too?" "Yes", he said. Then he sang an ancient song.

My dad was a party animal. I was a kid, and I had a friend called John, who had a guitar. They sang, gave serenades and they would arrive sometimes at midnight. Imagine that! He was a school teacher, and he sold meat in the wild on a black donkey. He met my mom, who was born and raised in a small village, at the coast of Caño de Raya, in a hamlet called Los Rastrojos. That's where my mom was born. The Frías family was conformed

mainly by women, right? They were all pretty. Dad brought her on the lap of the donkey, and they got married.

When Adán was born, the oldest, dad was twenty years old. My mom was seventeen. I was born the next year. We are six brothers in a row. I remember my dad playing baseball. That's where my passion for the game comes from. Dad is lefthanded. He used to play for the team "The Centaurs" from Sabaneta. It was a desert, but he played the first base. I remember him also as a pitcher playing skittles, with the left hand. He used to pitch the ball by one side: "Pac".

My dad sang her that ancient song to the doctor, at four in the morning. It was a beautiful tune that ends up saying "*I'm called the llanero, oh yes /I don't complain /for I carry my hat/ for I carry my hat of straw and chinstrap*".

## ***A piece of the soul***

**T** became a father for the first time with 21 years old. Rosa Virginia was born, my sugar cube. Rosa began to grow, and then came María and then Huguito I saw them very little, but I could say, “These are the only children in the world”. I saw they had a house, that they could go to school. In case of disease, I could bring them to the Military Hospital.

I remember that when we came to Caracas, I used to stop at the highway, by the edge and I said to them, “Look, you’re lucky. You have a father who can, sort of, provide you with sustenance, for I am a professional military, and we have a social security system that assists you. But beyond those hills there are many children without a father, with no attention whatsoever”. I prepared my children for what came after, that was very painful.

I will never forget, as a father, the night of February 03rd, 1992: Leaving the house, leaving the children while sleeping, giving them a kiss, leaving my wife and going out with a rifle in the dark. That is terrible! You leave a piece of your soul.

## **Rosa Virginia**

**T**omorrow, September 6th, is Rosa Virginia Chávez Colmenares' birthday, my little girl, my "negrita" Rosa, God bless her. She was born in Maracay, I was just a lieutenant. I told the battalion commander: "Give me a leave because my wife is going to give birth". And I came in the morning to Caracas, to look for money, because I did not have enough to afford for the delivery and the insurance did not cover me but a small part of it. Besides, Rosa Virginia's birth was a little difficult. Nancy, is her mother, my first wife, whom I remember with much affection.

I did not even have a car. I borrowed it from Second Lieutenant Chávez Tovar, a comrade from the Bravos de Apure armored battalion. He had a Fairlane 500, a fast one. So I came, like a bullet to Caracas, to Ipsfa (The Armed Forces Social Prevision Institute), with a letter from the Commander to lighten up. I had asked for a personal credit, six thousand bolivars to pay for the clinic. I arrived and got in and they even stopped me. There was a colonel there who did not want to attend to me or was very busy; I had to stand in front of him: "Attend to me, it is urgent". Finally they gave me the check, a small check, brother, I cashed it at 11:30 in the same bank of Ipsfa.

I started the car and arrived in Maracay in less than an hour, straight to the clinic. When I was entering the long corridor of the clinic, I saw Major Richard Salazar, who was the second commander of the battalion, and a group of officers. And the first thing he said to me: "You lost the bet". I had bet that he was macho, and what's more, I had bought him a baseball bat. I lost a bottle of whiskey, which at that time you could bet on. Of course, I was in debt. I didn't have enough to pay for that bottle, they took it that same day. Well, there was la negra Rosa Virginia squealing there happily.

### ***"The mad arm"***

*M*aria Gabriela was born in that savannah of Barinas, and on that special day we always went to the parades and Flag Day things on her birthday. So she associated all that colorful stuff with her birthday. One day I told her: "I was going to name you María Flag". "Dad, I would have sued you!". Because Maria came out like that, free as the wind, like the flag. She waves like that.

So many memories. Your furthest childhood, the company in the deserts was never a desert. There was always someone around. You are never alone. Even Jesus is always around, the man from



Nazareth. María is always like that: with her joy, her things, her hops. Once she fell from a guava tree there in Elorza, and her arm came loose. Se was seven years old. I had to bring her on a truck amidst the winter to Barinas.

I was with that girl on those impassable roads, and her arm swinging. She was operated in Barinas, and her arm was put in her place. Then, I pitched Huguito, and María caught the ball. she pitched the ball back and it jumped to the sides. She never launched it straight I used to tell her, "You are a mad arm". So she was called "The Mad Arm".

### ***Huguito was born***

I remember when my son Huguito was born, who is now Hugote; he is taller than me. I came to meet him three days later because I was, as always, devoted to my life as a soldier. Nancy went to give birth in Barinas and I was on a commission with some tanks, on maneuvers. Over there, in the middle of a field, some tanks and soldiers, I got the message: "She gave birth male". I celebrated the birth among tanks and soldiers. "His name will be Hugo Rafael", I said from there in a message to my mother and grandmother, my mother.

I was able to leave on the third day. They gave me permission, another captain arrived to relieve me and I took a bus from Carora to Barquisimeto. There a cousin took me to Barinas. I arrived in Barinas and I got the family sad, because the child was born with a stuck pylorus, which is like a valve at the end of the esophagus. That's what I learned that time. The boy was tiny and they were going to operate on him. In the end it was not necessary, there was no operation. Then his pylorus opened up a lot, he ate a lot and he became like Juan Barreto, he looked like a white ball, because my boy was white.

God bless him and all the boys in Venezuela.

### ***I'm not afraid of them***

Ah, then, I realized something I had not discovered: the fear of the factic powers. Look at the newspapers. Well, my friend, I don't care. They say everything to my daughters, even to the youngest, well, they mess with her, with them, with my son, with my parents. I don't care about anything, and they know it. I am not afraid of what they will say, or what they will do. God take care of my children and the children of all of us. One day I told something

to my children, the older ones, because threats started to arrive when I had no way to protect them. Now the State is obliged to protect them, it is a constitutional obligation. I was walking the streets, and I got divorced. Nancy with her three boys in Barinas, alone. I sent them a little money, and a little house over there that we were able to half accommodate. That was all I left them, I had nothing else. And I went on the roads to do what I had to do.

One day they threatened that if I kept doing what I was doing, they were going to kidnap one of my daughters. They were twelve years old, fifteen years old, and that was such a difficult age. So I gathered the two older ones, because Huguito was ten. I still told them: "Girls, take care of yourselves". Because it was the age of going out at night, boyfriends and adolescence. That beautiful time, but so dangerous at the same time. Someone said: "He who has a son has all the fears in the world". And I remember that I told my two older girls something I read about something very true that happened in the Spanish war. A Spanish general was defending a village, and the enemy force captured his teenage son. They call him on the phone and the enemy general "If you don't surrender, your son will die". The Republican general replied:

—"Is my son here??".

—"Yes! Here he is. Surrender!"

—"Please, put me my son!".

—“Here he is, listen to him”.

—“Dad!”.

— “Son, Die like a man!”.

This is how we the revolutionaries must be!

### ***The red cloth***

When I was in Yare, Maria wrote me letters, poems and very beautiful things, from the soul. She writes from the soul. And a very beautiful thing, once about a red cloth. Do you remember María? Because in prison, when they were leaving, I used to take a red cloth out of the window. She says she still sees that red cloth. That is profound, a symbol.

Then there was a very difficult moment for the Bolivarian Movement, when I had been arrested once and they sent me to the East, we were in difficulties. The Movement collapsed and there was confusion, persecutions, a lot of surveillance. There was an infiltration, a betrayal by someone who spoke out. Then, Huguito, once I came to the house, told me: “Dad, I wrote this”. He drew a picture, like stripes, like a river, and a jeep, a cart like that, and

below a legend: "The river runs hard but it is low and the 'jices' (jeeps) will pass". I read it and said to him: "My God, boy, what a soul, where do you get that from?" It was a message to the father who arrived a little crestfallen, tired. I was traveling from Maturín in my old car, alone to the house. At that time, it was as if I had leprosy, nobody came near me. And then the legend said: "And they will come out with mud, but we will wash them". Imagine.

### ***Rosinés' figures***

**D**o you know who imitates me, perfectly? Rosinés. She stands and salutes: "Excuse me, my commander in chief". One day, walking through some trees, she dressed as a soldier, she said to me: "Daddy, I want to be a paratrooper". Of course I didn't like the idea very much. Maria, my daughter, was the one who jumped out of a plane. Here is one of the culprits, they jumped without telling me, boy.

Now Rosinés tells me she wanted to be a parachutist and she was doing the math look at that, math. She was about seven years old, starting school, second grade. I said, "You'll have to wait until you're of age," buying time. "You'll have to wait until you're eighteen." She started to draw the bill, the little face. We kept walking and after a while she stopped: "Daddy, is it eleven

years before I can parachute?”. “Well, more or less around eleven years”. And we kept walking with some dogs, because she had some dogs there. She stops again, “Daddy, how long do you have left as president, until 2021?”. I said, “no, no, I don’t know”. “Well, 2021 it is.”

She counted: “Hey, you have thirteen years left, so when I turn eighteen, you will have about three years left as President”. I told her: “I don’t know, but that’s the count you are doing”. “And you will be able to jump?”, “How old will you be?”, “Fifty, sixty--something years old?”. So what she was thinking was to jump out of an airplane with me, my friend! “We won’t jump out of a plane, honey, but we can play dominoes, maybe, or play...” “What?” “Skittles. You like them so much.”

### ***New year's eve with the family***

Many years had passed without sharing new year's eve with the whole family, specially my parents, my brothers and that big bunch of newphews, nieces, grandchildren, etcetera. I arrived by surprise to my brother Adán's house. They were playing domino, as always. The same domino match in the afternoon since 15 or 20 years ago. My domino playing style is called there "suicidal". I hadn't played in a long time. I found an old friend and we played a good match We won by applying "suicidism". My brothers play domino a lot. I don't know how to play. But one of my brothers, when the match has three or four rounds, already knows everyone has. He counts even the pieces that haven't come out.

Then, it was the time for the toast at the night of December 31st: For everything that could and couldn't be; we made a toast for the future, for what Venezuela can be and will be On January 01st I left with the boys to visit a small estate my dad has for more than 20 years There we played skittles The Governor of the state of Lara, our friend Reyes Reyes and I against two of my brothers. And we also beat the in skittles! At the pace of the winners, we made the landslide of the century. Our record was left written there. I hadn't played skittles in five years, in such a dear place. I was saying to Rosa Virginia "Look, dear, how the time passes! I

saw you like my granddaughter when you were learning to walk and wandered around this very same yard wanting to grab the ball". You know how kids sneak into places. "Hey! Move the kids! Take them away!"

I also played a few matches of "chapita" (baseball, whose ball are soda caps) See that we won too! We were lucky that day. Ask Adán! In fact, Adán was the opposite pitcher. We were three teams. We exchanged players . I played with my brother Argenis, my brother Adelis and my nephew Aníbal, a fifteen year old boy who just went to the national baseball team. Of course, we had so much time without playing. My son Hugo and my nephew Ernesto went to look for them in the village of Camiri. We grabbed the broomstick from the house. "Don't break my broom," my mother said, as always. Finally, another stick appeared over there and the game began. ask Adán, so you can see. Three on base and I put myself, poof, triple. Triple was if the plate fell on the roof, if it went over the roof it was a home run. There were no home runs that day. We won in chapita, we won in skittles. But we lost a game of dominoes on the night of the 31st.

And we went to the river bank. That river bank is a very dense forest. We went to explore it through a little path, some topochales, and we arrived at the river. This is no longer the Santo Domingo or the Boconó. We are talking about the Pagüey, already on the road



to San Cristóbal, but very close to the city of Barinas. Of course, I was trying to go unnoticed. There were many children bathing, some of them saw me and started: “Chávez! Chávez!”. Well, I had to go down to greet them with my family. Because there is a very beautiful little island in the Pagüey River, which for many years people have called “La Isla de la Fantasía” (Fantasy Island). Many children go there, entire families go there in caravans of trucks and cars. People carry hammocks and spend the whole New Year on the banks of the river, bathing in very fresh water, in the waters of the Pagüey River.

It had been several years since I felt, how can I say it? Yes, far away from the worldly noise, at the shore of a river, walking through a forest hand in hand with my children, my granddaughter, my parents, my brothers and sisters, my friends. Like magic. I forgot about the president, I forgot about all that and I went back to being that child, that boy who walks inside.

2

# *The ball chronicles*



## ***Batting at the topochal***

Sometimes you lost in landslide. When your team is losing 10 to zero, all pitchers hit you hard. The team loses its moral. Those games became a massacre. That's why they invented the knockout, wasn't it? In the ball games of the Savannah, you could hit up to 40 runs. Adrián Frías, my cousin, who was called "El Guache", was the oldest from all of us. He imposed the rule of running as many runs as possible if the ball went lost at the topochal. Then, we ran over and over again until the ball appeared. Adrián was mischievous. Since he was lefty, he always batted towards the topochal.

We were a bunch of kids, around ten and eleven years old. He was already a teenager with 14. As I was also a lefty, I took advantage of that rule. You batted with a small wood stick Pum! Right to the topochal. I once scored 12 runs. The ball didn't appear: It had fallen over the topocho tree, and my brother Adán was looking for the ball. Adán is also a lefty, so he also batted to those sides of the topochal.

## **The “whip” Chávez**

I never forget that it was one of my dreams. Behind the example of the “Whip” Chávez. Isaías Chávez, who I admired so much and died in year 1969 when he was going to the Major Leagues. The “Whip” was 23 years old when that plane fell, in Ziruma, state of Zulia. It was a Sunday, I woke up a little late. The world fell down on me I was 14 years old, and I had the dream to be like the “Whip” Chávez.

In that time, we didn't watch television. We heard the games on a small battery radio. All the neighbors gathered to listen to the game. I kept track on the “Whip” on a magazine called *Sport Gráfico* (Graphic Sport). The “Whip” Chávez he underwent surgery for a calcification in the elbow of his pitching arm, starting the year '68. So, he didn't play in that season. He went to the dugout and made some appearances. Sometimes, he jogged with the team Magallanes. We missed him a lot in year '68. He never returned. He had left forever.

One night, in year 1967, playing against the team of Caracas, we were listening to the game at the square Domínguez, caraquistas and magallaneros. We were all together: neighbors and friends. My dad is an enraged magallanero (fanatic of the team Magallanes). Caracas had three in base with no out. That was

a glorious night for us the magallaneros, specially the chavistas. They bring “The Whip”. He was a boy, about twenty years old. He came from a national baseball league, where he represented the Federal District, in the Margarita island. That’s where he got the nickname “The Whip”. He rose the leg very much, like Juan Marichal. A Puerto Rican man once told me, “I don’t remember his name, but we used to call him the Venezuelan Juan Marichal”, in the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, all the Caribbean.

The “Whip” Chávez is brought to replace, during the fifth inning three in base the Caracas had. Then came the batting. Just imagine: Víctor Davalillo, José Tartabul and César Tovar, rest in peace. That was the threesome. The little “Whip” stroke out the three of them in line. I will never forget that. We yelled that night. We ended up in a fight with the caraquistas in the corner.

### ***Street match at the Coromoto hood***

**W**e had the Rodríguez Domínguez baseball team and we would go to play on weekends in the Coromoto hood, beyond the sawmill. But that was a field, a deserted ground there, and that dirt road, like talcum powder, the loose earth. Because a lot of trucks passed by there, off road trucks.

A guy from the Coromoto hood came by, a tall guy, and he hit a rolling pin. I grab the rolling, but he runs away shuffling his feet. Of course, that was the technique. It was full of dirt and you couldn't see first base, it was a disaster. I threw to first but he was running up the field. The first baseman didn't see the throw and the ball went away. He kept kicking up dust, and second, third. He came home, scored on a run. Imagine, the Coromoto hood. I'll never forget those tremendous street matches. We played there all day Saturday and Sunday.

### ***Score that lefty***

I remember when I decided to come to the Military Academy to try my luck in life. I wanted to be a professional ball player. I came without the permission of my dad. He wanted me to study at the ULA (University of Los Andes), in the city of Mérida, close to Barinas. I also wanted to be an engineer. But I took an old suitcase, and put there the spikes, the gloves and an old ragged Magallanes shirt I wore every now and then. I came to Caracas and looked for Chicho Romero. He was an uncle who had been married for long time with an aunt of mine, sister of my mom. Then, they separated, and he went to Caracas. But he remained for me as an uncle forever. I looked for him at the neighborhood

La Castellana. The house was alone, so I waited for him to arrive. Four hours later, my uncle arrived, as a driver. He hugged me and asked what was I doing there. That night I slept in the car of the family, in the back seat. There was no bedroom available. They were very nice with me, gave me food.

The next day, Chicho took me to the Military Academy, and I took the test. Do you know who I met that day? Héctor Benítez, who is like a father to me. I always see him. He was in Cuba in the game we did. Héctor was precisely the one who scored me in a list that day Chicho took me there, for I had failed a subject in the fifth year. Venenito helped with that, the Chemistry teacher. I got nine out of twenty in the final exam. In the Academy, they didn't accept students who had failed. But we were tested in baseball. Héctor Benítez was the batting coach from the Academy team. I remember Héctor Benítez said "Score that lefty". They scored the lefty Hugo Chávez, and that's how I entered temporarily in the Military Academy, while repairing Chemistry.

## ***Playing chapita***

I was a recruit, a freshman cadet. That was about November or December 1971. I went on leave one day. I was brand new and skinny. My cap was too big and it covered my ears. Then I took a free pass in the neighborhood El Valle, where those buildings are today located. There were no buildings there, only houses and small buildings. That area is called Longaray. The cabs used to pass by there. One would stand there dressed in blue, impeccable, with white gloves and would shake hands with the first cab that passed by. And I was lost in Caracas, but I would go to my uncle Chicho Romero's house, who was a driver of a truck. He lived with his wife on Colombia Street, in Catia, near the market. In a little house that had a room and a room in the back. That's where I arrived. I was going in blue and I said to the man: "How much does it take me to Catia on Colombia Street? "Five bolivars, come on, a cheek".

I sat on the back, took of the gloves off and looked Caracas by the sideways. I was scared, for I was a peasant, deep from the wild. I saw television for the first time in those years. I passed by the General Cemetery of the South, looked at the tunnels, and I imagined the grave of the "Whip" Chávez. The driver, instead of taking to the tunnels, went to the Avenue Arauca until the Cinema Arauca. The old Cinema Arauca, I used to visit with a girlfriend I had in that area, in the neighborhood Prado de María.



There was no overhead bridge, so we crossed to the left. I was staring sideways, new, lost, very curious. I suddenly see a boy playing chapita. I think to myself, "I know that guy" It was Jorge Rodríguez, my friend, a fourth bat of our junior team in Barinas, in the Nationals. He was a lefty, first base and he had graduated with me from highschool four months before. He had come to Caracas to study Pharmacy, and he was waiting for his school place. I say the taxi driver, "Sir, can you turn around? We did it behind the buildings, where the school Gran Colombia is located. We passed by again and I say, "Please, stop here". I stare at the boy again and I say, "There is no doubt. That's Jorge Rodríguez". "Sir, can you wait for me here just a minute?" "Don't take too long, newbie", he said. I was so new, that even the drivers called me "Newbie".

I get to Jorge and stand in front of him. He didn't recognize me, an. I was much skinnier from so much jogging and workout. I was in the bones, and the cap covered even my ears. Who would recognize me? Then Jorge says, "What do you want?" "Jorge, don't you know me?". I take off the cap and he says, "Hugo! And we embraced each other. He didn't know I was a cadet. "What are you doing?", "Where are you?" "At the Military Academy" "You as a military?", "Yes, man. I want to play ball here". "Me too, man. I will play ball somewhere".

We were feverish. He was playing "chapita". Do you know what

was I doing ten minutes later? With a borrowed pair of jeans, a borrowed pair of boots by Josefa's eldest son —, his aunt, whom I met that day together to her husband — I was playing chapita at the building Aroa. I spent there four years, playing chapita, hanging out with friends, walking to the corner of the bakery, the ice cream parlor over there, the liquor store at the corner where years later the gentleman was killed to rob him. This was on the way to the Cinema Arauca, walking around those hoods.

### ***Champion scammer***

**I** was designated once as a champion scammer in an Interforce tournament. Imagine! I stole around seven bases in a tournament. My legs were quick about stealing. My daughter Rosa Virginia was present in the awarding. "Liutenant Hugo Chávez", and I go. My daughter asks: "Dad, why they tell you a scammer?, Tell me! How come that you're a scammer and you're not in jail?" Imagine! I had to explain my little black girl several times until she understood.

I loved that Encarnación Aponte would give me a signal to steal when I was on first base, opening up a lot there. He would signal a steal when the pitcher would raise his spike a little bit and one would

pop out to second base. Once, just once, I stole home. I remember it was in a national championship. Goyo, do you remember?  
In Barinas, 1976.

We were playing against Aragua. I was already a second lieutenant; I was on the third base and the game was tied. Encarnación Aponte, the manager, told me: "Catch a lot, Chávez, the catcher is a little sloppy", to say another word. It turns out that Goyo Morales was batting, he was our shortstop, a good player. I open up a lot and when the pitcher throws, I catch a lot of ground and I catch ground again. In one of those, when the catcher goes to hit the pitcher back, he drops the ball about a meter away from home plate. I go to the plate and slide.

The catcher looks for the ball and throws to cover home. And there is a photo of that home run robbery. The umpire appears, who was a friend we used to call him "The goose", and Goyo Morales is with the bat like this, with his helmet on, watching the play. And in the background of the photo, behind in the stands are my mother and my girlfriend Nancy Colmenares, my first wife, mother of my three oldest children, whom I greet affectionately. It is a photo as well as for life. I had never seen it until Goyo Morales gave it to me one day in Barinas, about ten years later: "Look, Hugo, this photo, what a photo". I have it stored there, Goyo, thank you very much, a lifelong memory.

## **Strike!**

**I**magine the batter standing there and the story I tell of a major. He pitched and sang. He struck me out once in the paratroopers. One ball over here, he himself sang strike, and one complained. "My major how is that going to be strike." "Strike, captain, strike out if you can." Then I fouled him off. And in two strikes, a grounder, but everyone saw that he hit the ball before home plate, because it was a softball bomb, besides it was a caliche. I was chasing him to get a line drive between two, between right and center field. But the ball hit about half a meter before home, and that gentleman said: "Strike, strike out". I placed the bat in the middle of home plate and retired, which provoked a reprimand. "That is disrespectful," he told me: "disrespectful are you, that you are going to strike one out like that. No, you have to wait, it is the umpire who has to call.

## **The Big Absentee**

**I**t was a few months after February 4th. Then something very nice happened. There was the Inter Strength Games in August '92. I heard about it in the press. And I, who went to all the games, was in jail. My wife told me then: "Look, there are some games and they

invited me to go". And I told her: "Go on, take the children, greet them. They played in Maracay. Do you know what they did? That other Sunday my son Hugo came running to jail. He was about eight years old. "Dad, look what they sent you", a ball with the trophy "The great absentee".

I bursted to tears with emotion. I still have that ball there. It was lost. You know why? The government found out about the ball. My wife took it home, and they were looking for it. They were going to seize the house in order to take the ball and to terminate the ones who had signed. They all belonged to the softball team. Then I said Nancy, "Hide the ball". They buried it, and that's the story. Then, the ball was lost . Soon ago, in the city of Mariara, I was down a street on a trunk. There were a lot of people and someone says, "Chávez, here is the ball!" The ball was taken I don't know where to hide it. It returned fifteen years later.

### ***Pompeyo Davalillo***

**I** remember Pompeyo Davalillo, an impressive ball player. He was the leader in the dugout, he knew how to motivate the team to dwell battles, how to trascend the individual. I never forget Pompeyo and his moves, his mastery. I had the wonderful opportunity to be his coach and assistant. He said, "Chávez, if the game is at ten

in the morning, you must have the team at seven in the field. We were used to arriving one hour or two in advance but three?! It was aimed at talking, while looking at the opponent. "Look, that one over there is the center field; he has a good arm". "That one is the first bat, he bats a hit in a straight line". He talked to the pitcher and the catcher. Once we faced a team much better than us better pitching, better batting, better defense. It was a hard battle.

It was the final game of a military championship. And Pompeyo told me: "We are going to win this game like this, small, with moves. And the catcher, on every pitch he looked at Pompeyo and he was the one who told him: "Curve". And signs: "Outside". He would put his hand on his knee, here it was inside, there it was outside; one hand here, another hand on the other side. It was impressive, that man was leading the team pitch by pitch, and eating candy. We got to the seventh inning zero to zero. We dropped the defense, rolling to short, bad throw to first. A bunt, the pitcher catches, bad throw to second. Then Pompeyo told me: "You can't win like that. I can't do any more. And we lost the game three to two. Then we scored two runs on a bunt, stole bases, a hit and run, a suicide squeeze play, well, we almost won the game.

Playing against Pompeyo? Look, you have to beware! He was the manager of the UCV baseball team for many years and at the Military Academy we played against them. Any move was possible.

Suddenly with two outs, bang, bunt, and everyone was surprised. Double steal, men on second and first, delayed steal. Pompeyo Davalillo would do that, he would send in the delayed steal, and everyone would go crazy. One day he sent out a delayed triple steal. Three on base, no out, triple steal, bunt, terror, the other team was terrified. With a strategist like that, the other team is already afraid; watch out, anything can happen. Sometimes even breaking the rules.

Pompeyo Davalillo did not want to go to the party after the softball game. We were tied against Unellez de Barinas, and he told me: "Look, Chávez, what I want is to play dominoes, boy." Do they play dominoes here too? And he went over there to play dominoes and even lost his wallet.

### ***Mind mistake***

**W**e were losing by one, I was on third with the tie and there was one out. Pompeyo, who is a beast, tells me: "Chávez, you score even if it is with a hit, anything, you go home, a little rolling to the pitcher, you go home". He knows me, he knows that my legs move fast and home in softball is very close. So he gave me that order... The pitcher threw and I took three or four steps, and I

came back fast. They threw twice to third. Watch out, stay on third. In one of those, brother, I go out the same way, pitch and catch three steps. I had my distance well measured to get back fast.

It turns out that the batter hits a tremendous line drive to right field, but it's short and straight ahead. I am four steps away when I see the line, so I go back to step on the base to step and run. I step on the pad but, no way, it's a movement of going back to step and turn back; not even if you put third, fourth, backward, I even put in mocha. And besides, Colonel Maneiro was coming, he was in second gear and made a step and run. He came in like a whirlwind and we got on third base: me who had returned to step back to step and run, Maneiro, who was coming without a brake, and the Navy third baseman who was about two meters tall. A triple hit and I was under both of them. Well, so the guys who play baseball, when you're on third base, take a good look.

### ***The opposite band***

I remember I was pitching at the University Stadium for a retired Major League team. I thought they would beat me hard. There was Antonio Armas, Víctor Davalillo, and even the comedian Joselo. I threw a curve to Joselo that still makes "cui cui". I was giving him



no hit no run until the fifth inning when Remigio came and hit a line drive over second. Do you remember? I tried to pitch to you, because I know you are very skilled at hitting the ball outside to the opposite side.

One of my weaknesses as a hitter is that I never learned to hit to the opposite field. I hit the ball to the right field but I never learned to hit the outside straight to third base. Then Pompeyo Davalillo, who is a baseball genius, when we played against UCV, at the Military Academy, and I came to bat, Pompeyo would take third base away from me. He would put the third baseman to play on the shortstop, and the shortstop on the second baseman's pad; and the second baseman over here, in other words, they would close the box on that side. Well, on one occasion I touched the ball to third and I got on base.

### ***Ambushed ball***

That night we were in the car together, Fidel and I, already dressed in our baseball uniforms. We stood at the door, we were about to enter the stadium when Fidel told me: "This is as far as my chivalry goes, from now on defend yourself as best you can". He had told me: "Look, Chavez, I recommend you to score runs in the first innings". I analyzed this and turned it around: What does

he mean by that? Of course! He had the ambush prepared in the fourth inning. But Fidel was forced to bring it forward.

We were hitting them all over the place and he advanced the ambush to the second inning. Do you remember Germán Mesa? A beard like that... And a pot belly. And Kindelán on first. And how brave Remigio Hermoso was! Remigio took all that seriously and fought with me for about six months. Relations were settled when he came with a bunch of balls in a box and told Fidel: "Sign all that for me". He brought him about four boxes. He was very angry! "Until today I respected you," he told Fidel.

You won't believe me, but I gave José Ariel Contreras a hit. He came out to pitch with a big belly and a false chiva, and it was nothing more and nothing less than this Contreras with a pillow for a belly. I see him coming out and I say: "This fat belly, who could he be? I go to bat there and when he hit the first straight ball, wham! I didn't see it. Fidel Castro asks for time this is true and comes to talk to the pitcher. I see him, I go over to see what they are going to talk about, right? And I hear Fidel tell him: "Look, can't you throw a softer pitch to Chávez, you can't hit a ball to Chávez". And Contreras says: "That is the slowest I can throw a baseball, Comandante". And it was about 90 miles.

3

*At the headquarters*



## ***The cinderellos***

One used to go out on Saturday, if passed the armor cleaning review. Ay, ya yai! First, we had to jog on Saturdays at five in the morning, sometimes to the hill. The last twenty in the race didn't go out they stayed locked. After jogging, we cleaned the rifle. We used to put a small cord through the anima, pulled here out and cleaned. Once again, "ra, ra, ras", with some oil to avoid the that the gunpowder eats the cannon from the inside. It had to be brilliant as a mirror. "Newbie, clean the anima that the gunpowder doesn't eat the cannon!" We had to clean the mobile set, take away the slide. "Don't forget, newbie, to clean the handguard inside. They will pass review with a punch and cotton". If it was dirty, we ended up out.

So, after passing the trot, the cleaning and review of the armament of the two rifles: the FAL, which is the combat rifle, and the FN 30, the parade rifle. Both had to be cleaned, although the FAL is the more complicated due to its modern parts. The FN 30 is much simpler. The bedroom had to be cleaned and shined, the window had to be cleaned and fixed. You had to check the folded t shirts, the socks, fix the books. After all that, at noon you had to go out.

Then I would take a cab and get out on Brazil streett in Catia. I would take off my uniform, rubber boots, blue jeans, a tshirt, a little cap so they wouldn't see my haircut, because they knew you

by your haircut. Then I played chapita in the corner with the boys. Any other time we had a cold beer, on Saturday afternoons. In the evening a little hanging out, some little thing over there. But it turns out that the girls called us cadets "The Cinderellos". Why, because we had to leave shortly before midnight, like Cinderella. We had to be there at the Academy by midnight, the end of our leave. So when you were getting warm, at eleven o'clock at night, you would say: "Oh, I'm leaving! I'm going to dress in blue and get a bus and let's go!".

### ***The arepa at the caviar***

Who remembers that arepa house? The Caviar! The Caviaris over, man. More than once I had to run around the yard like a hundred times. Do you know why? There was an ensign in the prevention unit who was an immoral. One came from the street and with the only bolivar he had left he had paid for the bus and came to eat an arepita there in El Caviar, before crossing the bridge where freedom ended, before entering the Academy. An ensign from the prevention department came and told me: "Look, newbie, arepa to the fron...".

Who remembers that arepa house? The Caviar! The Caviar is over, man. More than once I had to run around the yard a hundred times. Do you know why? There was an ensign at the prevention unit who was an immoral. I came from the street, with the only bolivar I had paid the bus and came to eat an arepita at the Caviar, before crossing the bridge where the freedom ends, before entering to the Academy. Then comes the ensign from prevention and says, "Look, newbie, arepa to the front!"

Sometimes, one hid the arepa under the capor down inside, you know. Several times, I smuggled arepas, specially if the ensign on guard was a good person. Then, there was no trouble. But if the ensign was stern, I wouldn't smuggle any arepas whatsoever. That ensign told me to go back and that I had to bring him an arepa. I didn't have a locha, where was I going to find the money to buy arepa, and if I had had one, I wouldn't buy him the arepa either. Well, he sent me to go around the courtyard, I ran around the yard a hundred times because of that arepa.

### ***The rumor of the dead***

**L**ook, this issue of rumors and how one rumor and another well planned, in a perverse way, can alter the peace, the tranquility of a small town, or of a human group or of a whole country. There are many examples that one has experienced. I am going to tell you one:

When we were cadets there was one called José María Morales Franco. We called him Willy Mora, a very famous cadet. I have a lot of affection and memories of him. We coincided in the platoon, we became friends. He was older. Several times we went out to Caracas on leave, to a party. He sang very well. There he is in Maturin, he asked to be discharged as a lieutenant. Willy Mora was quite a character. We were from the newspaper room, because I used to draw more or less, and I always liked billboard work since I was little. We used to publish a small newspaper with a multi pen. I always liked all that: writing, drawing, reading, ideas. He was the head of the newspaper room. He didn't draw anything, but he was very creative.

Sometimes Willy, at night, would do witchcraft in the room. He would play with the Ouija board. He would call us the newcomers and he would come out with a black cape, a hood there. He had his show with the "ouija". Willy Mora sang in a disco called La Cueva del Oso (The Cave of the Bear), in Plaza Venezuela. One went there from time to time, a girlfriend around. One night I was there when I saw someone coming out singing in liquiliqui. I was in civilian clothes without permission, because they didn't give permission to dress in civilian clothes. So Willy Mora says: "I salute the brigadiers who are in civilian clothes over there". He sang there on Saturdays and Sundays when he went on leave. He sang very well, Willy Mora. He was arrested several times. Once they put him to sing at the

closing of some inter--institutional games. He came out with a cape and began to sing: "Ay Rosa, Rosa give me from your mouth, that crazy fury that my love provokes". That was a song by Sandro, do you remember Sandro? "Ay Rosa, give me all your dream, owner of your love I want to be, ay give me from your yesterday, the wounds..." He danced, he moved a lot, and in the military school of those years things were more rigid. Suddenly he took off his cape, threw it to the audience and it fell on the general. The general turned red, flushed. From there Willy Mora went to the dungeon. But he was singing, he was happy. I once told him: "My lieutenant, you made a mistake in your career. "It's true, I think I made a mistake in my career, I should not have been a military man.

Willy Mora one day invented something. He arrived at the platoon early one morning and there was a commotion. He woke up two or three of us, then woke up the other one, and the brigadier. He had a look of horror on his face. "Look how cold I am, I just got the dead one." He came up with a story about a dead woman coming out of the infirmary grille, where I kept a lot of guard. Then he would tell the story all morning. The wardens would call him: "Look, newbie, what's the story? He also had great histrionic ability. He would say: "Look, my ensign, I was walking with my rifle, passing review, and all of a sudden I feel like a whistle passing by: peep! I turned around and a white cloud was coming down. And I said to myself: 'Could it be that I'm asleep, or could it be my Brigadier Izaguirre Guarisma? He was a



brigadier who used to lie on the roofs and review. He used to say that whoever came close to him was scratched. You had to keep an eye on the roof, because sometimes he would come through the roof.

At first you took it as a joke, a story, right? But he insisted so much and then it spread like wildfire. It was my turn to stand guard three days later at that blessed fence, and I swear I stood guard electrified by fear. Because it is a dark place and since it is the infirmary, it seems that someone died there once, not from a gunshot, but from a heart attack. Then in the laundry they said, to add to the story: “No, a lady died there about twenty years ago of a heart attack, she dropped dead”, “that must be the one in the laundry”, “no, maybe it’s someone else”. Then, the stories began.

That generated panic at night. A new man, over there, at the gymnasium, shot a brigadier who was reviewing. Brigadier Rondín was reviewing the posts; the new man was full of fear and then he saw, bam, and shot him. A few days later, another second year cadet, without a helmet and without a rifle, came running to the prevention post at dawn. He said he had seen the dead woman.

Do you know what happened? About two weeks later, there was panic at night. First they gave the order not to turn off the lights at night, all the lights on. Second, that no one was to stand guard alone, but in pairs. The panic ignited like wildfire. I am not

exaggerating any of this. And in addition to all these measures, and others that I don't remember, many talks. I remember that they took the whole battalion to walk through the corridors and the priest, an old man by now, went ahead pouring holy water. We were all praying. It looked like a seminary, we looked like altar boys or seminarians. There at the grille there was a mass to bring calm to the cadet battalion.

### ***Rebel before outrage***

**T**he condensed milk was a luxury! I remember once a superior of mine, immoral, back in the field. We were going to eat, we opened the ration and he told me: "Look, recruit, I'll trade you this delicious, exquisite pot". It was a horrible thing, it had a lot of spinach and all that stuff. "I'll trade you this exquisite spinach salad for that poor pot of condensed milk." I declined, shoved it in my pocket. "You'll have to take it away from me." I was always rebellious in the face of outrages. "New, you're uppity." "Bold or not, this is my right, this is my combat ration. You are not going to take it away from me". Ah, he had me stubborn for about two months, until he forgot. One never accepted an outrage, nor should anyone accept it. Of any kind.

## ***A heroic act***

There is a friend of mine who, as a very young officer, did a heroic act. Once, a hand grenade fell on a soldier in the middle of a group of about a hundred soldiers. That boy had just graduated as a second lieutenant. He was a champion grenade thrower, an athlete. You know what the boy did, he didn't have time to throw it anywhere. He grabbed the grenade, tucked it behind his leg, squeezed it with both hands, bent down, knelt down, squatted down, and it exploded. The boy lost an arm, almost a complete leg and today he is a battalion commander. He has a great spirit of self improvement, he overcame that.

## ***The seed***

Here at the Academy I earned my counterinsurgency diploma, support weapons course, qualifications. See, see my signature at that time. A little signature there, a novelty. Ah! Here it is. You can see that I am not inventing. These are the admission test documents. Look, here this sheet from the laboratory in Barinas: Ministry of Health and Social Assistance.

Order number: 35. Name: Chávez, Hugo Rafael. Urbanization: Rodríguez Domínguez, block P, No. 24. Barinas; seventeen years old; stool and blood tests. And I came out perfect: urine, lab, RX exams. Here is the personal history sheet, it was filled out in August, by entering here. You see, it says here: "Profession: student. Religion: Catholic. Color: dark, broad forehead, thick lips". I don't know what else, big mouth, "brown hair, profiled nose, sparse beard, regular eyebrows". Alias or nickname, you see: "Goofy". Then you guys here called me "Fury". Because I used to sing a *corrió* from the Carrao de Palmarito, the "*Corrió de Furia*" (*Corrió of the fury*).

Here are the baseball teams I played with in Barinas before coming here: Club Béisbol Mobil, from the Mobil company. Club de Béisbol Juvenil IND, Club Deportivo Banco Obrero, this was my last team. Around here they asked me for references. Alejandro Pellechea was a neighbor from

Barinas; Silverio Martinez, another neighbor; Hugo Escalante, my father's friend; Irene Rosales, Irene, a fifth year classmate. I was very much in love with Irene. Vicente Sangroni was the manager of the Banco Obrero team. Ah, see this below, complementary data: "Have you been arrested?" "Do you belong or belonged to any political party?", "Which one?". Of course, my father was one of the founders of the MEP (Movimiento Electoral

del Pueblo, People's Electoral Movement) in Sabaneta, when old Prieto was robbed of the internal elections by the adecos, they threw him out of the party because he was a revolutionary. Prieto Figueroa founded the MEP and my father was one of the founders of those currents of the MEP teachers. So I already had my little seed there, but that little seed came to the surface here, and it became a tree, an oak and a rain tree.

### ***The Marqueseña***

“**T**hey left on the road of The Marqueseña”, my grandma Rosa Inés used to say. She spoke of the tales her grandmother told her about the general “Knife face”. He passed around Sabaneta one day, in May of 1859, yelling “Free lands and men”, “popular elections”, “horror to the oligarchy”. Ezequiel Zamora passed on this very same land. This estate owes its name to the fact that during colonial times it was the ancient lands of the Marquis of Boconó. According to the legends, the Marquis of Boconó had a tunnel here in La Marqueseña, that passed under all the rivers and reached Barinas. By the way, the first command position I had, as a second lieutenant, in 1975, was here. I arrived at the Cedeño Fighter Battalion and they sent me here. This was an old heliport, we used to jog up the mountain and go fishing in the river. Here I learned

to drive in an old Army truck, one of those that looked like a stagecoach. In La Marqueseña the soldiers used to say that a dead man would come out of this little mountain. There was an anti guerrilla theater here, there were torture sites. It is possible that in this mountain there is more than one buried. The bachelor Rodriguez was grabbed over there by Libertad, they brought him here and he was never seen again. It is possible that he is buried here, social fighters, student leaders. Here I found a car one day in the bush, a black Mercedes Benz. We cleaned it, we opened the trunk with a screwdriver and I got some books by Marx, Lenin; I got this book over there, I read it here: "Time of Ezequiel Zamora", by that great revolutionary Federico Brito Figueroa.

That Second Lieutenant Chavez began to read here, he began to talk to the soldiers over there. Just now I saw the remains of what was Bolivar Square, a bust of Bolivar. My father was once imprisoned in this place. My mother came to bring him an arepa, I came with her. I suspect he was out partying one night in Barrancas and they caught him, I think with compadre Juan Guédez, may he rest in peace. One night, he woke up here. He said, "Your father is in prison, they have him for a guerrilla". When here the Armed Forces were something else, when they were used by the Venezuelan oligarchy, by those treacherous governments subordinated to imperialism.

The first task I was given as a second lieutenant was to come to guard some equipment in La Marqueseña, I spent about six months here. When I started to look at the inventory, they were large communications equipment. Up there on the hill there was another one and here there was a communications room. My boss came one day to review me; he was a captain, a communications officer. Then he told me: "Look, second lieutenant, be very careful with this radio equipment --they were gigantic huge pieces of equipment--, these are not Venezuelan, this equipment is North American".

The Americans came here to install communications equipments, to direct tortures, disappearances. Now, for the glory of our Armed Forces and our military roots, for the glory of our liberating traditions, our Armed Forces are different. We have an Army, a Navy, an Air Force and a National Guard that have returned to their original roots. Today they are not there to run over the people but to fight together with the people for the liberation of Venezuela and for the development of Venezuela.

## ***They killed them***

I remember as a second lieutenant a discussion with a colonel who was already retired, but he was the head of intelligence in an area. I saw with my own eyes how they brought two or three skinny men, tied up. I was head of a small communications post, over there in the East of the country. Operations Center Number 2 in San Mateo de Anzoátegui. He arrived there one night. I didn't know that colonel, he identified himself and other civilians from Intelligence. "We are going to spend the night here. I welcomed them: "Of course, make yourselves comfortable here, there is a tent over there, we are going to make a coffee, we are going to give you something to eat". After we go to rest, I hear the screams. Ah, when I see some men tied up. I even said to him: "Colonel, can't you release those men who are tied up, at least so that they can eat?" "No, let them give them food in their mouths". It seemed so inhuman to me, they were already beaten. "And what are they?", I asked, "They are guerrilla men". I thought to myself: "They don't look like guerrillas, they are malnourished". I saw them skinny, yellow, pale, beaten, tortured peasants. And at night I heard the screams. They were hitting them with a baseball bat wrapped in a rag. I had a big mess that night with those people and, a few days later, the news came that "they committed suicide". I told my commander: "They killed them".



## ***The oath***

Venezuela must remember that José Martí was an infinite Bolivarian. He picked up Bolívar's banners, nurtured them, updated them after the fall of Bolívar and the Bolivarian project. That is why I remember that December 17th, 1982, back in the beloved Maracay. The Parachute Regiment was in formation to commemorate the day of Bolívar's death, and it occurred to Colonel Manrique Maneiro, whom we affectionately called "Tiger Manrique", to tell me to pronounce the words of that day. We were captains and as I did not write a speech or anything, I stood in front of the squadron, the whole cadre of officers, all the troops, and I was inspired by Martí that noon. And I repeated: "But so is Bolívar in the sky of America, vigilant and frowning, still sitting on the rock of creation, with the Inca at his side and the bundle of flags at his feet; so is he, still wearing his campaign boots, because what he did not leave undone is still undone today; because Bolívar still has to do in the Americas!" That was written by Martí.

We repeated it that day, and there began the speech: "How could Bolívar not have to do in the Americas with so much misery, with so much poverty, inequality?" That's where I left. That is not recorded, unfortunately, nor did I write it, only that we have in our memory

many things. When I finished the words there was an expectant cold, that stopped the bones and the hair. And a major says: "Chávez, you look like a politician". Then Felipe Acosta Carlez jumps up and answers: "Look, my Major, Captain Chávez is not a politician, what happens is that this is how we Bolivarian officers speak and you piss in your pants". A very tense situation arose. We were all there, and I remember that Colonel Manrique, a good chief, when he saw that the situation was getting tense with the captains here, some majors here, a lieutenant colonel there, then he commanded silence and said: "Don't let this get out of here! And he added something that even he did not believe it himself: "Officers: everything Captain Chavez has said I assume it, because last night I told him I would speak today, although he did not write it down, he told it to me in my office". Bullshit, what would I be saying anything! That's when it died, everyone assumed it with discipline.

But it did not die, it was born. Minutes later Acosta Carlez came and invited us to go jogging. We went to the Rain Tree of Güere and we took that oath. That same afternoon the Bolivarian Revolutionary Army was born. There were four of us: Felipe Acosta Carlez, Jesús Urdaneta Hernández, Raúl Isaías Baduel and this humble servant, it was barely 1982. Ten years later came the Bolivarian rebellion of February 4th, part of that whole process that sprouted from the bottom of the earth and the Venezuelan history; all that from Bolívar, from Martí. And Bolívar, seventy years before Martí, launched the

prophecy, he foresaw the empire. It was not yet seen, but he guessed it, like the peasant when he smells the rain beyond the horizon. "It smells like rain," my grandmother Rosa Inés used to say. Bolivar smelled imperialism. Impressive, we will only remember the phrase: "The United States of America seems destined by providence to plague the Americas with miseries in the name of freedom". It was 1826, what a genius Bolivar was, the first great anti-imperialist, together with Marti and all those men.

### ***It turned out pretty***

I have always liked theater, the arts. I got into more than one mess because of the revolutionary songs, harps and couplets. I did it on purpose because it was part of the process of creating a revolutionary movement within the Army. It was a very difficult thing. With culture, we achieved a lot. As a captain I was already known as a declamator, improviser and entertainer of the queen's election and all those things. I was used for many of those things.

One day a general called me: "Chávez, come here urgently, to San Juan de los Morros". I thought it was some kind of mess, because I was already in the revolution, holding meetings, conspiring, thinking about the future. I introduce myself, he says: "Look Chávez, there is a serious problem. This directive arrived here, about six months ago,

to form a theater group, to select the best historical play for a contest in Caracas. It turns out that here the Colonel forgot, nothing was done". And it was about a week before the national contest. And, then, the general told me: "I don't know how you are going to do it, but you go and present a play in Caracas in a week". "Are

you sure, General?" "Well, I told him, give me a second lieutenant (I knew he had a lot of ability), and some soldiers".

We chose soldiers, llaneros all. We made a play, we made the script. Do you know where? From "The savannahs of Barinas (Las sabanas de Barinas)", a book by Captain Vowel, which I had read. We looked in Paez's autobiography, then, we put everything in it. What was the play called? "The Genius and the Centaur in Cañafistola", when Bolivar and Paez met in Estate Cañafistola, 1818. Bolivar was coming from Guayana and met with Paez. We did the play, but we added harp, and there in "The savannahs of Barinas", some of the verses that the English captain, who fought under Paez and met Bolivar, says appear. He wrote his memoirs after he left for England. He says that the women sang to Bolivar. We put some Caracas girls that we got at the Teresa Carreño Theater, where my brother Argenis works.

I came running here and said: "Help me". We looked for a dressing room, some old rifles, some spears, a projector that on a wall reflected some sheets and some clouds that moved. And some songs and a

girl came out to sing to Bolivar, who was sitting there, a second lieutenant, I played Bolivar. I played Paez. And some soldiers there, very happy, llaneros, I made them exercise: "Relax, relax! Let's go to Caracas". A little bit of *vegueros* (peasants) for Caracas, *compadre*! Then, a girl used to sing to Bolivar: "My General Bolivar, he has a little carnation in his mouth that provokes me". Yes, and there was another one: "My General Bolivar, by God, I ask you to give me a husband among your officers". And there was another one: "My general Bolivar, he has a sign engraved on his sword: "Death to Spain!" Well, that was something... and it came out beautifully. That work was an impact. The General told me: "Chávez, you won third place, I thought you were going to be last". "No, third place in the cavalry", I told him.

### ***The "new" fool***

**I** studied military communications, and there is a thing they call "radio listening". The enemy speaks on a frequency, well, let's listen. You don't normally understand what they say, because they speak in code, codes. But just the fact that the frequency of communications increases in such a period, you say, "Hey, the last three hours they have talked ten times more than they talk every

day, something is going to happen, something is happening because they are talking too much". Then you have to turn on the alert: "Hey, move! Look, see, maybe they are preparing an attack and they are coordinating a lot, something is happening that they are talking three times more than what they talked the previous days or the historical average"; well, all that is scientific. Or one sees a lot of activity, they turned on the tanks before dawn. "Hey, watch out, the tanks are on! Look, they always turn them on at nine o'clock in the morning to test them and they are on at four o'clock in the morning, ouch, compadre!".

Ah well, like one time a new guy who was a pacifier. We were on a maneuver and the ensign told him: "Look, new guy, get over there on that little hill so he can watch out". Because there was a simulated enemy in the area, who were also cadets, but they were attacking, especially with tear gas. Then they tried to grab you and took away your rifle and boots. Ah, I really liked being the enemy, you enjoyed being the enemy, because you could capture them. On the other hand, the other could not capture the enemy, he had to go by a route; the enemy was free. I liked being an enemy to set up night operations, ambushes and so on.

Then the new fool was put up there. We would go to eat in a small ravine. One to wash one's head, to rest for a while. One loosened the campaign boots, we were coming from a march out

there, it was in the East, by the table of La Tigra, it was very hot, there were fires. We were opening the combat ration, we were going to have lunch with the sardines, the tuna, the stuff, ta ta, and suddenly we were surrounded and they tear gassed us and took everything away from us. They almost captured us. We ran and ran and stopped over there, in a palm tree I remember. "Ah, are we complete?". And the new guy was coming that way, the fool, and the ensign wanted to kill him. "Look, new guy, and I didn't tell you, why you..." So the new guy says: "No, I saw, but I thought it was smoke from the fire. It was tear gas they were throwing at us. It turns out that they grabbed him like a fool. Then they let him go and he was barefoot. A new fool.

### ***"Cadaveric, speak Papo"***

I was a second lieutenant and it fell to me to carry out some Communications Operational Instructions in a battalion. And I did it with a very humorous spirit, so much so that I tangled my life with several superiors. Because I called Captain X, who was a skinny guy and smoked a lot, "Cadaveric". The other one, a captain who was fat, I called him "Papo". That was written down and the

operators carried it. Then one would hear over the radio: “Cadaveric, Cadaveric, this is Papo”. When these officers realized that I was teasing them, the consequences fell on me, calls for attention and they were right. I did it to give humor to the exercise we had.

### ***Paint it green***

That was in Barinas in 1976. A captain used to tell me: “You have to put that grass green”. I was a second lieutenant and I told him: “Captain, but it is summer”. No. “The Army Inspectorate is coming and the grass has to be green, Chávez”. And some soldiers were pouring water on that grass, which was getting drier because it was burning with the steam from the Plains. And I told him: “But, Captain, you have to explain to the Inspector that we are in summer and here in summer things get dry. He has to understand that. “No, that has to be green”.

Do you know the instruction he gave me, to spray paint it, green paint. Ah, because that was what they demanded and whoever did that was very well off. But maybe they didn’t check the soldier’s morale. Maybe they didn’t search the soldier’s soul to see how the troops were doing, but rather the form, the appearance. Now the Armed Forces are not like that. Patterns and procedures have changed according to what the Armed Forces should be: mystical morale, willingness to serve, work, sacrifice, service to the community.



## ***Cloudy in Barinas***

**I** was reprimanded many times when I was a lieutenant, second lieutenant, unfair ones too. Uh, over there I was reprimanded several times and sometimes for things that were not well interpreted. Once in Barinas I had an orientation class by the stars with some soldiers. You have to learn to see the sky, where the Big Dipper is and that's where you go, star orientation. One aligns the two previous stars of the Ursa Major, projects it down directly and there should be the North Star, that is the north. And if one sees the Southern Cross, then one aligns the two vertical stars of the Southern Cross and that is the geographic south. Then you see Orion, Cassiopeia, the constellations. The sky has a map at night. That's how the old navigators navigated, and still do.

The truth is that I had a class with my platoon, there were thirteen soldiers. I made my lesson plan, but it turned out that the night was cloudy. That was covered, it was winter and the class was practical, in the field, because you teach the class first on a blackboard. I took the soldiers to the courtyard at about nine o'clock at night. When we started looking up, "My God, but you can't see anything here." So I suspended the class and pulled the soldiers out. Of course, I told them: "Go to the casino", they were there listening to music and having a drink, what do I know. Well, the captain passed by,

fulfilling his obligation to pass the drill review, and he did not see the platoon on the site. You know that in the barracks that is how it is, strict. Hugo Chavez's platoon has to be in the mango tree between eight and nine o'clock at night, receiving lessons from the stars. The captain passed by and there was no one there. But he did not look up and I was reprimanded.

The next day, at six in the morning, at reveille, he called me early. "Order, Captain. "Sign me here." "What's that?" "A reprimand." And you know there's no right of reply. I signed my reprimand and then, after twenty four hours, one passes a report. It was cleared up and they finally took it away. But a study had to be made, because afterwards the captain said that he did not remember if what I said was true. We had to ask for the meteorological report, witnesses, the soldiers, what do I know, and finally it was proven that yes, that day it was cloudy in Barinas and I could not teach the class.

***“Kikiriki, me toca a mí”***

**T**he era of cheating and fraud is definitely over in Venezuela. Convince yourselves, leaders of the Adecos, Copeyanos and their derivatives. That time when you did whatever you wanted. I saw it with these eyes. It was 1978. I was Lieutenant Hugo Chávez, commander of the Third Tank Platoon of the Third Company of the Armored Battalion Bravos de Apure. We went to Plan República (Operational deployment of the Armed Forces during elections) in Cojedes State. Lieutenant Hugo Chavez was given several responsibilities, one of them I was responsible for the logistics, food and lodging of the troops of the Armored Battalion. But I was also in charge of several voting tables.

And it was one of the few that one could see, because the officers were not even allowed to show their faces. They used to put us as fools to carry the fraud, boxes full of fraud. But I saw, and that earned me a reprimand and almost a sanction, because I was always a troublemaker. And I told a superior that I could not remain silent in the face of what I saw. A table, over there in a little school, on the outskirts of San Carlos. It was raining a lot, so maybe that's why I woke up in the little school with the soldiers, there in a corner. The only witnesses there were Adecos and Copeyanos. The leftist parties had no money, if they had

witnesses here in Caracas, in some parts, but at the national level, nothing, what witnesses could they have. The Adeco, the Copeyano, the so-called Supreme Electoral Council, everything was Adeco and Copeyano, the Punto Fijo Pact. They opened the box and took out the card, it was a vote by cards. Here was one, then someone was writing it down on a blackboard, and they were writing down in the record that killed the votes: AD, Copei, AD, Copei.

Suddenly a red rooster came out, some Communist Party votes came out. I was indignant because they even made fun. One of them said: "Kikiriki, a rooster". Yes, they laughed, they sang it, just like bingo. And then I, lieutenant, who had taken my Constitution seriously, my responsibilities for the Motherland, I already felt Bolivarian, I said: "No, but this is a mockery, okay, this is a real mockery". Then they would say: "Kikiriki, it's your turn". Ah! The triple cock! The joker. Then the rooster would end up being adeco. And after a while another rooster would come out: "Kikiriki, it's my turn".

**EL V 100**

One day I see an old newspaper, because at that time there were no newspapers in Elorza. I see over there in a little square: "Second Lieutenant Rafael Moros Gonzalez died". On the border, over there in the West. I mourned him. He was from Acarigua, catcher of the baseball team. A grenade exploded and he died to save his soldiers. He was twenty years old. I called him "V-100", because the V-100 is a combat car and he was like a combat car. So I also wrote him a few lines:

*Here, fare away from that world*

*Here, where I've just been left alone talking to*

*Sweeper ghost*

*here where the Centaur in a troop launched the inspiration that sprouted us  
in blue uniform, with white gloves a sword and a hope.*

*Here on the other side of the Homeland, here on the banks  
of the Arauca River, this morning I received a blow that  
broke my soul.*

*This morning, Rafael Moros, my son, of my word of my  
sowing there watered this morning I learned of your  
departure.*

*You left, Rafael, to the other world*

*You left "V-100" to the other world*

*here your centaurs we follow the course  
to your great tomb we will arrive together  
someday we will sing together, alive and dead,  
the immortal song  
our deep song.  
Forward centaurs, at a gallop  
with the lance high  
towards the horizon of the XXI century.*

### ***Respect this troop of the liberating army!!***

When I was a major, the governor of Apure did not even want to see me whatsoever, because I had several clashes with him at that time. They were adecos appointed by the Presidency, drunks, thieves. So I sent him to the slammer. "Let him make a report," a general told me. "I will do it, but if that governor talks to me like that again, I will kick him in the liver, so that he respects", I told the general.

I am going to tell you why. One day we were at the airport, here in Elorza. It was a ceremony for the squadron's anniversary. I was not the squadron commander, it was Captain Castillo, but I was the oldest, I was invited. Besides, my squadron was also mine, and

those soldiers that I loved so much. Then a small plane landed and someone said: "It's the governor". He was not coming to hear the people, he was coming to a farm over there, to a beef barbecue surely and a good whiskey. That's what the governors came here for. Then I go with the captain to greet the governor. The governor comes to scold the captain, in front of some people. "Look, captain, since I am the governor of Apure and I didn't know anything about this event, what is this event? The captain says: "Look, governor, I sent you the invitation card, it is the anniversary of the squadron. If you want to you can join us. I was standing next to him, because I was not the head of the troops. I went to salute out of respect, didn't I, to the governor; even though I was already the head of the Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement, but as a military officer I had to salute by obligation. Then the Governor began to tell the captain: "I did not receive a card, that is a lie, the Army, I do not know what to do with the Army! The Army here pays no attention to the governor," and I don't know what else. It wasn't with He wasn't talking to me, but I got involved: "Look, Castillo, back off". And I told the governor everything so many things, among other things I remember: "Look, governor, the Army that is there, is the heir of the Army of Apure and of the Army that liberated this continent". Then the Governor said to me: "Ah, you are Major Chávez, that Major Chávez". I told him: "Not that Major Chávez, I am Major Hugo Chávez Frías". And he: "Ah, you are conspiring against the Government". "You must be conspiring". Well, I almost threw him into the river. They had to take

the Governor away. He went was over there and I kept saying things to him. I said: "They are going to throw me out of here, out of the Army, but I will tell this governor what to say needs to be said to his face, to this drunkard, bandit, corrupt and thief".

And they made a report to on me: "Major Chavez there in Apure disrespected a Governor". They called me and I had to come and give an explanation. Today he is one of those adecos that go around shouting: "Chávez the tyrant, Chávez must go". Every time one saw him around he was drunk in Apure, and eating roasted meat everywhere. And he would run over people, until an older man a young major had to stand in front of him: "You are wrong, gentleman. You are wrong, you have to respect the dignity of these officers who are here and of these troops of the liberating army of Venezuela". He was dumbfounded, so I left him and went away. And then they even invented that I was with the guerrilla over there in Apure.



## ***Armored***

**D**o you know what I like? The headquarters. I would have really liked to be a commander of the Armored Brigade because that is my weapon, my main weapon. One is a paratrooper, one was in the Fighters, they are special units, I was also in communications for a while, but then I became an armorer, so tanks. I like the fast war, the blitzkrieg, the hurricane of armor.

In the armored vehicles we used to spend time with José Luis. I lived in Maracay in a little estate shanty town, I am not ashamed to say it. I was a second lieutenant and Nancy was pregnant with Rosita, the first daughter. Back then Jose Luis and Isaura were also recently married. They had gotten a little apartment over there in Santa Rosa, Maracay, near Plaza España. We were in the Bravos de Apure Armored Battalion. One Sunday José Luis and I went to play ball and then I told him: "Let's go to the house, boy, to have a beer". We went to the little estate shanty that was not mine. Chicho Romero lived there with his wife and two children. What I did was to put a cardboard and there we lived in a bed. Then he said to me: "Hey, do you live here?" "Look, I am in an little apartment, and there is an empty small room over there, there are two of us, Isaura and me". So we moved there, Nancy and I. And the two babies were born almost the same day, five days apart. Rosa was born first,

and then Jorge Luis who is already a lieutenant. My son, you are already a lieutenant. You follow in the footsteps of your father who was a good soldier, a good friend and a great companion. Lieutenant Jorge Luis and the other one is a second lieutenant and another one is a technical sergeant, all of them joined the Armed Forces.

So, Jose Luis Vegas Rodriguez, armored soldier and of the good ones, good companion has died a few days ago in San Cristobal, may he rest in peace and my heart goes out to you Isaura, to the children and this all the endless memories.

### ***Tank maintenance***

**E**very Friday in the tank battalions, by tradition for many years, there is tank maintenance, from seven in the morning until twelve o'clock. Sometimes, one would eat with the soldiers on top of the tank. Cleaning the grease because it had to be greased, cleaning the tracks, cleaning the cannon, taking out the ammunition, which is about fifty 105 millimeter grenades; cleaning and checking the ammunition, the smoke tube, the reserve ammunition, taking out the machine gun from the turret, the point fifty that goes on the side of the cannon, which is big and long, taking it out, cleaning it. All day long, and in the afternoon there was a magazine review.

If they got found something dirty, on Saturday they had to come back and repeat the maintenance. But when, for example, Commander Garcia Hernandez would say, from time to time: "Tank platoon commanders are free on Thursday after four o'clock in the afternoon. Those who want to do maintenance on Thursday, go from four o'clock until the time you want. On Friday I will pass review at noon. Those who get their tanks spotless will be on

leave". Man! On Thursday afternoon, at night, the soldiers were worked as hard as ever. Of course, because then you would have time for your wife, your children, your girlfriend, your family from Friday at two o'clock in the afternoon, after lunch, until Sunday.

I liked to paint. I never missed a ball game on weekends, especially in Maracay. I played there in double A, I took my wife and my two little girls with me. We spent all day playing ball at the Central University. At night we would take the wife and kids to a theater, to a movie. Or we would leave the kids with some friends and we would both go to a movie, or we would go to the Caney Tropical: harp, cuatro and maracas, Cristóbal Jiménez. On Sundays we would get up late to read the newspapers, to watch José Vicente Rangel on that program "José Vicente hoy". One looked felt like a king, on Sunday, resting, reading,

conspiring a little bit, the meetings of the movement. That was once in Lent a while. Then one performed better and was more committed to that commander. We tried not to fail in anything, because we had to give something back.

### **“Condorito”**

I had a soldier we called “Condorito”. He was small, but very smart. At that time almost no soldier had even a sixth grade education. Illiteracy was rampant. One had to choose the best soldiers, all of them were good or almost all, but the smartest and quickest learners. I named appointed “Condorito”, Corporal of the Depot, when I was a logistics officer. The inspectorate arrived and we were in a tent on the outskirts of the battalion, in Maracay. And there were the those field kitchens, the old ones that had to be filled with white gasoline. A field kitchen with a tank, a tank of about twenty liters.

Then there were about ten kitchens and a colonel would come to ask “Condorito”. The lieutenant could not speak, the lieutenant was looking there, taking notes. “Soldier, what’s your name?”. “Corporal, I don’t know what else, they call me Condorito”. And I said: “Why are you going to tell him that they call you Condorito? But he was very outgoing: “Corporal, I don’t know what else... and they call me

'Condorito', my colonel". The colonel was a grumbler: "How can they call you 'Condorito!'" "Here they call the soldiers I don't know what!". "No, my colonel, that will be among them," I said. Everyone called him "Condorito", one himself in the courtyard: "Condorito!" and for him it was a pride to be "Condorito".

"And what's the name of that kitchen?" asks the colonel. "Condorito" knew it by heart "AXB421". "Manufactured in what year?". "In 1948." "And how many soldiers does it cook for here?" "For 328 soldiers". "Correct." "What kind of gasoline do you use? The same you use for the cars?" "Noooo, Colonel, the white kind." "Ah, the white kind." "Go ahead, there's the white gasoline". "How many liters of capacity does the tank of that stove have?" "Two hundred liters," says Condorito. He was wrong, he sees me and I point with my eyes.

And the colonel says "How much, how much?". "Among all of them, my colonel, among all of them".

### ***The first jump***

I remember the first time I parachuted. Don't forget to yell, "Jea!" Of course, since you're scared you have to yell hard to give yourself courage and give encouragement to others. That was me being scared, especially on the first jump. Here's the steel cable, because

it's hooked skydiving: jumping at fifteen hundred meters. The seven hundred meters is very low, because when you have more experience they drop you low, where you have almost no time.

The Hercules airplane goes and I confess that I was doubly scared, because I am a veguero. I had never in my life been on a plane and I had to jump out the door. When that bug thing starts and begins to make its first turn in the drop zone at the Libertador Base, in Palo Negro. Soaring, soaring until it reaches the altitude, when the jump master says: "Get up! Oh my God, I remembered my grandmother, may she rest in peace. In one of the jumps, I had to do number one, "You have to stand up at the door, brother". Oh my God! Holy Mary, Mother of God!

When you go to the door you have to throw the steel cable hard, otherwise it can get wrapped around your arm. Some people get it rolled up and when they jump there have been tears and worse things. Some people got hung up on the plane. The plane turned around and around and a man hanging in the air. Yes, sir. It happened to me once with a soldier. I was battalion commander. Terrible, terrible thing. We jumped first and fell down landed, picked up. Then I stood on top of the ambulance with binoculars, to see the second wave, other planes were coming behind. Then I saw the soldiers jumping, jumping, and one... "My God, let there be no news". Because it's always difficult not to have an accident.

There's usually a ten percent injury rate. The jump I am referring to was in El Pao, in winter. We jumped over savannahs full of trees, lagoons, fences, some hills. I remember that a major, my second in command, fell into a tree.

I am going to tell you who did take a parachute course in the Air Force: Castro Soteldo. Because Castro Soteldo first fell in of a Mirage. The first jump was in Barcelona. He was passing by, here comes the Mirage..., he was buried upside down landed head first in a cemetery. Everybody said: "Castro Soteldo was killed", the Pata'e guarapo. They found him hanging in dangling from a rain tree, over there. He activated the ejector and he was hanging in from a rain tree. Three Mirages fell that time: the "gocho" Durán Valdés, Castro Soteldo and the other one, I don't remember who he was. I found out about it in Corozopando. I was in Elorza, I was coming from San Fernando and I bought *Últimas Noticias* (a national newspaper). "Three airplanes fell. At that time the Bolivarian Movement in the Air Force had three senior officers: Reyes Reyes, "Gocho" Durán Valdés and Castro Soteldo, and they both fell. I said: "The Bolivarian Air Force fell". At that time we were just a small group. How we have grown!

***Neither this, nor that***

**I**n an *Aló presidente* I talked about a newspaper that I think I know who owns it. At one time he was in the revolutionary ranks, now he is in the counterrevolutionary ranks. But I know that this person keeps those things with respect. At least I ask him for a copy of that diary, of several of my diaries. One was the one I kept in the hunters' battalion, October 1977. Precisely in those days of October, in the diary I kept, I wrote the slogan: one Vietnam, two VietNam in Latin America. And I wrote "the soldiers do not feel this struggle". We were in the bush, behind the guerrillas in the East, in Anaco, in Cantaura, in Santa Rosa, in Santa Ana, Bergantín, Table La Tigra, Table La Leona, la Vuelta del Caro. I know all that like the back of my hand, even though thirty years have gone by and I have never returned to those roads. But I learned them that way, walking, road by road, mountain by mountain.

In that October seven of our soldiers were killed near Aragua de Barcelona, in an ambush by a group of Red Flag. That ambush shook me and turned me into a whirlwind. That ambush cut short my madness, because the plan was to go to the guerrilla with those soldiers. I was about to jump to join the guerrilla; I already knew that we were defending something that was not right, that what we were defending Carlos Andres Perez, president of Venezuela. The



country was being plundered, the gringos were in charge here. Then he I said: "Che was right". He I would say: "I was wrong". I remembered my childhood years and my father's conversations in Francisco Orta's medicine cabinet and I would say, "What did I do, my God, where am I what did I get myself into!"

"What I have to do is jump over there, now that I am already trained in irregular warfare," I said. I was already a hunter soldier, a paratrooper, an explosives specialist. I was trained for combat and in my physical prime, in '77. The ambush turned me into a whirlwind and I lost my way. Why? Because those soldiers were cowardly killed and then I said: "No, what kind of guerrillas are these? "What kind of guerrillas are these that are going to be who kill these poor boys?" In one turn they grabbed them, they massacred them. It is one thing to die in combat and another thing to massacre, to murder some boys asleep in a turn.

So I said: "No, no, neither this, nor that". That was when I was sworn in to the Bolivarian Army for the Liberation of the People of Venezuela and a few months later I was transferred to Maracay, and we began to work at a different level. In 1978 I met with Douglas Bravo, through Adán; with Alfredo Maneiro, through Vladimir "Popeye" Ruiz. Then, through them I got into the revolution, I got into the rhythm. I remember what Alfredo Maneiro told me the last time I saw him, "Look Chávez, this is

for going to take a long time, so calm down, patience, this is for a long time". And I was assuming that it was for a long time going to take a long time, as it was for a long time and as it will be for a long time. Here our whole life will be gone.

### ***We vanquished the gringos***

One time I remember that I walked out of a military classroom, they were going to sanction me, well, I got out of here. We were doing the General Staff course and they brought in about sixty gringos. It was part of the government's plan at that time to try to influence us and stop the rebellion that was already coming, it was palpitating. It was almost an open confrontation in the classrooms, in the headquarters, with the Bolivarians. They already called us Bolivarians, and we even had the luxury of confronting our superiors in discussions about Bolivar and national politics. I remember in that course that I stood up to defend the Guayana companies, because they took a speaker, economist and so on, to sell us, the military, the thesis of privatization. I remember that I defended what we are now proudly helping to rescue. One fought silently in there, didn't one? It makes me very emotional to say this and to remember, because, hey, how many things happened, how many small, silent battles that led us to what that led us to.

Then once those gringos came, and they put us to play war. They put me as an operations officer on one side, and the gringos on the other. We got them into won at the war game! They were watching me, I was a psychological and research target in the course. Those gringos were almost all sociologists, psychologists. Military, but almost all of them assimilated, political analysts, disguised there. It was blatant intelligence work, right in front of us. I knew it and I even said it in a meeting. Well, so we made a war game there and we got the freshmen into the war game. We even took the rearguard of those little gringos. Then one of them came up to me, a colonel: "Commander, what is your name? "I am Commander Chávez". He told me: "You are very aggressive to play war". Because I was the one who made the operational decisions, and I stuck four battalions of tanks on one flank, compadre, "ra, ra, ra!", and we put the tanks all the way in, until they surrendered. A game, but one that has its science and art, like playing chess: audacity and strategy. And it was not me, but a team. Ortiz Contreras was there in that team, may he rest in peace, my buddy Ortiz.

We played softball and we vanquished them, we beat them by knockout. They had a gringo there, a big guy like that, who wrestled and beat everybody. I told him: "You're going to beat me, but you can't beat my friend Urdaneta". I am very sorry for what has happened, but he was a great friend, a brother was Jesús Urdaneta. Maybe he even gets angry because I mention him, but it doesn't matter, recently his

father died, it hurt me a lot, the old Urdaneta. Well, but I have my memories, well, who is going to take them away from me? Nobody is going to take away my memories. It's like when you love a woman. You can take everything away from me, but nobody can take away my memories. The real friends who passed away, you have them here as a souvenir. So I said to the gringo: "Look, ah, you go around bragging. I was drinking beer in the casino, there in Fuerte Tiuna. I told him: "I bet you don't beat my compadre pal Urdaneta". "Shall we bet? "Hey, Jesús Urdaneta. Come here, compadre. Look, this gringo says he's going to beat you at arm wrestling". "Me?", "Who's going to beat me at arm wrestling?" Aha! And everybody surrounded the two of them. Urdaneta, who was being blown up.... I said: "I am going to be guilty of Urdaneta's death". Because that gringo was a giant, boy, and Urdaneta is a strong man but not a giant, but with a will, no doubt. I hope he will always remain that way for good things. So Urdaneta, and all of us applauding. Urdaneta's arteries looked like they were going to explode, okay, but that man was nothing. Until the gringo started, look, to "culipandear" give in. Bang! Urdaneta turned his hand over to the gringo the gringo's hand! We beat those gringos at everything. Those who go around saying: "A gringo invasion, a U.S. invasion and the war would not last four hours" are very wrong. Or "the United States would control this country without the need to put a boot here". They would not control it even with a million boots. Nobody controls this country! Only Venezuelans can move this country forward, only we can do it!

## **Fort José María Carreño**

**T**his headquarter receives got this name because my General Martinez Cafasso, commander of the Cavalry Division, told me: “Chavez, my promotion is retiring, the Carreño promotion. I want that fort to be called José María Carreño”. Besides, he signed an internal resolution, he ordered a bust of José María Carreño to be made. He sent it to me in a small plane. I was in charge of the little square, the benches together with Sergeant Gonzalez Martinez, Tinaquillo, a very good companion. Sometimes I had to order him not to make any more jokes, because he would burst out laughing: “Sergeant, don’t make any more jokes, that’s an order”. He would cover his mouth. Some jokes... and what’s more, he would tell them in a burst: pun, pun, pun! But very good, he was a non-commissioned officer, but like an officer for everyone. I had no distinctions. I always wanted to unify that a long time ago, because I saw that the children of non-commissioned officers were treated in many places as if they were “sub-sons”, well, less than the children of officers. And the wives of the NCOs as if they were less, too. What is that? Since then I had this dream that I now see come true: technical officers.

Then Martinez Cafasso came, we made the square, we planted a little grass and so on. As they were leaving in July, he invited some classmates and about twelve major generals, brigadier generals and one or two colonels came. The division priest came.

Then I had to look for the three Pinzgauer of mine, I borrowed the two that the Guard had, and another truck, an M35. None of them were new, they were just a couple of old ones, but they had power in the engine. We made the column at the airport. They all arrived in several small planes and a small plane, an Arabas full of generals. We had to go to the barracks and then a veal barbecue in town. Well, to the headquarters.

The truck, the M35, got stuck first, followed by the one from the Guard. The generals were passing by, we no longer fit. The other from the Guard got stuck. There were three of mine left, six wheel drive. The first one got stuck. When there was only one left, we no longer fit. Some were on foot. Then Martínez Cafasso tells me: "Chavez, come here, comrade," and the generals come covered in mud, but they were all soldiers, no one was murmuring, they were rather enjoying themselves: "Is this Apure?" "This is Apure. So that they know the plain in winter, my general". "The priest! Where is the priest?" said Martínez Cafasso. The priest comes. "Let them bring the holy water" and everything. We stopped in a little mud hole, and Martínez Cafasso said: "Chávez, in which direction is the squadron?" I told him: "Over there, my general, in that forest that is over there, the forest of the guacharaca, there to the left." "Well, priest, proceed from here, to inaugurate the square." That square was inaugurated from the middle!, there where the Paso

de los Niños is, because there we all hit each other got stuck in the mud one day and each officer brought his children. We arrive at the village with the children on our shoulders, the mud up to the knee or higher. This is how the Plaza del Fuerte José María Carreño was inaugurated. Memories of soldiers.

### **Commander**

A few months after “El Caracazo” I was imprisoned in Miraflores and taken to the Army Command, accused of something that was not true. Of course, I was already the leader of a revolutionary movement, but we had been accused of killing wanting to kill the President and the Military High Command at the Christmas dinner that year. Far from our intention to kill someone, but it was a desperate invention of some members of the High Command and the Disip (The Division of Police Intelligence) who couldn’t get us out of Miraflores to me, and other comrades of the second commandos of important battalions such as the Ayala and the Caracas Battalion. Ortiz Contreras was in that battalion of the Ministry of Defense.

I am arrested on December 6th, “You have one hour to leave the Palace”. “You must dawn in Maturín be in Maturin by break of dawn”. I picked up all my stuff, grabbed my old copper, a car that

I had which was all damaged, put threw some boxes and clothes back there and came left. My boss was very upset, because he said that was a lie. But well, President Carlos Andrés Pérez himself gave the order. Then I woke up in Maturín. Wilfredo was on duty that night, he was Chief of Service and he says, "What are you doing here?". And I said, "I come to work here". "What?!" "Where?" It was December, not days of change. But at night there was a party there, I buzzed and left for the party, it was Maturin Day, December 7th, so here I spent Dec. 24th, I spent Dec. 31st. I couldn't get out of here. Maturín was like a prison for me, but what a beautiful prison and what beautiful months I spent here. A few days later my wife came with my children, who were little.

I met and made old friends. An uncle of mine lived here. One day I got it ran into him, we were jogging and a car passed me and they said, "Maisantal" I turn around and it was Rubén Chávez, boy. Years without seeing him, his house was my home. I got met that boy from Sabaneta who went to a baseball world cup, Argenis Lucena, brother of Pancho Bastidas. His house was my house, I made friends in the neighborhoods, on in the ball games, we played softball, baseball. Officers who gave me their affection like Major Silva and many others. But in truth they had very guarded were very vigilant of every step I took. To leave Maturin I had to ask permission from the superior command, so I spent here December, January, the New Year, the carnivals. I will never forget them, what a wonderful carnival parade



here! on Bolivar Avenue. Then we went to Maraquero Pass. Then all those months here. I thought I wasn't going to be promoted to commander, that I'm how could I going to be promoted on when I was facing charges of wanting to kill a president. However, they could not prove anything and finally I ascended, here in Maturín, in the Plaza del Bolívar equestrian, next to the new cathedral. I spent here some truly unforgettable months, of much reflection, because it was a crucial moment. I said: "Well, I'm going to leave, the Movement is over". But no, soon the boys started coming.

### ***Discharge***

**T**handed over my Briceño Battalion to the Homeland on February 4th, 1992. Some of them left, some of the boys died in the rebellion. The Battalion went to prison, officers and soldiers, all prisoners. Several months later I was in Yare and an official from the Office of the Comptroller General of the Republic arrives, for me to sign the deed of delivery. Because the Battalion had been eliminated. I wasn't going to refuse, of course, because it was an administrative responsibility. So I welcomed the officer they sent.

But I began to review the minutes and there were a number of observations. One said that I had a debt of I don't know how many millions of bolivars for food, until June of that

year '92. I said to that gentleman: "Where do you get this?" "How is it possible that I am being blamed for this debt from February to June, if my battalion went out to the rebellion and did not return?" "Where did these people eat?" "How am I going to pay?" "I am imprisoned since that date". Of course, if I had not reviewed, I would have signed it. Look, they stuck the stake in me. Then I said, "No, I'm not going to sign that". Thank goodness one of the comrades in the rebellion, Sergeant Freites, is an accountant and helped me review the record. I said, "Leave the record". " "No, I can't leave it here". Well, "then come tomorrow".

He came back the next day and we keep checking. We found other things, that if I hadn't checked, or if I hadn't had Freites there, maybe I'd sign off on it and get an own goal, because I'd been recognizing debts. Maybe they put out in the press the next day: "Look at Commander Chavez, who talks about morals and revolution, look, he left a debt, he didn't pay food, he took a few million bolivars". I remember there were also some debts in the canteen of troops. A lieutenant was the bartender and they went to check. I was told that they checked even the bottles, bottle by bottle, to see if the empty soda bottles were complete, the bills. They went to all the commercial houses, as it should be, checking to the smallest detail and then there was some money missing in the canteen.

I told him, well go find the lieutenant who is imprisoned in San Carlos, that he send me the receipts. The lieutenant could not get out of jail, but he gave indications about a notebook he had in a briefcase, in his room, and in that notebook were some invoices that he did not have time to consolidate. It turns out that weekend there was a canteen, there were soldiers, there were visits from families, they took refreshments, there were purchases, there were sales and on Monday he woke up 'What would How could I have time to be consolidating invoices and recording the notebook? On Monday he was walking with his mortar platoon, armed. However, the invoices appeared and everything was consolidated and it was clear. That's called a discharge.

### ***"Spoiled"***

I came was able to buy a house when I was major, and that's because my boss had good human sense. We worked at the White Palace. One day we were going to a conference in Maracay, and he said, "Look, Chavez, you talk like a brother of mine, but he's a communist. He's a doctor and he even left us until the his family and left with the Indians of Amazonas and nobody took could get him out of there. His name is Gilberto". Then I met Gilberto Rodríguez Ochoa, may he rest in peace.

He was an extraordinary man, as few I have known, humble, detached from everything. I was confident and said to the general: "I am honored that you compare me with that brother of yours, someday I hope to meet him". "What is communist He is a communist? What is communism, General? Do you think it's bad?" "Oh, Chavez, don't get involved in these issues, don't get involved," he said. "Be careful that they are hunting you and you are not deer. They are hunting you because you talk a lot". "How can you ask what communism is, if I am a general? Can you imagine?".

He asked me one day: "Chavez, where do you have the negra your wife and the children?" "They are in Barinas". "Where do you have a home?" "I don't have a home, my general." "Are you old a major and homeless?" "I don't have one". One day he saw my car. We were going down to an act I don't know where and my car was a catanare very old cluker, that had the tin all eaten up full of rust, the smooth rubbers and wor-out tyres. I kept throwing flit spraying flee at him it so a wader mosquito wouldn't chop a rubber sting a tyre because it would exploded. Sometimes I walked drove around without spare rubber tyre, because what little money I had left, if there was anything left, a small bolivar, one put it for I would give it towards the cause. The Movement had some expenses, papers, meetings, travel that were not on the agenda. Moreover, an officer's salary has

always been modest. Then we came down from an act, uniform and tie and my cart was standing parked next to yours his, a big black car of those protocols, because it was the position parking spot assigned to the assistant.

And he says to me: “Chavez, coordinate, boy, find out whose car that is, very carefully, you know, out of respect for the human being. You tell him to put that car back there or away somewhere else, because look at that small car old thing, how spoiled it is there in all the front of the Government Palace, you know”. So, I say, “Yes, my general, permission to stay. Let Allow me not to go to the act”. “Why? If we are on time, let’s get on go”. “No, no, that’s my car”. That good man changed colors. “Well, sit down, boy, let’s go”. “And how do you have a car like that, Chavez”. “Well, my general, I don’t have any money”. “I have a woman and three children and my wife doesn’t work, she looks after the three children since they were born”. Then he insisted on me to buy buying a house, and have having the family closer. One day he told me: “You turned this into a care office for the poor, Chávez”. But deep down he was with me.

## **Lovelorn**

I'm not against beer. I never liked liquor, but, well, you'd go somewhere and have a beer, two beers, a little drink, especially one that was in the conspiracy. Colonel Hugo Trejo, my general Trejo, promoted by the Revolution, taught me a lot about conspiracy, taught me how to be a patriotic soldier. I already was, but he loved shaped me, helped me he helped me take shape. I had the joy of meeting him when I was very young, Second Lieutenant. I stood firm once and joined his army. He once told me: "Look, Hugo, with the military you will not be able to avoid it and if you avoid it would be suspicious. So you have to act like most". Parties, especially at that time. Every time there was a change of boss, a party, whiskey, music, an expense. And that was over. The order is, that's it.

The other delivery of command I made in El Pao, campaign, burning in the sun, with the troops in front. And for what party a party? What for?, well, what is that. Ah, those are the old ways, see? Rómulo Betancourt said that "the military had to be kept happy with cane booze, copper money and the other c p...y", which cannot be named. And the Armed Forces were rotted corrupted. Thank God he maintained certain spaces a few ones were kept, as the whole homeland kept them always healthy, which were able to

sprout from among the excrement and give the battle together with the people, as we are giving it.

Then Colonel Trejo would say, "Hugo, you have to go ringing all you have to do is shake your drink, and be careful. The An officer who doesn't drink is suspicious, because he can be waiting, he can be hunting you, he can be of intelligence, well, and he's doing some work. And the one who drinks a lot and scratches gets drunk, careful, because if you put him in the revolution he will start talking, he will betray and, besides, well, morally he is a drunk".

Well, so the beer. I'm not against that, I'm not a Muslim, but for what beer, right? Ask yourselves. What cane good is alcohol? If you're on fire heartbroken, lovelorn, well, a nail gets another nail there are plenty more fish in the sea, mate. "No, I'm on the edge heartbroken". There are people who take that as an excuse and spend it is scorned are continuously lovelorn. "I'm sick". Then they invented the double spite lovelorn, that's worse. Imagine you, black spite lovelorn, that's another one what they call it.

## **Flamijoquer**

**A**m I not going to meet Do I not know the “Buffalo” or Briceño Araujo? Briceño Araujo was captain of my battalion and I remember that a few days before February 4th he was changed to the jungle. He was captain and I commander, when we fired said farewell to him taking drinking flamijoquer from the paratroopers, we drank fire. You know that? We paratroopers drink fire, we put something here, of that spicy water, it burns we set it on fire, pssst! And then you swallow the flame. We were firing saying goodbye to Briceño Araujo, and in the early morning, it was like a Friday, we stayed there playing domino for a while, the officers of the battalion. It was December. I remember when we said goodbye, in the early morning, he said, “Look, my commander, I know there’s something coming, I know. Don’t leave me out, you tell me, I’m coming and I’ll come right here”. The day of the rebellion was coming. Possibly that December we were about to explode. We finally left it for January, February 4th. I couldn’t get you, you were in a battalion I don’t know where, over there, I texted sent you a message, but you didn’t get it. That’s General Briceño, second commander of the Armored Division. He commanded the Parachute Brigade and handed him it over to the “Buffalo”.

The “Buffalo” played rugby. See the “Buffalo” front Look at Buffalo’s forehead. I had the Academy rugby team. They were cadets and the “Buffalo” was one of the tough ones playing rugby against the Simon



Bolivar (team). Do you remember that coach? Mackin Black Coller, was the coach. Then one day I go as captain to review the Hospitalito. I'm walking down the street where the Armored School was. I see there's a new cadet coming in on crutches, all bent up, plastered over here, carried there by a technician. I see that cadet all trashy bent out of shape, and I say, "Look, recruit, what happened to you?". "I'm from the rugby team, I bumped into my ensign the "Buffalo". Do you remember? You headbutted a new one there. The commanding general of the Parachute Brigade. Those are boys as brothers, some I see as children, they are generations that one smoeewhat helped something to form.

### ***The Caracazo***

**D**o you know why I came here for the first time, to this Palace? I came here for the first time to look for a box of whiskey. Yes Look what this palace was for! Lieutenant Chavez was sent to talk to the head of the Military House in this very office. It was a general, and another officer, there was a party and there was no whiskey, because you had to drink whiskey. I was sent with a small leaf here to introduce myself here and I went out there left with a box of whiskey. I feel sorry am embarrassed! But I'm not sorry, because that reflects a lot of what this palace was, the nonsense it was. Years later, a little more mature, I arrived at the White Palace as an assistant to a general, a good boss I had. So one day I woke up

from Cajon de Arauca to Cajon del Guaire, and a few days later we came to the swearing-in in this room. Then, with some skill that gave me I picked up in the savanna and life, I went making made friends here: the officers who worked, the secretaries, a deputy vice minister. So I was walking would walk through here, I was going would through the tunnel. I came to various parties in this courtyard, good champagne, the most expensive, whiskey, music.

In those years I saw with these eyes the one and only Blanca Ibáñez herself, through those corridors, in the Hall of Mirrors, in various events. I always looked at her and saw in her face the expression of power. President Jaime Lusinchi was a man who did not rule. Blanca Ibáñez had personal power. At such a level of degeneration we had arrived come that everyone knew she was the President's mistress, and the wife was there in La Casona. And here came all of them came here the high society, the bourgeoisie, many high dignitaries of the Church, Fedecámaras, to toast. Several times I toasted in that courtyard of the Fish that Spits Water, there were used to be many parties then here. Almost every Friday, it was as they say in the streets "stick and stick, brother" one drink after the other. and it was not precisely the baseball team of Magallanes. One night I saw them take carry the President away, as well as just as they do in in the cartoons, they take the drunk out kicking him in the air, who because he does not want to go, so just like that they took him. He was very drunk,

really. And he had that fame reputatiom created by that those who directed the his communication strategy made him. There was an analysis of Lusinchi's smile and he was compared to the Mona Lisa, a mysterious smile: "the best and most beloved President".

They were surrendered to the economic elite. They did a lot of business and it was in those years that the debt of the private sector, by an agreement that was made between the government of Lusinchi and the private sector, was put on the Republic. That's how, from one year to the next, Venezuela doubled the public external debt. Where did it come from? It wasn't that they lent money to Venezuela. The debt owed by the private sector was taken over by the Lusinchi government and we continue to pay it today. I tell you, the papers documents disappeared. The Republic paid the debt of the rich with dollars from international reserves, from the people's money. Not the debt of the poor, but of big business, the elite, the bourgeoisie. It was that agreement that led Lusinchi to say later: "The bank deceived me". But he left quietly and we stayed here. All these are causes of "El Caracazo".

I lived here the day Carlos Andrés Pérez won. At night I saw from my window the arrival of Fidel Castro. There goes Fidel, a hope for these peoples, I said, but how to approach him. I remember Master John Sifontes was a sergeant, a revolutionary Afro-Venezuelan. I was in the movement because we had been together in Elorza. One

day he arrived at my little office in the White Palace and told me: "My major, I was named head of security for Fidel, of the caravan". "What do I tell Fidel?". "Do I tell him about the movement? because I talk to him". "You can't tell him anything. Stand firm, give him a greeting, the most energetic in your life and with that you tell him everything. You tell him that the Bolivarian Army greets him". He fulfilled, because two days later he came to me. "What did he say?". "He gave me a hug". The Bolivarian army.

The historical situation was gaining momentum, of moral and political chaos, totally worn social structures. They were People without direction, without government, without representatives. Do you remember the names of those old men in Congress? Most of them were businessmen. In Congress, the deputies were placed appointed by the big media, they had their quota there. Fedecámaras (The Federal Chamber of Business) and the big private sectors brought in deputies and senators. It was power sharing, the Pacto de Punto Fijo Agreement. The American Embassy, of course, had free entry, I know can attest to that. I got to fly in the plane of the US embassy, because I was bold, I was playing hard inside the Army. I became a friend befriended of the American military, of the embassy. I remember Hugo Posei, I used to go to his house went, in Prados del Este. Upon For my promotion to lieutenant colonel, a year later, it was the colonel and the United States military attachés flew in on the Embassy plane. They took some people from Caracas,

went to Barinas to celebrate the ascent. And it arrived on Monday, February 27th. I arrived very early here at the Palace. I felt ill-health, I had an illness, I came had just arrived from San Joaquin. There We lived there with my then wife, Nancy, and my three children. I came too very early to avoid the hidden queue traffic here in Los Ocumitos and the Auto queue traffic in Coche, so I wouldn't be late for work. You had to be here at seven, so I was leaving would leave at five in the morning in my wagon very old car, "El Vaporón". We worked that day, there was already some movement. In the afternoon I went to Simon Bolivar University, we were doing the postgraduate a masters degree. I remember very fondly my postgraduate professors, some criticize me today, but never mind, I remember those debates. Professors some left wing, but most from the right. That night there was no class at the university because of the riots. There was a group of classmates there at the university entrance who had no car and I gave them the tail a lift. I went there, through La Trinidad, and it was my turn to see, after I left my friends near their houses, as they looted the looting, police, shots. I came to the Palace that night, called my general and said: "Look, I just saw this, this and this, and here in the center of Caracas there is smoke". He said, "Stay there, tell me anything and let me know if anything happens". The next day I woke up with a fever, I had milk, it was sprouting chicken pox. I went to the infirmary in the Palace and they ordered me to rest. I introduce myself to go to see the

general and he says, "Don't come near me, he hasn't given me I've never had that, and it's contagious". I couldn't get enough gas to get home, all the stations were closed. It was already February 28th, Tuesday morning. I entered Fuerte Tiuna and I had to see him it was at war. I went to get gasoline with a comrade friend who was a colonel. I sat in his office and I see saw that disaster on the TV. I go out to the yard, the soldiers running and some officers sending formation and looking for the rifles. I say: "Colonel, what are you going to do?". "Oh, Chavez! I don't know what's going to happen here. But the order that came is that all the troops go out into the street to stop the people". "But how will they stop it?". "With rifles, with bullets", he even said: "May God accompany us, but it is the order". I saw the soldiers come out, the logistics soldiers who are not trained soldiers. Those are the ones who make the food, the ones who tend the vehicles. Even the mechanics were pulled out and given a rifle, a helmet and plenty of ammunition. What was coming was a disaster, as it was.

On March 1st, Luis Felipe Acosta Carlez, one of the leaders of the movement in Caracas, was killed. On February 27th, the February 4th target reveille we played sounded. As soldiers we felt so ashamed, so sore after that tragedy and we always remembered then that spark that was Bolivar when he said: "Damned is the soldier who returns the weapons against his people be damned".

On February 27th he made us cry, he made us bleed, but I remember that I could not even come to do anything, I was that I could not even speak almost, I needed a full week of rest.

When I returned to Caracas I went to the tomb of Felipe, it was the first thing I did. On a different Another night I was going up the steps of the White Palace, returning from the university at about ten, eleven at night, and a lieutenant comes up to me, tells me he wants to talk to me. The Army was ignited by an internal debate, especially us humanists, we the younger ones. There were others who did not want to debate, there were others who said: "That's what we are for". No, it can't be an army can't exist to massacre children, men, women, unarmed. Still Maybe if it was a guerrilla, an armed thing, but unarmed, innocent people. I remember the photo of a child lying face down, he was six years old; I remember it in color, he took it out some it was published by a newspaper, one of the many children who died. Then the lieutenant says to me on the steps: "My major, I want to talk to you". "Well, let's have a coffee there in my little office. "My major, not here, we're being recorded there are no recorders here". I said: No, I think not, but let's talk in the hallway, see what you want to tell me". He said to me, "Look, my major, there's talk out there that you're in a revolutionary movement." Those were the comments since 1986. Two years ago the rumor had begun that there was a Revolutionary Movement and that I was one of the leaders. We were very careful about recruiting people, we could not go wrong,

for one we were wrong if a single mistake was made, a group or maybe the whole movement could fall apart. So we had a very strict process of studying personality, man to man, woman to woman, for incorporation. So I told the lieutenant, "No, you're wrong, they're rumors, you know, all I do is I study, I talk about Bolivar". And so I went to him that's what I told him, not to give anything away not to tell him absolutely, but to leave a door open and then to study the boy. He has been here in the Military House. At the end he says to me: "Well, my major, I understand that you cannot tell me anything, but I will tell you something, if that movement exists, please put me include me, because what I lived and what I saw, would be the only thing that would justify my presence in the Army, because in an Army like this, I don't want to be a soldier". That boy dropped out afterwards, I lost track of him.

That was "El Caracazo", with the martyrs of the people, that outbreak social explosion that had been fermenting brewing for decades. We must remember what January 23rd was and the betrayal of the spirit of January 23. The surrender of Romulus Romulo Betancourt surrendering, who knelt bending his knee before the imperial power of the United States. Since the sigh of Santa Marta this town was betrayed once and a hundred times by Páez, Guzmán Blanco and how many others, two hundred years of betrayal, compañeros, compañeras, it was enough. So it had to happen Just as it needed to happen and "El Caracazo" happened.



4

# *The founding fathers*



## ***He made us liberators***

**B**olívar had curly hair. He was blacker more black than he was than White. That was the real Bolívar, who was also disfigured. It's not true that he spoke loud. No, Bolívar's voice was shrill, unbearable. He climbed on the tables, tore up the papers for the General Staff. "This does not work is no good!". This is what Andrés Eloy Blanco says in a poem called "The Toothless" (Los edentados Desdentados)". Andrés Eloy recounts that many years after the Liberator died, there was an act in the Plaza Bolívar in Caracas and the statue, the crowns wreaths, the flowers and the official speeches. The president, all in "paltó" wearing suits and frock coat, paying tribute to Bolívar. And behind the bushes were some old men, they had no teeth, crouched down, watching the act, and laughing. Then comes the reading of the last proclamation and a man, with the voice of an announcer: "Colombians, you have witnessed...", recalling it. And the old men laughed and talked about Bolívar. Why were they laughing? The poet ends up deciphering the unknown. At the end one of the old men said: "Look, what these people say, they say that he was tall, they say that he was strong, they say that he spoke thickly had a deep voice. No. He was small, he was skinny, he had a shrill and annoying voice. And one says at the end: "Damn! But he got into our souls and made us liberators."

## **Antonio José de Sucre**

That great martyr of the Americas, one of the greatest, Antonio José de Sucre. Mariscal Marshal Sucre was thirty-five years old when he was killed. He had been Miranda's aide-de-camp at the age of 15; General of the Liberation Army in Guayana, together with Bolívar. Then the Southern Campaign, Junín, Ayacucho... The viceroy, Sucre's prisoner in Ayacucho. The last viceroy of Spain captured in these lands in Ayacucho with all his officers. The entire Spanish army surrendered; they lowered the flag of Spain after 300 years of domination. Sucre gave him his hand to lift him up. They say that the viceroy told him: "So young and with so much glory." That is why Bolívar himself, in his own handwriting, wrote that phrase: "Posterity will remember General Sucre with one foot in Pichincha and the other in Potosí, carrying in his hands the cradle of Manco Capac and at his feet the chains of the Spanish empire broken by his sword".

Sucre was 29 years old when he became immortal in Ayacucho, in the great battle for the liberation of South America. Of the best soldiers, of the best revolutionaries, of the best leaders, Simón Bolívar said one day, and it is written: "Where General Sucre is, there is the soul of the army." He was the soul of the army, soul of

the people, the cumanés. Humble, but determined, with a will of steel, a very creative intelligence for the military, for the diplomacy, for the political. He was the founding President of Bolivia. They gave him a coup, the Bolivian oligarchy, because he was giving land to the Indians, to the poor, building schools for the poor, building roads. He was an engineer, too; irrigation systems, looking for water, taking water to places lacking it; health, building hospitals; the education. Sucre had a very good government. They shoot him in the arm and he is left armless, they almost kill him. They made life impossible for him. He resigned from the Government of Bolivia. He came to see Bolívar and stayed with him until the last hour.

Memorable is the last letter from Sucre to Bolívar. Bolívar resigned, he left. Sucre looks for it him, but doesn't find him. "Your absence, my general, spares me the tears of farewell. Goodbye, my general. Wherever I am, my last breath will be for Colombia and for you." The next day, he took the mule, went to look for his wife and his little daughter in Quito. But he was not forgiven for being loyal to Bolívar and being so young. As the viceroy said: "So young and with so much glory." It was a danger to himself, his life. He came after Bolívar. His brilliance, his glory, his prestige in the armies. From the Caribbean to Argentina, the name of Sucre shone everywhere. And the ambush occurred, the treacherous shot. Santander behind the ambush, Obando, traitorous lackeys who later delivered these countries to the grip of the North American empire. They betrayed

the revolution. Bolívar said, when he was informed of Sucre's death, among many things, a lapidary: "The bullet that killed Sucre killed Colombia and ended my life."

### ***José Inácio de Abreu e Lima***

**I** was telling President Cardoso the night of a dinner we had there in the Military Circle, a state dinner in to honor of him, his wife, his entourage and the brotherly peoples of Brazil. I was telling you him a little about a Brazilian general who fought in the War of Independence. By the way, that April 6, the day Cardoso came and we were together all day, General José Inácio de Abreu e Lima had a birthday. Born in the state of Pernambuco, in the city of Recife, where we have been several times. That young man came from Brazil when he was twenty. The life of Abreu e Lima is impressive. His father was a priest and a soldier. They were in revolution against the Empire, they shot executed him in front of the young man who was already an officer. He saves his own life, goes into exile in the Caribbean and hears about Bolívar in Puerto Rico. His brother stays in Puerto Rico leading a private life, but he, who was already walking burning with the sacred fire of the revolution, comes to Venezuela through

Angostura. They were in the middle of the Oriente Campaign, they had already liberated Angostura and Bolívar was convening the Congress of Angostura, 1819.

Abreu e Lima, barely twenty-four years old, introduces himself to Bolívar and tells him that he wants to be an officer in the South American revolution. Bolívar incorporates him. He was a correspondent and editor for the *Correo del Orinoco*, Bolívar's private secretary, because he spoke several languages. A very educated and brave young man. He fought in the battle of Las Queseras del Medio. He crossed the Andes next to Bolívar, wrote proclamations, fought with the sword and with the pen. He fought in Boyacá, a battle that liberated New Granada. Afterwards he went up again to the Andes, fell to the Apure savannahs, fell on Carabobo and fought in the battle of Carabobo, on June 24th, 1821, under the command of General Páez. From there he left wounded with a shot to the chest. Under this same command he also went to take over the castle of Puerto Cabello, the last redoubt of Spanish power in Venezuela. Later he fights in the naval battle of Lake Maracaibo.

You remember that Bolívar went to the south, and Abreu e Lima stayed here with Páez, in the internal Venezuelan process. Páez was the boss, the leader here. Bolívar went to the liberation campaign of Ecuador, Peru and the creation of Bolivia. But here in Venezuela the betrayal of Bolívar began to take shape. Abreu e Lima began to

smell the betrayal, to feel it. Páez was surrounded by the oligarchy, by the enemy they fought. They handed over to the Centaur, they took the spear from the Tigre de Las Queseras del Medio, he stopped being a tiger, they filed his nails, they maybe gave him a good smile, he joined the Venezuelan oligarchy that hated Bolívar to the death, because he it wanted to keep his its privileges, he it wanted to change owners, he wanted the Spaniards to leave, for them to take possession of the slaves, the haciendas, the wealth.

Because at the bottom core of all revolutions there will be many causes, but the economic ones are always there. The desire for power and one of the fundamental elements is economic, personal, group, national power or however you want to see it. Abreu e Lima, noble as he was, tries to mediate. There are letters that he sent to Santander, to Páez, to Bolívar. He tried to maintain unity, which he considered necessary, vital. And he was to continue the independence revolution. When that man saw that it was not possible to maintain unity, due to low passions, due to interests, he stayed with Bolívar and was very close to the Liberator the night they tried to kill him in Bogotá, in September 1828. Bolívar was expelled from Venezuela, and Abreu e Lima went with him.

***“The zaraza breaks or the bovera is over!”***

I have said it here, as Pedro Zaraza said: “Either the zaraza breaks or the bovera ends.” That was a general, Pedro Zaraza. The story is this. José Tomás Boves was not really a realist. Boves was the leader of a class war. He was from Asturias, but he lived here for many years, from a young age. He was a cattle dealer in the plains. He wanted to venture into the patriot ranks. They didn’t let him because he was from below, from the lower class. Those who were still in charge were the Mantuanos, the rich of Caracas.

There wasn’t a revolution yet, it was the independence of the rich here against Spain. But no of the blacks and the poor don’t. So Boves became the leader of the poor and raised an army. He went against Bolívar, he destroyed seven armies that formed by the people of Caracas and the oligarchy, let’s say the Mantuanos. The royalists thought they were going to use it him. But he declared himself independent.

He sent payed no attention to the royalist bosses long to the dick, almost ordering Morales to be shot, one of them. The oligarchy of Caracas was disappointed with Boves. Bolívar was in Caracas and saw realised that he could not stop him. Bolívar’s older sister was named María Antonia. She was a mantuana of



caste. María Antonia faced confronted her brother. There is a letter that she sends to the King of Spain, asking for protection against “my crazy brother”. “Simon is crazy,” she said. Even the King protects her from her, they take her to Cuba and assign her as a pension, because she was left with nothing of hers, María Antonia.

She had bad fame, for being the sister of the Liberator.

Bolívar was in Caracas in the year 1814, which was a disastrous year due to the war of Boves and the poor against that mantuanaje (upper class of Caracas). They were Venezuelans against Venezuelans, it was terrible that. Bolívar tells María Antonia that he has to leave Caracas because Boves is coming. He leaves, he has no way to protect her. She was her older sister and they were orphans of father and mother. So to a certain extent, she was like his mom in life. María Antonia refused to leave, like many people from Mantuanos. Especially those who had not supported Bolívar said: “No, I’m not leaving if Boves comes, I’m with them.” Bolívar told her: “Boves will finish you all kills you, he is going to kill you, and above all specially you, who because you are my sister.” Maria Antonia refused. Bolívar sent an officer with ten soldiers and they tied her and took her to a ship in La Guaira and Bolívar sent her, I think she went to Puerto Rico, “to the Spanish colony; take her then.” And indeed, Boves arrived and some upperclass jalamecates bootlickers from Mantua came out, dressed in suit

and frock coats, to receive him. He executed every single one of them put them all to arms, right there, at the entrance to Caracas.

It was a class war. He settles in Caracas and governs. He was a warrior. He came to persecute Bolívar, who had to come to the East. He brought the survivors with him on a long and painful march to the East. The Lanceros de Oriente (Lancers of the East) come out to protect those in the center, who had been retreating, many women, the sick, many children. So, the Lanceros de Oriente come with their cavalry, they go out there to protect the humanitarian retreat, let's say that, that Bolívar commanded. One of them, a plainsman from these savannahs, Pedro Zaraza, went out with the cavalry and they uprooted camp out there in some bushes in Urica, the bare savannah. And there came Boves, in an inclement cavalry. They put the prisoners to the sword, it was the poor against the rich. There came Boves, with his invincible army, against Maturín, a heroic city that resisted sieges, looting, blockades, once the same inhabitants burned it to prevent them from taking it; as they burned San Fernando de Apure, also, the apureños Apure's plains. They say that Pedro Zaraza was with the cavalry in Urica, under some bushes. And they say that Zaraza was sharpening the spear, and told his staff: "Here comes Boves. This day of today either the zaraza breaks or the bovera ends ". Two hours later, José Tomás Boves was dead. Pedro Zaraza split his chest with a spear.

***“The first time a spaniard sees my back!”***

**T**he plain, the great plain, San Fernando, Calabozo, and here San Juan de los Morros, but right there downtown in the center, Carabobo, Valencia, Caracas. So here Bolívar passed I don't know how many times Bolivar passed by, Zamora, all of them. The Spaniards too. Páez, the cavalry. José Félix Ribas wore the Phrygian cap. He was a Jacobin, a true revolutionary. Around here they caught him and bit chopped off his head, arms, legs. Bolívar had to decree war to the death because the Spanish troops were barbarians, they stabbed, slit their throats, raped, killed, burned. Bolívar said: eye for eye, tooth for tooth: war to till death. The fight was very hard and Bolívar had lost the Second Republic. Yet our Army and Navy were recovering fast, beating themthey would get defeated and would recover fast coming back. The war extended south and south. San Martín liberated the provinces of the Río de La Plata.

So in Spain they make a strategic assessment of the situation, and what they recommend to the King, his great staff, the admiralty and the Spanish army: “If we want to end the war, we must end Bolívar, because that is the caudillo leader, that's the biggest. We must put an end to the Venezuelan Army and the Navy. If we put out that candle fire, the rest will go out.” And the King of Spain commands sends to the “New World”, as they called it, the most

powerful fleet that Spain has ever sent to this continent. Complete units of cavalry came, with the horses and everything, the cannons. Do you remember the Valencey battalion, which withdrew in order to Puerto Cabello? That was a King's battalion, a line battalion, with its officers, cavalry, artillery, infantry. Ferdinand VII's hussars came here. They were troops like the King's Honor Guard. And he sent one of his most courageous, intelligent and enlightened generals: Pablo Morillo.

Morillo traveled all these seas with that fleet. He was the same one. It was him who besieged Cartagena de Indias. He subjected it to the iron of the blockade and Cartagena resisted. The people of Cartagena ate rats and cats, but the people of Cartagena did not surrender. He then besieged Barcelona and destroyed it. There are the remains of the Casa Fuerte, that was what the Spanish left behind. They burned Barcelona. Then they went to Margarita, they surrounded her. Morillo sends a letter to Francisco Esteban Gómez, who led the troops, and to the people of Margarita: "Surrender or not a stone will remain on this infidel island." And Francisco Esteban, that Indian, answered him: "Come get me. If you were to succeed, you would be the king of ashes, because not even ashes will remain here". Morillo disembarked, and was defeated in Matasiete by the indigenous Margariteños. Even the children came out to fight! Do you know what Pablo Morillo wrote to the King of Spain afterwards? That was in 1817. There is a letter from Morillo that

tells him: "Your Majesty, this town of Margarita, these soldiers of Margarita, came out almost naked to give their chests against the best troops of the King. They were like lions and they fought like giants." The old Margariteños peoples of Margarita of that time say that the island was surrounded by so many Spanish ships that you couldn't even see the sun, you couldn't see the horizon of the sea, nothing but ships and ships. And they had a gigantic one: the San Pedro Alcántara, which was the logistics ship. The Spaniards said that the Alcántara burned due to a fire on board, due to an oversight in the kitchen. Did she go under? The Margariteños Indians indigenous peoples of Margarita sank it! They jumped into the water and burned it. It must be there, at the bottom of the sea.

It turns out that then Morillo comes to look looking for Bolívar, leaves Margarita, disembarks. And Páez, very skilful, is withdrawing with the cavalry; he counterattacked, retreated. Morillo begins to feel that this force was also like a giant gigantic, but on horseback. And in the sheets savannahs, compadre! The alligators came out from anywhere, the plague killed the Spaniards, the tigers, the Caribs. On the other hand, the plains did not not the llaneros, they crossed the rivers swimming with the tail of the horse. Morillo writes another letter to the King in which he tells him: "When we spend the whole night awake, waiting because we believed that they are going to attack us, there is no attack. And when my troops rest, suddenly an attack comes."

Páez was an indomitable guerrilla man, very cunning, he was part of the savannah. Páez went so far as to tie such bushes to the horses' tails; So they rode over there far and they raised a cloud of dust, and so the Spaniards believed that five thousand horses were coming. And there were a hundred! Because they were guerrillas in truth. Until the army that fought in Carabobo was consolidated and decided the battle, it was the army of Apure, the cavalry decided the Battle of Carabobo. Morillo arrived at Las Queseras del Medio, on the Araucanian coast. And Páez says: "Where will is a the water cavalry of be?" And he throws himself into the Arauca river with 150 horsemen. They cross the river, surprise Morillo and the cry is that of "Come back turn your faces!". And Bolívar says: "You have executed the greatest military feat of the nations": one hundred and fifty against about five thousand. Among them Francisco Farfán, José Cornelio Muñoz...

Páez and Morillo met here in Mucuritas. It was summer, January 1818. Páez is hanging around stalking him and turns him around. He stands against the wind, so that the wind will hit Morillo and his troops in the face. He set fire to the savanna, and after the savannah is was on fire, he surrounded them with fire, attacked them from both flanks with spears. Because the apureños people from Apure made a long, light spear, about two meters. And Páez, astute, calculated—he writes it in his memoirs—how long it took the Spaniards to reload the cannons. So, they would shoot and

launch the faster horses with long lances spears to try to reach the cannons before they fired again. It was a guile war, on the ground, day and night. What is certain is that Páez destroyed Morillo's forces in Mucuritas, again. They were saved by a pipe that still had water, they passed it and the candle fire did not reach them. It is when Morillo, in a letter to the King, wrote that sentence: "Fourteen consecutive cavalry charges on my tired battalions showed me that these men are resolved to be free."

When General Morillo returned to Spain, the King asked him how it had been possible that some savages had defeated him, who had fought against Napoleon and defeated his troops. And Morillo tells him: "His Your Majesty, they are not savages at all. If you give me a single Páez and a hundred thousand llaneros from Guárico, Apure and Barinas, I put will lay the whole of Europe at your feet". They were indomitable, invincible. Not only the plains of Venezuela, but also the plains of New Granada, the centaurs of Casanare, Meta, and Arauca. We are the same.

In 1820, seven years of war to the death, Bolívar and Morillo sat there in the Andes. They signed the War Regularization Treaty. Morillo goes with an escort of about twenty well-armed and uniformed soldiers, with good horses. They arrive at the meeting point, they see that someone is coming on a mule, with a little hat. Morillo orders two officers to go quickly to see who is coming, who looks like a

peasant, or is it an envoy from Bolívar. And the Spaniards go on horseback, about five, fast, with weapons. They return terrified: "It's Bolívar." Bolívar was coming, alone! Morillo was so embarrassed that he quickly withdrew all the officers and was left alone. And they hug. It is from that day an anecdote There is an anecdote from that day. It seems that Morillo is walking with Bolívar and a young Venezuelan officer is in front. Morillo sees the Venezuelan's back and says: "What a good back this young man has! Bolívar." And the Venezuelan officer turns around and says: "Mr. General Morillo, this is the first time a Spaniard sees my back."

### ***Francisco Farfán***

One time I was asking some Friends, why this village is called Elorza. Go ask that sir man, they said. He was the historical memory of the village. But the youth had no idea why the village was called Elorza. From the secondary school Ignacio Rodríguez, where I used to play baseball, giving them talks, then when I became the god father of the promotion, nothing. Then, we started from the squadron Farfán, a revolutionary squadron where, since my arrival, no officer nor soldier, nor anybody in the village had idea of who Farfan was.



We began to investigate, to look for in history books and we got the wonderful story of the “Centaur of the Queseras”: Francisco Farfán. We made a little book; we had some stencils and a typewriter. We took out some leaves sheets of paper and put named the newspaper “The Centaur”. When the soldiers began to find out who Francisco Farfán was, when they found out that he was one of the 150 lancers of Las Queseras del Medio, their chests swelled with pride. And they began to hear the “chains” in the courtyard. I would give them “Hello President” in the patio, conferences for three and four hours, drinking coffee, when night fell there in that beloved and remembered Cajón de Arauca. I read them books and stories from those heroic and glorious years of that savannah. Later we even found a painter and turned a large wall into a stage, a small theater. A harp appeared showed up, a cuatro appeared showed up, some maracas and the soldiers began to improvise. Singers came out and groups began to come out. A soldier wrote a note song to a black sergeant. The corrió song was called The Black Centaur (“El Centauro Negro”). The sergeant was angry. “My captain, how is that soldier going to be calling me the Black Centaur?” He protested. I told him: “Be proud that the troupe sings to you, okay, you are a leader.” Later he was proud of being called the “Black Centaur”.

Francisco Farfán, from the Farfanés de Guasimal, as we llaneros say. There were two of them, Francisco and Juan Pablo. Do you know what those centaurs did, especially Francisco?

When Bolívar was betrayed and expelled from here, and Páez became master of the oligarchy and installed the conservative government in 1836, Francisco Farfán rose up against Páez and took San Fernando de Apure. Do you know what Farfán said on the papers they handed out?: “Long live my General Bolívar!” They tried to recover the Bolívarian dream. Páez went to fight against them, who were his former soldiers, and Páez defeated Farfán in the Battle of Payara. That is why Páez is given the name The Lion of Payara (“El León de Payara”). There in San Juan de Payara, Juan Pablo Farfán died in combat.

Francisco Farfán went to Colombia. Over there, because of the wind, he prowled those borders for twenty years, as a guerrilla against the government of Venezuela. They even held a trial against the military judge of Guasqualito. Because one day it was shown proven that Francisco Farfán went from Colombia – from Arauca where he lived – to Guasqualito, to kick for a rodeo. He was a coleador, an Indian, he spent five days partying in Guasqualito. The government ordered the dismissal and imprisonment of the judge and the civil chief of that town for not having imprisoned Farfán. Do you know why they were not sentenced? Because they showed that he was an indomitable man and that it took twenty or thirty armed soldiers to subdue him, and that they were not strong enough to do it. Indeed, Páez in his memoirs dedicates a chapter to Farfán and says: “He was a man almost two meters tall, he

could not be physically reduced, I expelled him twice.” Indeed, Páez expelled Farfán twice from Apure’s army, but he returned. After the battle of Mucurita, Páez expels him and returns. Do you know what Páez says in his memories, already an old man?: “Francisco Farfán, of the centaurs of the savannah, colonel. I expelled him several times, several times I thought of shooting him, I never did. It took brave men to gain independence and he was a brave man”.

### ***Manuela Sáenz***

**T**he story is very chauvinist sexist and the women don’t appear are not mentioned, but they also rode on horseback, like Manuela Sáenz. She was drawn by the oligarchies that hated her and she went down in history as Bolívar’s lover. She was not Bolívar’s lover, she was first “Horsewoman of the Sun”, captain of the armies of San Martín and colonel in Ayacucho. The Marshal of Ayacucho promoted her on the battlefield, along with a large group of male and female officers. Because she, the Colonel, went on horseback, pistol in hand, saber in hand, to surrender Spanish troops there in the field of Ayacucho.

She was a woman of battle. She came out sword in hand the night Bolívar was almost killed in Bogotá, and she practically forced him to jump out of the window. Surely, out of dignity, he did not want to

jump from her, but as there is an English saying that says: "If your wife asks you to jump out of the window, she sees you moving better move to the ground floor." Bolívar was almost dead. They killed his aide-de-camp, Ferguson, and wounded another, Diego Ibarra, with a saber blow and a shot to the arm. They were already going to the room to look for him. She entertained them and said, "No, it's he is downstairs in the meeting room." Lie! He was getting dressed, grabbing the gun to get out, and she forced him out the window. She later made a doll that she put in the plaza, dressed it as Santander and put a sign on it: "Santander". She shot him herself: pa-pa-pa! And she told Bolívar: "That's what you have to do with Santander, shoot him!" Bolívar never wanted to shoot Santander. She Bolívar spared his life and, in the end, he was not forgiven by the Santander oligarchy.

### **Locket**

Miranda was a womanizer. He traveled the world, and wrote about his affairs. "I met a woman", like this, like that, sometimes erotic. We are humans. Miranda was human. Even Catherine of Russia seems to have fallen in love with him, or him with her, or both of them. Bolívar was also a womanizer. You don't

know that when Manuela found a woman's earring in bed that was not hers. She jumped over him and scratched him. Bolívar had to spend a week without leaving the room, for he was embarrassed, he was all scratched. Manuela was fierce. Ha! Manuela and her letters to Bolívar, some of the are very erotic.

Surely, they did not think that this was going to transcend, they were very private things, well: "Come soon so that we can melt like a volcano." At that time there were no cell phones, but there are very erotic conversations. You write anything or they write to you. They recently wrote to me here: "Chávez, what fleshy lips!" Of course, flesh and blood brother! Just the same! Poor Bolívar did not have these gadgets, he had to write and command send it on horseback. More than one of those letters was seized by the enemy and Manuela wrote to him: "Why don't you come?" "Who are you with?" Aha! Jealous! She knew, she knew her cattle, right?

Well here goes: Miranda kept pubic hair. And that makes him human, don't you think? Locket, locket. My grandmother had a locket. No, but that's it!, that's it hold on! Hold on! My grandmother had a locket and there she kept mine and Adam's highlights strands of hair from when we were children. I was a bachaquito, because I had tangled hair, as well as taffy. twisted and yellowish! Adam didn't. Adam had straight black hair.

## **Maisanta**

**M**y mother's grandfather came to Sabaneta, he came from the wars at the end of the century. He carried this scapular. We have calculated him as one hundred and fifty years old, because he belonged to Maisanta's father, Pedro Pérez Delgado. Pedro Pérez Delgado's father was called Pedro Pérez Pérez. This is a cross, only a cross of swords, it is barely visible. The other is the shield of the Virgin of the Aid Help. Who was Pedro Perez Perez? I spent years and years investigating that story, looking for papers, recording things and also asking the old people about these villages. Later I lost documents, but I had about fifty cassettes, one of those old ones. One went around with a little tape recorder, and did interviews with old people, old soldiers, old women, old men from the beginning of the last century who were still alive twenty, thirty years ago.

Well, Pedro Pérez Pérez was an indian from Guárico. He went to the war after Zamora. And why did Zamora go to war? Well, as a consequence of the failure of the Bolívar project. It was a new revolution of the poor. And with him went Pedro Pérez Pérez. They killed Zamora in 1860 and Pedro Pérez Pérez went to Ospino, where he married Josefa Delgado. And he had two children: Petra Pérez Delgado and Pedro Pérez Delgado. This is how my aunt Ana, mom's aunt, tells it. There she is, she is ninety-five years old, she turned. I call her from time to time. I recently sent for her so she could meet

a daughter of Emiliano Zapata, they are the same age. Because Pedro Pérez was like Emiliano Zapata, like Pancho Villa, they were the last of the cavalry to come out spear in hand, machete raised to say Long live the Homeland! They were the last on horseback. That was your grandfather. He was the father of Rafael Infante, your father, our grandfather, and of Pedro Infante, whom I knew as an old man, in Guanare, shortly before he died. Your uncle, mom, was just like his father, tall, white; they were caters blonde, yellow hair. They called him "the American". That's why my mother comes and her Creole lineage, but white. My mother was called "the American" when she was a child. That was what Chucho Navas told me in Sabaneta, one afternoon, as an old man, shortly before he died, and uncle Julián; I talked a lot with them. I had that tape. My God! Adam, don't you know where he is? The hurricane took it. That was worth gold to me. Tío Uncle Julián told me one afternoon in Sabaneta, a witness to this is Miguelito González, my brother-in-law. Do you know what Maisanta's dogs were called? Perrondongo and La Chuta, two hunting dogs. And his horse was called Bullet (Bala), a black horse, when he lived in La Marqueseña and was a colonel. He was one of Cipriano Castro's men, and that's the story, well. I was getting the way, investigating, asking, I said: "Oh?, now I understand!". One would hear far away that they were talking about a certain guerrilla, a murderer, a bad bug, a bad grandfather. I found out the truth as a soldier. Ah, what a bad guy was he? He wasn't a bad guy. Maisanta was promoted to colonel by

Cipriano Castro himself, because when in 1899 Castro came with Juan Vicente Gómez, with 60 men on horseback, with a machete, from there from Táchira, they passed through here. Maisanta lived in Sabaneta. There he had come because he had killed a man. He put four shots into He shot a colonel named Masías four times, in Ospino, because he impregnated got his sister pregnant and he didn't recognize take responsibility for her belly. He was a fucking fifteen year old, he put four shots into it shot him four times. Old Pedro Pérez Pérez had already died. He had to leave, because if they don't kill they would have killed him, and he went to war.

In 1896 a general who was loved by the people rose up, his name was José Manuel Hernández. The first electoral campaign that took place in Venezuela from town to town was directed by José Manuel Hernández. He lost his fingers to a machete blow in a battle, "Mocho" Hernández. It was the Venezuela that was looking for ways after the tragedy of having thrown out Father Bolívar from here, killing Sucre, and the tragedy of 1830. And "Mocho" Hernández won the elections, they were stolen. He came to the hill plains. He disguised himself as a priest, he came to the plains. Near San Carlos he raised an army and launched the Queipa revolution. Pedro Pérez Delgado was seventeen or eighteen years old, fleeing with this scapular, and he became a soldier. That revolution failed, "Mocho" was taken prisoner, they took him to Caracas. Pedro Pérez Delgado, the boy, gets on a mule



cart with Natalio Menoni, who traded from Valencia all over these plains. He came to Sabaneta as a carter's helper, he was less than twenty years old. It was 1897 /1898. There he began working with Natalio Menoni, Julia Rache. Did daddy meet Julia Rache, old lady? He didn't know her! My grandmother, maybe. I almost knew them, because they told me stories about what Julia Rache was like, who had large coffee plantations along the coast of Padre Vieja, and around here in the mountains of Mijagual, which was all this. It was an impenetrable mountain, there were tigers, jaguars, lions, they told me all that, and I imagined as a boy that I lived in that time. That was filling me with passion. I was getting fire on the roads and suddenly I started a fire, boom!, and here I go. I became aware of what I carry in my blood. When I grabbed a rifle I said:

"What is this rifle for, damn it? To defend the traitors or to defend the people?" And here I am. To defend the people! Well, when "Mocho" rose up in Queipa, there near Pao, San Juan Bautista, Joaquín Crespo, who was a warrior, was head of the army, he was not an asshole stupid. He handed over the Presidency but remained head of the army. They were men of battle and he himself came commanding an army to look for "Mocho" Hernández. And in the first skirmish, the first shots, former president Joaquín Crespo was killed. He was killed by a sniper. As he was going to go into battle, he got off the mule

and was mounting the chestnut white horse. At the moment when he is mounting the horse, bang!, the head of the army, the ex-president, falls dead. The last chieftain When Crespo falls, the country falls into anarchy, caudillos emerge everywhere. He was the one who kept that leadership under control, and the country falls into terminal chaos. There were like four wars. Ramón Guerra rose up, the other rose up in Guárico, they rose up around here and Venezuela became a tidal wave, and in that tidal wave Cipriano Castro and Juan Vicente Gómez emerged.

Look, sixty men came from Colombian territory. Castro was the leader, Gómez was the one with the money because he was a landowner. They passed through here, and do you know who got hit? Pedro Pérez Delgado, who looked for a horse, perhaps the horse Bala Bullet, and another group of llaneros from here and went with them and fought in Tocuyito, where they wounded Castro, who entered Caracas with a shot to the leg, and took over the government. It was 1899. The nineteenth century was ending! Within a few months, Pedro Pérez was a colonel, and Castro sent him as civil and military chief of the entire area, from Boconoíto to Puerto Nutria, including part of Apure. And he sent a good general to Barinas, Juan José Briceño, peacemaker of the plains. And so the years passed. It was 1900 and Pedro Pérez settled in got together with your grandmother, Claudina Infante. They lived in La Marqueseña. Those lands belonged to old Severo Infante,

Claudina's father. In 1903 the eldest of the brothers was born, who was Rafael. That's why my name is Rafael, after my grandfather Rafael, although I didn't know him. And besides, Pedro Pérez Delgado was called Pedro Rafael. That is why he named one of them Pedro, his first name, and he named the other of his sons Rafael. And so Pedro Infante and Rafael Infante were born. He did not give them his last name. Your uncle Pedro, already an old man, told me there in Guanare, that they received letters that he sent them from the wars in Apure, telling them: "Sign with my last name, sign Pérez." But there was never a legal document that recognized the surname and they stayed Infante. The years passed, 1904, 1905, 1906, 1907, the Caracas oligarchy against Cipriano Castro, the gringos against Castro. And 1908 arrived, Caracas and Washington broke relations. Cipriano Castro gets sick. In December Castro left for Europe to undergo kidney surgery, and Gómez knocked him out overthrew him. Well, it wasn't Gómez didn't knock him down, it was the gringos that overthrew him knocked him down. The Yankees took over Venezuela, the oil. A few months later in Sabaneta there were meetings, one of the leaders: Pedro Pérez Delgado. An Italian, "musiú" Mauriello, from the left, a revolutionary of the Mauriellos who are out there. They sent to look for him, they killed him with a machete, on the coast of the channel beyond the Boconó. They left him lying there; someone came to warn Pedro Pérez: "They killed musiú Mauriello." That night Pedro Pérez looked for forty horsemen, looked for the machetes, looked for the rifles, he came

to Mijagual. Around here, by Santa Rosa, he ambushed Colonel Colmenares, who was the Colonel from Gomez who was sent to replace him. He ambushed him with a machete. It was the time he disguised himself as a vendor of honey coverspots, a machete battle with a machete. Around here he went That was all around here, and never returned to Sabaneta. He took the road there set off from there, crossed the Apure and began the legend of Pedro Pérez Delgado. Until 1922 he was raised, as the Cristóbal Jiménez song says. He was imprisoned and, when he was barely fifty years old, he died of poisoning in the Castillo Libertador, in Puerto Cabello. Those who were there say that he left with pain. He couldn't take it, he took off his scapular, threw it at the wall and said: "Maisanta, Gómez could do more." And he dropped dead.

I tell this not only for my friends, not only for myself and my companions, but to you Yankees, know well what is in here: conscience and fire that nothing and no one will be able to put out while I live. And as long as I live, this fire and this conscience will be at the service of the Bolivarian Revolution, of the liberation of Venezuela, of the independence of Venezuela, of the greatness of Venezuela. Enough is enough, not just of betrayals, enough pacts with the oligarchy, enough defeats, compatriots. The final hour of time has come for the great victory that this people has been waiting for two hundred years has arrived. The time has come! We cannot choose between winning or dying. We are bound to succeed and we will succeed.

5

# *Revolution men*



## **Felipe Acosta**

**W**e made a mass held a memorial service at the Military Academy on March 01st, to pay tribute in memoriam to a good soldier who left us in El Caracazo, together to with the people. In that tragedy, we lost the “Blondie” Felipe Acosta Carlez. There is a corrió song, that runs making the rounds around the plains and valleys of Venezuela, and it that came out from my soul. I was very sick that day, with chickenpox, and I remember a neighbor and sister, wife of a comrade in arms. She yelled at me through the window of the little house I lived in with my family. Hugo, the “Blondie” Acosta was killed!” With tears and pain, that very same night I took that phrase of my sister. I will never forget that voice: “The “blond” Acosta was killed”. He was already dead at that time of March 01st in El Valle, during El Caracazo.

A very strange death, like many of those deaths that fell by the wayside. “The Blond” Acosta was one of the leaders of the Bolivarian Movement and they sent him to fulfill there on a mission there. And he, brave, aware, it seems that they were shooting from the hill and had wounded a soldier over there in El Valle. So, he got in and said: “No, we are going let’s go there to capture them or to neutralize them.” He left with a small group of soldiers and on the way he was shot in the chest. A sergeant who was behind him tells me, with whom I spoke later, to ask him how the “the Blond” died, tells me:

“Look, Commander Acosta turned around, looked at me and said: ‘They killed me.’” He was a good friend and a great soldier. I will never forget it and I told his mother, who is also like mine a mother to me. The old lady came from Guárico to mass the memorial service with her children, her grandchildren and great-grandchildren, with his loyal friends and lifelong friends, the classmates from the Simón Bolívar promotion who we always saw him first.

The “Blond” Acosta was like Negro Primero. He always went first in the trot, in the cavalry charge, in the plane to parachute, at the time of any activity he was always there. Always with his style, with his joy. He was a llanero from Guárico, with his drive, the “Blond” Felipe Acosta. Cristóbal Jiménez has honored me by recording that poem “Felipe Acosta was killed”. And that poem was premonitory. Once I recited it in the theater of the Military Academy and a group of military chiefs called me: “Look, Major, why do you say that?” “Well, it’s a poem.” “But what kind of poem is that?” A poem and among other things, it announces what was coming. I couldn’t come to his funeral, I couldn’t physically say goodbye. But many of the boys, especially from the Army, tell me that they went to see his corpse in the great hall of the Military Academy where he was in state chapel; to swear in front of his corpse body the fight, to swear the battle, to swear pledge allegiance to the homeland again. So his death was life and breath inspiration for many, therefore it is not death. “Those who die for life cannot be called dead.”

I remember when he was sworn in to the Bolivarian Movement. His wife had gone out to buy the groceries. Mrs. Cecilia took the eldest girl; It was Saturday and he had stayed to take care of look after the youngest children. I went to look for him in Mata Redonda, over there in Maracay, because we had a meeting and he was going to be sworn in that day. So he brought the children. I took an oath to give life to the country and the children saw his father and raised their little hands. They swore with him, they are like everyone's children, Glory to you, brother Felipe Acosta! The poem says, in a part that I had to remove, because what was meant to be said in those years was too open: *Whoever killed him does not imagine what will come from now on / nor the force that now beats within the soul of these peoples who have been hungry for centuries / fighting to beat the drum against the infamous invader.*

Once, I hadn't seen him for about a year and a half, and we saw each other here in Fuerte Tiuna and as always he yelled at me from afar, and a hug came followed. I remember I said to him: "Hey, don't leave me alone!". He told me: "*We will never leave you alone!*", And then I put added that little bit into the poem: *Hey, don't leave me alone! / Don't leave us compadre / that the cacique Guaicaipuro reunited his tribes of the Valley / that José Leonardo Chirinos has already raised his black mass / that Francisco de Miranda hoisted the sails of the Leander / that Simón Rodríguez is blowing up darkness / Do not leave us now / Don't leave us brother / And*



*just yesterday afternoon the Blond Pérez woke up / that my General Bolívar in a meeting of commanders received Ezequiel Zamora and all his federals / that the sky is overcast announcing storms / don't die on us now / don't leave us, brother.*

### **Corrió of the blond Acosta**

*Listen to Felipe Acosta, / listen to his indomitable cry  
at the mouth of the cannon / when the attack is launched  
in the enemy defense / when the infantry breaks it  
when they break the sound, / a hundred combat planes  
when a thousand paratroopers / fall on the ground  
and when they make / the earth tremble a hundred tank divisions  
and when the cavalry / launch their savage charge,  
hear Felipe Acosta, / hear his indomitable cry.  
You're still here with us, / they didn't kill you, brother.*

### **Meeting point**

**Y**ou search for The Aragua Crossroad (*La Encrucijada de Aragua*). You will get find some very beautiful businesses of popular food: *cachapas* (corn cakes), pork rind, pork upper leg... Be careful with cholesterol! Don't abuse it. That was a meeting point for the revolutionaries of the Bolivarian Movement in the first stage. We used to meet there, at La Encrucijada de Aragua.

Because it was close to everything, there was Maracay. There was always ham sandwich and pork rind. There is a very good chicha. Do you know Mrs. Petra, who sells the cachapas? Aha!, I do know all of that.

Sometimes I would stop at one in the morning to wait for the boys. "Who are you waiting for?", "No, waiting for Diosdado", or they were waiting for me, or Blanco La Cruz was coming from I don't know where. We would meet there There we would see each other and hide at the house of Lugo López, who lives nearby. Hugo López is a llanero major, from beyond Guárico. That boy attacked the Yare prison on November 27th, despite the fact that he had very few forces. And us inside, desperate for not being able to do anything, locked up there in the cells. The first thing that sounded we heard was a mortar that fell in the prison yard. Boom! "The revolution started," we said. And an attack on Yare began with a group of officers, non-commissioned officers and civilians who got up trying to get us out. They could not enter and withdrew retreated. Lugo López took went to the savannah, went at the head of a force that was retreating, took went to the plains of Guárico and there he surrendered. Major Edgar Lugo López, I will never forget his friendship, his patience and his sentiments as a good man from the plains and a good soldier. And Luis Figueroa, this boy that you see, was the president of the Federation of University Centers of the Central University

of Venezuela (UCV), a student leader, a social leader and he continues as such. He was one of the young men who, rifle in hand, went to Yare on November 27th to try to free us from that prison. We couldn't warn them not to launch the attack; that movement was betrayed. Arias Cárdenas and I, who didn't sleep, were very worried because we already knew they were waiting for them. We heard the noises, they were placing a machine gun on the roof. We tried to call on a radio all morning. I was hoarse: "Eagle I don't know what, calling...". Nothing, we could not communicate with anyone. At seven in the morning the first mortar fired in the prison yard, we said: "They've arrived!", and that's when the shooting started there.

Too bad we didn't get the weapons. I was imprisoned and thrown lying on the ground by because of the gunshot. Then they grabbed a machine out there. I peeked out and saw it, but they blew it up. By the way, a lieutenant from Lara, who was retired and joined that group of combatants, lost an eye. He was driving the machine as a strike force, but they shot him with an anti-tank gun. There were some casualties on our part, some wounded. The boys retreated into the hill, otherwise they would have been massacred. They were waiting for them with machine guns and anti-tank guns.

***We come from there***

I remember when we used to meet half clandestinely. I'm not talking before February 4th. I'm talking about the years 1996 and 1997. Meeting with Hugo Chávez was like being at the gates of hell, or something like that. To be more clear on the matter, someone who meets Hugo Chávez in an apartment in Caracas, and when he leaves, he has there are three unfriendly looking guys there looking grumpy, with a black jacket and a pistol sticking out; or they have "spoofed" the four tires, or they stole your car. Maybe, if they liked the car, they took it. Or they don't say anything to you, but they look with anger. And when you start the car and leave at ten, eleven at night, three motorcycles follow you to your house and pass you very close. When you get home, two minutes later you open the door, then a phone call, if you have a cell phone to your cell phone, if not to your house, and your wife or your daughter or your sister or your mother answer, and it's a voice stranger who tells you: "We are going to kill you. I know you met with Chávez. Be ready." It was a psychological war.

And many times not only threats, sometimes kidnapping, grabbing someone, putting throwing them in a car, driving them around Caracas lying there on the floor and leaving them at the Cota Mil highway; or put us in a dungeon, back in the Helicoide, when the Disip (The Intelligence Police Corps) was in the hands

of, well, imagine who was there. And torture, of course. I'm not talking about poetry, I'm talking about very real things. I think that Freddy Bernal was imprisoned more than twenty times in the basements of the Disip, because he wanted to they felt like it. Colonel Dávila, current Minister of the Interior, was held prisoner, grab him and took put him away. Raided houses. Those ladies, friends, from Catia, who were imprisoned for six months. They planted some grenades on them and put I don't know what on them and behind them came a television camera and a journalist paid by themselves, some witnesses: "Here it is, look, we got this", a rifle, some hand grenades and two women prisoners : "Military rebellion". Just Imagine yourself, six months in the Ramo Verde jail, in Los Teques. We are not talking about pure made-up stories, real things. Mothers of families, well, that's where we come from.

### **Tomás Montilla**

**I** was remembering some elementary school teachers, high school teachers. One of them always caught my attention. He is one of those teachers, professors, who will remain forever in my memory and my soul. I remember my high school teacher. He talked to us about life. From time to time he would come to the classroom with a cuatro and give us a recital, he would

sing us some songs. He was born in the mountains, over there in Barinas, at the foot of the mountain. He talked to us a lot about the bad things and the good things in life. He is one of those teachers like Carmen Landaeta, my guide teacher in the first year of high school; or as “Jughead”, who died recently in Barquisimeto; a guaro who came to Barinas and gave taught us maths classes. He was a friend, a partner, “Jughead”. Professor Lozada, who died recently.

And with them also came this boy who played cuatro for us from time to time. We sang with him when one of us had a birthday. He spoke to us about the “garbage” of life: “Guys, when you go down the street and see garbage, if you can’t remove it because it’s stronger than you, look at it, not the smell, maybe it smells bad, look at the color and the harmony of colors. He was an artist. It was Tomas Montilla. He has died, I found out a few days ago. To his family all my feelings, and to him, my teacher Tomás Montilla, our memory and tribute. I had not seen Tomás Montilla for many years. Once I was looking for him, when we were putting together the revolutionary project for February 4th. Because he was a revolutionary, and a military comrade, he told me about Tomás Montilla. He told me: “You have to talk to Tomás Montilla, in Guanare.” I said: “Tomás Montilla? That was my teacher, could he be the same? And yes, he was the same he was talking about the same man.

One morning we arrived at his house, we talked. And Tomás Montilla making his reflections, his comments. He knew that a revolutionary project was underway and he knew that one of his students from Barinas, from the O'Leary High School, was involved in it: Hugo Chávez. Years later we found ourselves here in Guanare. When Fidel Castro came, Montilla delighted us for a while there, in a farm where we went, always in a hurry. But he went out with his four cuatro to sing to Fidel Castro.

### **Carlos Alcalá**

Carlos Alcalá joined the Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario 200 when he was a brigadier, later he became a helicopter pilot. On February 4th they did something beyond what they had to do. It is the courage and commitment of men. I remember that our revolution helicopters took them from Caracas to San Carlos, they arrived there on the afternoon of Monday, February 3rd. Carlos and Chacón Roa come to tell me: "We have problems, they took the helicopters out of Caracas." They went to ask me for my support to move some parachute troops, take over the San Carlos airport and fly the helicopters. I told them that they were crazy, because it was already like six in the evening. From Maracay by land it

was about two hours, calculating the numbers they were going to arrive at the San Carlos airport around nine o'clock at night.

While they were seizing the airport, they took the helicopters, they were going to take off at eleven, twelve at night. But they had no night vision equipment. "You are crazy, so no, let's go by land to Caracas." I was ready, heading to Caracas, with the paratroopers. So, Carlos and El Chacón come, do you know what they tell me? Rebels at last, they were already rebellious: "My commander, we have been waiting for this day for many years to not avoid fulfilling our mission, we have to fly tonight." Finally they convinced me, I gave them the troops and they took the helicopter, they flew at night. I don't know how they did it, they flew over Caracas. I saw when they passed there, there the boys go and later, without gasoline, without fuel they jumped and fell over there, at the Country Club. They fulfilled their mission, soldiers to fulfill their mission, soldier of the motherland, Carlos Alcalá.



## **February 4th**

**O**n February 4th, 1992, the operation was successful in Zulia, it was very successful in Maracay, and in Valencia as well; but here in Caracas the plan did not work for different reasons, among others because someone betrayed us at the Military School. The decision that the command had left in my hands was made, I only had to press a button, based on some information that was coming to me, especially one of them, the return of Carlos Andrés Pérez on Monday night. I'm going to say it for the first time: the "Indigenous" Pérez Ravelo, today a general, commander of the Brigade in Paraguaipoa; Well, the Indigenous, my godson, was a lieutenant and he was here in the Military House. He had, among other tasks, to inform me of the President's arrival, and he confirmed it to me directly on Friday afternoon.

So, based on that information and others, I took the decision, on Monday, February 3rd at midnight, and we began to alert everyone. On Sunday we were reporting in stages; we had a security system that worked almost 100 percent. But it turns out that when on Sunday when night they informed an officer who worked at the Military Academy, whom I loved very much, like a son in truth, as a matter of fact, and I remember him with affection. It turns out that the boy turns out that he was in love with the daughter of the director of the Military Academy, and he had lost that revolutionary

lineage fire that we all had recognized in him for several years, since he was a cadet. That boy was discharged as a cadet and I helped him get back in, because he was already in the movement. I was the sports manager and I helped him draft the re-entry request letter; I was one of those who most defended his return. He re-entered, not because of me, he had conditions and, in truth all honesty, he had failed in one subject, but he was doing very well in the others and he was already in his third year. Well, in short he graduated. But the boy betrayed us, of course, he with one foot in hell and the other perhaps in purgatory, between two waters. He did not say everything and that earned him later they also caught him. For example, he did not say that I was the head of the movement, nor about Arias Cárdenas, and he knew. He told his boss, the general and his father-in-law: "Look, there is a coup, they are going to take over the Academy, and it is my turn I'm in charge of to putting you in prison and I do not want to do that." Here in Fuerte Tiuna he gave other the names of some of his companions colleagues, but that was as far as he went. They questioned him several times and he did not give more, he did not release anything else. However, everything he said allowed the High Command to take action inside Fuerte Tiuna.

The previous Friday I had sent the Chester, that large communications van that belonged to the Paratroopers, which would have allowed us to have long-range communications; I sent it from Maracay to Fuerte Tiuna, in Caracas, with a repair order.

The head of that unit was Campos Aponte, a communications captain of the Paratroopers Brigade, and together we planned it. We sent the sergeant with the soldiers, pretending that the Chester was damaged. That was A lie, it had there was nothing wrong with it, it was perfect, rather we had repowered her, USB communications, single saivan, I don't know how many other things. That Bolivarian Chester even communicated with the moon! On Monday it did not go to the mechanic, it was waiting for the agreed time, at six in the evening, to move it. What was the plan? Move it first to where Sergeant Reyna Albia was, at the corner of Pepe Alemán, in San Juan, where the old Military Administration is. They were going to take over it. Later, when the operation was more advanced, they were going to move it to the Mountain Headquarter (Cuartel de la Montaña), which was the communications center. The Chester could not leave Fuerte Tiuna, they prohibited the exit of all any military vehicles and they stayed there. And not only that, but when they realized it was a Chester from Maracay, pung!, they put the sergeant, the soldier, in jail, and they took their truck away and we had no communications on February 4th.

We were recently talking with Commander Alastre López, who was one of the officers who came with the tanks column from Fuerte Tiuna. That was a suicidal action taken by Blanco La Cruz, Díaz Reyes, Blanco Acosta, Alastre López, Ávila Ávila, and Florencio

Porra Echezuría. About ten of our officers had to hide in the room of Díaz Reyes, who was in the Armored School; They were looking for them being looked for all over Fuerte Tiuna. They would send someone to look lean out to see what happened; there were no cell phones or anything. They didn't even know if we were coming from Maracay to Caracas. They ordered Captain Blanco Acosta to go in his car towards Maracay: "Go to Maracay, see how you can get out of the Fort however possible, see if my commander Chávez is coming or not, or if are we here alone and we're going to get caught they are going to catch us here?" locked up". They were alone with the pistol All they had was a small gun. I don't know how Blanco Acosta managed but he left the Fort in his car, late at night, headed for Maracay. After the Los Ocumitos tunnel, he saw some buses with paratroopers coming, and he turned back, drove over the crash barrier jumped back over the island like a bat out of hell. I don't know how he entered Fuerte Tiuna, because they were looking for him, he came back to the room and told them: "Here come the paratroopers are coming and we are locked up here." So, they decided to go out with the guns, nothing else, at night, it was about eleven o'clock, it was already a little late now. But they took the risk and left in two cars, those cars were packed with officers, crouching there. They arrived at the door of the Tank Barracks (Cuartel de los Tanques), in Ayala, next to the Yankee military mission that was there, and at gunpoint they subdued the guard. I was told all those stories were thrown at me, later in jail.

They took over the headquarter, they caught the commanders playing a cards game called “trick” “truco” (tricks), who and were there drinking “whiskey”. they took out got the tanks out, and pung!, they came here. But the tanks had no ammunition. Ávila Ávila tells Blanco Acosta: “Look, these tanks have no ammunition.” And what did Blanco say?: “What does it matter if they don’t have ammunition, we will crash against them, we use the shock force.” “Look, the radios...”. “What does it matter to us that the tanks don’t have a radio, we’ll yell at each other out loud, and let’s go.” And they came. They even paraded in front of the Brigade commander, General Tagliaferro, because the High Command stayed that night at Fuerte Tiuna, alerted to the movement. Tagliaferro reaches the door of the barracks, but when as the tanks are coming out, what could he do? Nothing. “Don’t take the tanks!” It seems that even a dog, which was the pet of the soldiers, came with them.

There are many jokes. Florencio Porras Echezuría, who is a brilliant boy and, among other things, a great cartoonist, wrote many of those stories in prison. Among other stories, there is one from the commander of the Tank Battalion, who was a good friend of mine. I remember him fondly and he gave me some pain I felt a little sorry, because until that day his race career was going well, but we took away his tanks. That good friend, who was older than me, was a commander because the High Command, as a strategy, did not give my promotion command of tank battalions. It was my turn to command one, because I

was from Armored. That was my career, but they didn't give me command. They gave battalions to some officers who were about to leave the rank of lieutenant colonel, but just the same we took away the battalions with the captains, lieutenants and sergeants. So, they say that this commander saw a tank that stayed there in front of the command; all the tanks but one were gone. The cannon was pointed at the command door. After they all left, he came out with the gun and shouted: "Soldiers! Don't shoot, I'm your commander!" And he stood there, with the pistol gun pointed at the tank, you can imagine, in a gesture of courage and dignity, we must admit it, because they took the entire battalion to from him. But there was one left and he was going to get the that tank back from him. And the tank standing there, and him with the gun, but they didn't forgive him and they painted made a caricature of him. Because it turns out that he manages to get to the tank, after much maneuvering and shouting "Don't shoot, soldiers, I'm his your commander!", And he moved here and there, he spent half an hour at it. When he finally climbed into the tank... he was alone empty. It is that he turns out that the engine had not started the engine and they left him it. The tank was alone empty, there was no one. Those are the jokes of February 4th.

In Valencia, when they caught the general, commander of the Armored Brigade, it seems he was half drunk, because that man drank a lot. Captains Valderrama, Arteaga Páez and Godoy

Chávez took the general to the soldiers' dungeon, which is there at the entrance to the headquarter. In the dungeon there was a soldier who was imprisoned for lack of attendance being a foul-up. The guajiro soldier wakes up with that uproar. It was already midnight. They turn on the light in the dungeon and when the guajiro sees that they are bringing the general and putting him in, he says: "Damn, my general! You are irresponsible a foul-up. What did you do, my general? What did you do that they imprisoned you here with me? Because the guajiros treat everyone on a first-name basis. The guajiro does not say you address anybody formally, it is their custom to say: "You, my captain", "you, my lieutenant". I had some guajiros, the guajiros in the paratroopers, they were a show because they were not afraid of anything. But then, at the door of the plane, one told them: "Look, you have to hit put your elbows together, you have to jump like that." And they looked, whoops! Yes, with a scared face, but when it was their turn, they jumped at once: they are bold; Well, indigenous at last thru and thru. That February 4th, Fernán Altuve Febres, an old conspirator who was an adviser to the Minister of Defense, and Santeliz Ruiz went to the Mountain Barracks (Cuartel de la Montaña) in a civilian car, but Hermes Carreño fired a blast at him them and almost killed Altuve and Santeliz there. As a caged tiger caged there, I had no communications and I finally sent them through. He was surrounded, with no connection to the tanks, no connection to Zulía, or to the La Carlota base. I remember

that I carried a hand grenade here, strapped to my harness, a defensive hand grenade. When Altuve saw that I had already made the decision to surrender, he told me: "Commander, this is a historic day, give me that grenade. I fought for took the grenade and gave it to him, and I think a small radio that was never used for anything; he must still have that saved somewhere."

Altuve witnessed that moment when I gathered the troops under my command there in the headquarter, officers and troops, and it is what he calls "the first 'for now the time being' ." That was already dawning, the sun was rising. I greeted my troops and officers and ordered: "Pavilions, set up, and to the left... They remain You are now under the command of the Colonel of the Historical Museum and his officers." I handed over the troops and asked for respect for them, and that's when Santeliz told me: "Chavez, now you have to be careful because the order is to that you leave here dead." Santeliz, Altuve and the Museum Colonel himself helped to simulate it, because there were snipers surrounding it, with orders that I not come out alive. When they tell me that the order is to kill me and the F-16s passed very slowly low, then the idea of death came to me. I said: "And where are we going to go so that I don't get hunted by snipers who have already killed at least three of my soldiers?" The notion of death came to me, and you know what I remember? A quick thought: "Rosita, María, Huguito, I am not dying today."



***Nobody could stop him***

Carlos Andrés Pérez knew me, I worked with him and spoke to him several times for different reasons, work, above all, there in Seconasede. He knew me very well, Jesús Ramón Carmona, who was a minister of the Office, and Heinz Azpúrua, who was head of the Disip and was after me for five years, following me, looking for something and always told me every time he questioned me: “You can go, Chávez, one day you will commit a little sin. I’ll catch you one day.” One day after February 4th, he went to the Division of Military Intelligence (DIM) and the general of the DIM calls me: “Look, here is General Heinz, who he wants to talk to you.” “Did he want a sample? Did you he want a little sin? “Well,” said Heinz, “congratulations Chávez, really, we couldn’t stop this.” “No, it’s that they weren’t going to arrest him of course you couldn’t stop it , my General,” I told him, “or that they had arrested me not even if I had been arrested, or Arias, or the other one; This was could not be stopped by anyone. It is an unstoppable, inevitable process, that does not depend on a man. If you had arrested me a year or two years ago, perhaps it would have been even worse.” And in truth it was like that, it was an unleashed process. The revolution that returned.

***Don't you see i am Chávez?***

Marisabel gave me a very deep and pleasant surprise. She rescued, from some corner, a box of things that had been lost. Yesterday I arrived and she, Rosinés and Raúl were there with some very old agendas diaries, photos, letters. We begin to take things out, as well as it was things from a trunk treasure, like a child with new toys. And of those agendas diaries, the oldest I got was the one from the year '81. I was a lieutenant. I told Marisabel: "Look at this". On the last pages of the agenda a symbol written in black letters, an acronym. When I saw that, a cavalcade of memories came to my mind. Of course, they were the first acronyms of the movement in the year '80 or '81. ZMB: Zamora, Miranda and Bolívar, because we discussed Miranda for several years and we went to study at Colombeia and the Miranda archives, and we studied his revolutionary trajectory. In the end, after discussions and things, MBR prevailed, which was EBR first: Ezequiel Zamora, Bolívar and Simón Rodríguez. We were looking for the ideological root.

Later, looking for the other agenda diary, the one from year '92, I say to Marisabel: "Look how time stopped!" The agenda is full until February 3rd, and there is a note from February 3rd, which I wrote very quickly: "Find Garrido." It was Colonel Garrido. We

were making desperate, last-minute efforts to secure support from the Air Force. And a pilot told me: "Look for Colonel Garrido." I wrote it down, although I didn't have time to look for it him, because we were involved in so many things.

I remember the night of February 4th, prisoners imprisoned in the San Carlos Headquarter. One said We would say: "Well, death would have been better," or in the basement of the DIM when they took us away, not so much in the San Carlos because we were together, the group and the captains and the commanders. We held each other and felt the pain, but we were together. But then they took us to the DIM cellars basement and we were each alone there, each one in a cold cell, in some cellars those basements, and you felt as if you were dead. Until that town the people began to arrive. I remember the widow of my brother Ortiz Contreras, may he rest in peace. They gave him her permission to enter, I see from my cell that Ortiz is being taken out and I start yelling: "Where are they you taking him?!" It was Mahuampi who had arrived and when Ortiz returned, he threw a piece of paper at me through the window. I grab it and it was a note written by Mahuampi. She is a sociologist and was a professor at the Military Academy; she had been thrown out fired in those days. I still have that saved. It is a banknote with my face superimposed on it, and a whole revolutionary message. And, on the back, a writing by Mahuampi and Miguel Ortiz.

The next day a priest came to greet us and give us a Bible; he also left me a letter that someone sent. Then the family arrived. Later, finally, the blockade was broken, the press began to arrive, they brought us a small television and we began to perceive the effervescence. How can we forget that carnival of year '92, where all the children were dressed as soldiers? I remember an interview that a journalist did to a child on the street. I saw him on television in San Carlos: "And you're in disguise costume?" "Yes, yes, I'm in disguise costume", but with a face the child of seven, eight years. And he asks him: "What are you wearing?" And the little boy replies, full of candor: Are you stupid? You don't you see that I'm Chávez!"

***For the time being***

This is from jail. I wrote this poem with some drawings. This is how the sentry box of the soldier who was up here watching over the mountains of Yare looked from my cell, because it is a valley. This is how the moon looked on clear nights, or Bolívar Square, through various windows. They were views that one we had. I spent hours passed the time drawing, writing, studying and reading a lot. These letters are called “Surrender”, I had written them in the DIM on a piece of paper, in the cell. It was February 6th, only I transferred it later to this notebook while I was in Yare. It was very cool on recent February 4th. See how he says:

*Low planes, enemy lightning thousands of eyes look at innocent  
children caged in cans and cardboard  
at the foot of the hill  
the morning eyes of my rebel troop scrutinize me  
red berets, tricolor armband “my commander, the Homeland  
is in danger” we will fly again like paratrooper eagles through  
Venezuela.  
Terrible uncertainty, senseless suicide, genocide, fratricide  
No! Down with the rifles, raise the flags, silence in the cannons  
and a deep cold in the heart as of death.*

*Surrender, boys! For now the time being.*

We also sang to the Moon, the Yare Moon:

*Full moon of Yare Full Moon, you wake up with the gift of going through everything with your invisible eyes. Elongated black riders on horses of wind surround you, you despise them and you rise pretentious girlfriend, eternal lover.*

*Yare full moon of Yare, ten rebels sing to you and their cry crosses black, empty spaces.*

*Hey, moon, our voice of past insurrection and to come. That moon, yourself, in February, allied without rifles, you watched the storm, a thousand seconds in a thousand places.*

*Moon of the valleys, you left in love with dancing soldiers to the north. Companion, I saw you red, that night of luminous berets. Today we sing to you riding your light on black horses heading north, Yare full moon of Yare.*

## **Guasipati**

**W**e spent those first days in San Carlos, it was a turmoil. The government was very nervous, because we were many. Actually, February 4th is the largest military rebellion in the Venezuelan history, well of its kind. It wasn't a war, thank God. A rebellion of one day, twelve hours, but of its kind the largest Venezuelan military rebellion and almost ten thousand soldiers, hundreds of officers. The coups that had been carried out here were generally carried out by a small group, a leadership, and this was a rebellion from below.

In those days there is an official we call Guasipati, a boy who has a lot of spark and was from part of the team. We used him to steal a base, he was fast and he was a riot, because he was bad at hitting. We would pinch him when we wanted to grab a walk. He crouched down, crouched down, and they walked him or looked for a hit. He is very crafty and famous throughout the Army. Guasipati was in jail, even though he was sick from a plane crash. However, he went to rebellion. Since there were intelligence people trying to hear what we were talking about in the cells, Guasipati would stand behind a door over there, pretending that he was speaking on the radio: "Tiger one, over." And another someone over there answered: "Go ahead, Tiger One." "Look, plan B is

ready, we'll get out of here tomorrow", move I don't know what, and the others heard and passed on the news. "Look, is there a plan B?", and they generated a movement and a whole series of jokes and stories of things that happened in prison.

### ***My General Pérez Arcay***

*M*y general Pérez Arcay knew the soul of the military boys of the '70s. In a letter from Pérez Arcay, like a sword, he tells us: "Someone had to do it, it was your turn, guys, I'm with you." He went to see us in prison, in Yare. They didn't let him in and he just stood there. He told an officer: "Captain, I'm General Pérez Arcay, since they won't let me in, I came to stand up in front of my commander Chávez, who is inside there." That general stood with dignity under the sun for three or almost four hours, paying a stand there, bringing withstanding the sun in front of Yare, as if spying on things. He is one of our great teachers: Jacinto Pérez Arcay. By the way, my general, I congratulate you, your wife gave birth to another child. Ah, my general, that's why it's good to lead the rhythm of life that we lead, the rhythm of life that one leads, at seventy you can still have a boy. He has had several children throughout his long life. One of his sons – look how life is – was in my battalion on February 4th, the day of the



rebellion. So one of his sons went to prison, José Rafael. Pérez Arcay went to the battalion a lot; he had two children in the Páez Barracks in de Maracay Headquarter. One night I almost told him: "General, we are about to rise up," only revolutionary discipline prevented me from telling him. I was sure that if I told him, he would have joined the revolutionary movement. Since his time as a lieutenant colonel – we were beardless cadets – he spoke to us in the parade ground: "Boys, Bolívar; boys, Sucre; boys, Miranda; boys, Zamora; there is the root of you, military boys of the 21st century". Years ago he had a boy was born to her, do you know what his name is? Jesus!; and so many years ago a girl, whom that I knew as a little girl. Her name is Bolívar and we call her "Bolivita".

### ***Eliécer Otaiza Castillo***

**O**taiza Castillo, this boy who is alive thank God. That boy is a soldier! On February 4th, he couldn't do anything because we didn't notify him. He was away, in a course. He returned to the country, to the army and went to work. He once sneaked into the Yare prison disguised as a woman, and he looked very ugly, by the way. "Who is this big black woman that came in here?" Otaiza disguised as a woman, in Yare, in a cell there, and I had to go in

and I told him: "But are you crazy?" He was an active lieutenant, boy, and he had a plan to get break us out. I told him: "No, that's it hold on, wait a minute", because he is a combatant soldier and he was on fire: "My commander, we are going to get you out. We have three helicopters." And I told him: "No, don't start making things up, things are going well. Here we are calm, you continue out there ". At the same time I find out that they are forming groups. Who could stop that? It was an estuary unstoppable force that was coming. The town was on fire and the military too. No one could stop on November 27th.

Otaiza is a soldier who, with his blood, covered the streets of Caracas on November 27th. Look at what he did with another boy who did lose his life, entering the Palace there. They were in the vicinity of Fuerte Tiuna at dawn, waiting. They had no troop command because they were rebels and they were closely watched. Some troops from Fort Tiuna that were going to leave for Miraflores did not leave, because some officers revealed the plan. These boys see that the sun is rising and there were no troops, they were alone, alone with their rifles and a pistol gun. They decided, like crazy patriots, to go to the Miraflores Palace. And they have broken into the gates of Miraflores. Otaiza was shot four times in the chest with a rifle. But he is an athlete, a very young man, with great vitality. They left him for dead. He confesses that he felt that he was dying. The doctors at the

Military Hospital say that he arrived clinically dead. But they saw some sign, you know, of possible life, and they put him in the operating room, and there's Otaiza, boy.

He spent all these years studying, he is a doctor in political science, a very intelligent man. He then recovered so much that he went to a swimming world championship and won, he brought the trophy from him. And now it turns out that one of these early mornings he told me: "My commander, I want to talk to you." Because he was in my caravan security team, mind you, he was in security, he had taken special security courses and he is a commando. He told me: "My commander, I want to go to the Constituent Assembly."

***Reyes Reyes: "i'm going with you, brother"***

**L**uis was flying F-16, Mirage; Bomber and fighter pilot. He is a brother of life. He is from Barinas, we studied high school together and we went together, he to aviation and I to the Army. Unfortunately, a son of Luis was born with brain problems. I remember him all my life with that child, Tuto, may God have him as a little angel in glory. We fought for Tuto for many years. He took him abroad, they gave him all kinds of treatments, and

well, the boy lived happily, yes, until he was twelve years old, more or less. But they were terrible years. He was two years old when Tuto started having his problem.

A few days before February 4th, I told Luis: "Stay on the ground, don't fly", because he hadn't flown for a long time. He went to the United States, to work there for a while because of his son's treatment. Taking a car is not the same as flying an F-16, after five years without flying it. It's very dangerous. But he was secretly hidden training, he seaked into the flight simulator at dawn. On February 4th, he was unable to fly. He was imprisoned for a few days, they did not prove to him that he was compromised. He went out back to the Air Force, watched over by under suspicion because of his brotherhood with me. But he returned to work with Castro Soteldo and to prepare the air rebellion that worked on November 27th.

And he went flying that day, in a Mirage. He could not get on the F-16, because the F-16 group could not be controlled, and that was one of the causes of the surrender of the 27th. That group has a lot of combat power in the air, the F-16 . But they took the Mirage groups, and he was many years older than he was not flying Mirages he hadn't flown a Mirage in years. He already got off the plane, with his son and his problem and his wife, my friend, may God bless her, and all his boys, who are

an extraordinary family, left. He fought in the air, he flew over Caracas. Perhaps what he did nobler still was when he learned, flying away mid-flight that defeat was imminent. He was thinking about where to land and turn himself in, but he learned on the radio that Visconti had taken off with the Hercules plane and the officers had gone to Peru. They were going to order the plane to be chased, even Carlos Andrés Pérez gave the order that if the plane had to be knocked brought down with all those people inside, they had to knock bring it down.

Do you know what Reyes did? He called his colleagues on the radio and three Mirages left to escorted the plane. They went to on the sides escorting Visconti's Hercules, until they reached the border. They would have been able to continue with the Visconti plane, and take refuge seek asylum. Reyes turned back at the border returned, he thought of his family, his son, landed in Barquisimeto, where they lived and left came out with arms raised. He was in prison with his pain, he was released from prison and, unfortunately, shortly after, Tuto was taken by God. Luis was released from prison and devoted himself to his son. I understood, of course I couldn't ask him to come with me. I almost cry when I remember this. In front of Tuto's tomb, when we put the crown on him, he told me: "Hugo, now that God has taken Tuto away from me to Tuto, I'm going with you, brother."

## **Francisco Ameliach**

I mean Major Ameliach Orta, who went on leave a week ago. He was in first grade the top student in the General Staff course, he was going to be promoted to commander soon, and he has asked to be discharged. That boy woke up on November 27th there in the mountains of Yare, throwing lead shooting away at Yare when they wanted to get us out of there. He came from the East crossing the savannahs with four soldiers, like crazy, desperate, to get us break us out, Commander Chávez, Arias, and all of us at Yare out of there. They couldn't do it, some were wounded came out. When they had no more ammunition they left. Look at you Imagine that! He was so skilful that he once again went across the savannah dressed in civilian clothes in a cattle truck, and arrived at his post in Cumana at night.

No one found out that he had been in Yare shooting that day. So he passed there, he moved up to major. He was in the course for commander, he was going first, but he presented himself to me in Miraflores and, giving yet another demonstration of sacrifice, he told me: "My commander, the time has come. Leave I'm leaving!". And I know what that means for a soldier, to leave the uniform. Yesterday I got it there, as a candidate for the Constituent Assembly. Francisco Ameliach Orta, he decided to do that. I did not give him the order, nor did I give him the order to come from Cumaná to pour lead shoot, risking his life, leaving his children, his family, to try to get us out of Yare, on November 27th.

## **Lucas Rincón**

At around seven at night someone called me, unofficially, from the Electoral Council: "Commander, we won!" I was sure of victory, but we were very tense because of the coup that was being mounted planned in the Supreme Electoral Council, managed by the mobs. They ran the computers. Here the dead voted and later returned, again, to the grave. And they always voted for AD and Copei. The dead that came out were adecos and copeyanos. So they had a plan. First, knock down steal the largest number of votes, so that the difference was very little and, then, steal the victory. The other plan was a coup. Remember that head of the Army there was, and generals.

Here in Maracay there was a general who behaved very well. General Lucas Rincón was commander of the Armored Division, who knew me from a long time ago. Then, one day when I came to campaign, in Maracay, Lucas sent me a message with a retired official. And we met in hiding secretly, over there in El Limón. In a farmhouse small house, over there was Lucas under a lemon tree, we hadn't seen each other for a long time. From February 4 to here, we had never seen each other. I was in the Parachute Battalion, and Lucas was director of the Technical School. He sometimes invited me to lunch and visited me there, we were friends. So, he tells me: "Look candidate", with a lot of

seriousness a general to a candidate. And he explained to me what he knew about the coup that some generals were mounting. Almost all of them later appeared in 2002, directed from PDVSA (Petróleos de Venezuela) and other sectors of power.

Years later I found out that Lucas Rincón ordered explosives placed at the La Cabrera tollbooth. A group of officers was mounting the counterattack, how to stop the coup, how to neutralize it. The Government had put appointed a general in Valencia, one of those dragged grovelers, commander of the tanks. He had the order to move the tanks towards Caracas to avoid the triumph of Chávez, likewise I'm telling you! And that was one of the things Lucas told me; because that general was subordinate to Lucas, but he didn't pay attention to him, he received orders from Miraflores. That's how Lucas told me: "Look, candidate, that general doesn't obey me. So he told me one day, 'my general, I don't receive orders from you, I receive orders from Caracas.' So Lucas, since he had no other choice, said: "Well, if the tanks come, we'll blow up the viaduct." Some of our officers, some lieutenants and captains, from the arsenal there, where the explosives are, put dynamite under it. It turns out that later, with the victory, they forgot and Christmas, New Year passed... when someone said: "Hey, and you guys removed the dynamite blocks there?" No, no one did, and there they were. Fortunately, that has its insurance safety, its security device; but look how things were.



The truth is that later they call me on the phone: "Commander, we won", and the people on the streets. It was the order that we gave to the party and to the allies: "people in to the streets". A friendly colonel was even half a block away with a group of armed soldiers, in case the coup came. They already knew, we already had a plan to move to a barracks, coup and counter coup. So, they tell me: "We won!" I remember that we were receiving Noemí Sanín; she was visiting here, she asked to speak to me. He It was already getting dark, when the first result was announced on television, which was irreversible. Victory then!. A few minutes later, the Military House arrived: "President-elect, at your command." "Aha, welcome, give them coffee." "No, no, thank you very much. Let's go to La Viñeta, get up here for La Viñeta". My freedom is over, compadre, until today, until today's sun. And here we go.

### ***They were going to kill me***

**M**y poor parents were in the Palace that night and my mother gave me a message of strength a few minutes before going I was taken prisoner. I told Marisabel: "Go to Barquisimeto", when things were already heating up red hot. She went out with Rosinés, Raulito, her mother. And my oldest children, Rosa, María and Hugo, with a group of friendly officers. They also hid them in another place, and at that point I didn't know

anything about them. So, they lent me a cell phone, I didn't know the numbers. I said, "Look, do me the full favor, get me the family numbers." "But where?". "Well, call someone over there in the Palace" and the telephone exchange. The colonel gives me the borrowed cell phone for one minute, two minutes. There half a caught and I start to dial. Neither Marisabel, nor my mom, nor my dad picked up the phone. Cell phones were very bad. The government of Barinas and the number was wrong, it was a family home in Barinas, who must remember my call. Maybe they didn't believe me. I told him: "I am the imprisoned President; with whom am I speaking?". No, no, I don't know what. They really waited on me took the phone call, but I think they didn't believe it was me.

Then, María Gabriela picked up the phone. They were hidden at some friends' house, at some beach. I say to her, "God bless you. How are you? I'm imprisoned again". María is very strong, and she said, "May God takes care of you, dad. Be strong. We are fine. What can I do?" I say, "María I only ask you one thing: take good care first. Secondly, call the world, whoever you want, a journalist. Tell the world, if something happens to me, even if I can't speak to you anymore. Tell them I had never quit the power the people gave me. Tell them I'm an imprisoned President". My little girl began to call everyone, and spread the news around the world.

A few minutes later, Marisabel went over there, she was in Barquisimeto, hiding at a friend's house, on the outskirts. And the children resting. "We're fine, don't worry, we're here worried about you", then, a kiss. I told her: "Marisabel, take care of yourself, take care of the children, be calm, I'm fine, but I don't have any guarantees. I don't know what's going to happen tonight." I had the feeling and the certainty that that night they were going to move me to another place and I didn't know why, because all the forces of the devil were unleashed. I came to confess to God, because I was sure they were going to kill me.

## ***The Christ***

**I**brought a Christ that the master general, the thinker general, Jacinto Rafael Pérez Arcay gave me. One of my teachers and one of the distinguished generals of this Venezuelan time. He gave me this Christ in the Palace, when we were leaving, and he told me: "May God bless you." And I will carry it forever, just as I carry the scapular of the Virgin of the Aid, the Virgin of the Carmen that Pedro Pérez Delgado, "Maisanta" or "The American" used. He I carried it like this, holding on, and he I had it here. And he heard the cry over there, of someone who said: "You have to kill him, he

is a murderer.” There were passions unleashed here, the devil was out there, evil was out there. That was breathed You could feel it, the evil here, dark forces like hurricanes surrounded these spaces, spaces that I love very much as a soldier that I am.

### **General García Carneiro**

I want to pay tribute to those soldiers, embodied by Jorge García Carneiro, a classmate from my class, who hands over the Ministry of Defense after thirty years of military service, and in the coming days will be sworn in as Minister of Social Development and Community Participation. José Vicente fired García Carneiro in a Council of Ministers, they gave him a farewell, and I told him: “No, we have to sing for him. He came back, he came back, he came back!” I appointed him commander of the Mérida Brigade, it was the first position I gave him, he was a brigade general in 1999. There he invented the Wasp Plan: Self-construction of Houses on Isolated Plots. Later I sent him to San Cristóbal, commander of the Division, the Bolívar Plan 2000. He spent all his time in the hospitals, he called me: “Look, this is missing here.” Well, inspecting hospitals, clinics, carrying out vaccination campaigns, health campaigns, etc. Later he was in the Military House and one day he came to me with a project to recondition everything that is the the entire

Simón Bolívar Center. There is the project moving forward, the Plaza O'Leary that was in a mess. He spent all his time sending collecting garbage to the corners of Miraflores, those accumulations of garbage. Later, he turned Miraflores, he more than me, into a center of social attention. That was full of people, the poor and he himself taking care of them, I remember it very clearly. Later I sent him to command the Third Infantry Division, and that was when the blow coup came. It is for history this general mounted on a war tank, with a megaphone, saying: Long live the Revolution! And along with him, most of the officers of the Armed Forces. García Carneiro was a mainstay in the resistance, that unforgettable, painful day of April 11th, April 12th, April 13th, year 2002.

If he told would tell you what happened to him that day, with some coup plotters, gun in hand. Later he escaped from a room where they imprisoned him. He left for the Disip. When he arrived there, the Disip was taken over by the coup plotters and then he cleverly told them: "I have come to look for Carlos Aguilera as a prisoner here. I'm taking him prisoner", and all to avoid being detained there, or killed. And he took it him away. And then, Minister of Defense, and all the tasks that he has accomplished. You see the Tiuna project, the first time that a vehicle is made in Venezuela for our troops, for the defense of the country. And he has been, I would call him, a champion of military civic unity, General García Carneiro, and of

social projects. That is why he went deep into the Military Hospital. About two weeks ago, his father was sick and he went to visit him at the Military Hospital. He called me, but with such indignation that I had to say: "Calm down a little bit!". He was right to be outraged. Despite the fact that he removed I don't know how many emaciated doctors from the opposition that were in the Military Hospital, who did not want to care for the poor, who closed the door in the face of the Cuban doctors, who did not care for Barrio Adentro Mission, there was still a small group and he got them. That morning there were some Cuban doctors with some patients, and the scrawny ones opposition doctors refused to care for them. Well, he sent that little group to his house home and took them out of the Military Hospital. This phrase is from García Carneiro, in an interview after April 11: "A general with a people behind him is invincible."

### **Danilo Anderson**

**W**e all remember here the tremendously difficult time we went through, when the same Supreme Court of Justice made that decision that shook the country: "There was no coup here and the President was not kidnapped, but guarded by soldiers pregnant with full of good intentions." That is the justice they want. They did applaud that, what cynicism! That night someone called me: "Put

the Send the tanks on to the Supreme Court, President, don't put up with that." "No, I'm not going to put send the tanks in, that's what they want. We are going to hold out to see who can do more, damn it". Here we are and they are fleeing like rats, defeated by history, by their own shadow.

I remember seeing Danilo Anderson speaking live at a press conference. He began to point out things, and that he was going to accuse this and that other, people of power. Because many say that Chávez is accumulating power. They It was them who did accumulate power and what a power, presidents who subordinated themselves to the Supreme Court Tribunal, to the Supreme Court; assemblies and congresses, governorships and mayoralties, and companies, PDVSA, the CVG (Venezuelan Guayana Corporation) and banks. They had everything in their hands, all the political and economic power. All of them were kneeling before the empire.

So, I saw Danilo and the instinct came to me, the one that one develops. Since one has already been doing this for so many years, sometimes a detail is decisive, and I said to myself: "They are going to kill him". And I swear I sent for him, but I had to go, I don't know where I was going. "Call me Danilo." And the caravan security convoy left flying towards Maiquetía. "And Danilo?" "No, that he does not appear he's not there, that he does not respond." "Let them locate it for me Find him!." We came back. Danilo, boom! Danilo left. Isaías

Rodríguez called one night: "President, they killed Danilo." "No, tell me no it's not true." That's why I insist so much on the details, for a phone call maybe they wouldn't have killed him. I asked him to move, we put special security on him, but they caught him alone, careless.

### ***I resurrected***

**I** am not exaggerating. Many men played a role, some heroic, some gave their lives, but Venezuelan women played the decisive role in those days of April 12th and 13th, 2002 in many ways, in different spaces, but above all in the street.

And the night before last I saw some very good testimonials that the TV Channel 8 has prepared. That hill of El Valle collapsed completely, the people went towards Fuerte Tiuna, unarmed, and in front they had some war tanks. A woman tells how a group of women stood in front of a tank and began to shout: "Soldier, you are from the people", until the soldiers got out of the tank and left it to them. There they rode got in, they just didn't know how to handle drive it. And so it happened in many places. Personally, throughout those hours that I lived, women appeared in different ways. The first was my mother



there in the Palace. That morning she appeared showed up like a hurricane and I remember that she gave me a lesson in courage. I had already decided to go to Fuerte Tiuna, I did not know that she was in the Palace at that time, she arrived and went into the office. A group of traitors were there offering themselves for dialogue, they came and went. But they were all traitors, others cowards. We were talking and my mother arrived with a message of courage, strength and a lot of love, of course.

Then already a prisoner in Fuerte Tiuna, in the room where they had held me since dawn on the 12th, there in the Military Police, two military women arrived, very young prosecutors. They were threatened, pressured, watched, but they were allowed to enter as if to fill out a form. They made a record and I told them: "Put Write it there, please, that I have not resigned." They were already saying It was being said everywhere that I had resigned, it was mid-morning on that April 12th and they were under pressure from a coup leader who was watching them there, checking what they were writing. They didn't write what I had asked them to, so I signed the minutes and told them: "Okay, that's fine". They were gone. Do you know what they did? In tiny, tiny little letters they wrote under my signature. Note: "States that you have he has not resigned." And when they left the area of surveillance and pressure from the coup leaders, they obtained and sent a copy to the attorney general, Isaías Rodríguez. That is one of the causes or triggers of that press

conference that the prosecutor Isaías bravely gives. And he says: “We have not seen the President’s signed resignation, rather we have evidence that he states that he has not resigned. Therefore, —said Isaías that afternoon— he is still the president”. That was a message that he delivered like a missile to the opinion matrix that they had been creating, through repetition, that I had resigned.

Well, the two girls. Then they take me out of Fuerte Tiuna and take me by helicopter around midnight to Turiamo. They wanted to kill me at Fuerte Tiuna, but a group of officers prevented it, so they took me to Turiamo away from me. They also wanted to kill me there, another group of soldiers prevented it and instead forced the hit men to return in the helicopter; they started protecting me. Then they take me to an infirmary at the naval base and the women appear again: a doctor and a nurse, both military. The doctor checks me up that morning. And the nurse, a young, dark-haired woman from Barlovento told me that she was. The doctor left and she stays. I was wearing a short, a flannel t-shirt and barefoot, because I had nothing, not even flip-flops; prisoner is prisoner, then. I see her eyes and she suddenly says to me: “Oh, President, oh my commander! I dreamed of meeting you since I was a child, but I never thought I would meet you like this.” She saw me defeated, sitting there, I was like abandoned, really. Christian as I am, I said: “Well, whatever you want, if I had to die today, here I am ready. Of course, if I have to die, I am not going to

ask for mercy, or forgiveness, or anything, but rather I have to die standing up as Che Guevara died". Then, that girl tells me: "My mom loves him you so much. And my son, if you saw him when you go on television, he would stand up and say hello". I ask him: "And your son, how old are you?" "He is three years old". "What's her his name", and "He's called..." such... She talks to me and leaves crying. I exploded... and went into the bathroom to cry, but in those tears all the poor children in the world passed me by, the barefoot ones... That message was definitive, because even she tells me: "Oh, what will become of my son now?" That triggered in me a special feeling that we revolutionaries have for children, and then I said: "My God, what is going to become of the children now, with this cadre of squalid that bunch of oppositionists, perverse, and oligarchs controlling Venezuela? ?, what will become of the Venezuelan children? After I washed my face, I sat there, in a little chair. And I swore once more: "I have to go back." That hit me hard in the soul. I left that resurrected bathroom, regained strength. It was late at night and by dawn I was already talking to the sergeants and some young officers who were guarding me, making plans to go to Maracay. But it was not necessary, a helicopter arrived, we went to La Orchila and there the group of paratroopers and the Air Force went to the rescue. Before the sun rose for the third time in a row, I was back in Miraflores. It was like a miracle. He would come I was in the helicopter, and I would say: "My God, is this true?" So they tell me: "Let's go to

Maracay". "Not to Maracay, we're going to Caracas, we're going to the Palace." "That there is still no control over adjacencies." "It doesn't matter, let's go to the Palace."

And not only in my direct events of those hours, but in the streets, in the neighborhoods, in the towns, the Venezuelan woman gave a forceful and heroic demonstration of what she is capable of, of her strength, of her love, of her courage.

6

*From the plains*



## ***The patrol man***

Some people don't want to believe it. The other time I commented on it and they told me that I was fooling them, when I said about the Patrolman there in Elorza. I saw it. Forty-five meters long I counted at a glance. We were coming one night from Puerto Infante, in the boat, with the soldiers. Who has seen a rock in the Arauca? Have you seen a rock in the Arauca? There are no stones, and it looked like a stone. What's more, the propeller touched the alligator's back and bent. Nobody believes that, but well, I'm not to blame. I saw the Patrol man around here, between Puerto Infante and Elorza, it was about midnight. Some people think it is an island, it is an alligator with a palm tree on its back.

## ***Variná***

“*B*arineando i am happy in the Easter days, in December, and the summer and the fairs and exhibit of the Pilar virgin. It's a beautiful song, the Barinas one. But let's refresh ourselves on the history of where this name comes from. The Variná Indians, with the v of Venezuela. They were indigenous tribes that inhabited this foothill. They lived from agriculture, hunting, fishing; peaceful tribes. Petroglyphs have been found here in Bum Bum. The Old Ruiz Guevara, friend of many years and historian of this land, obtained

the petroglyphs of Bum Bum; remains and traces. There are very old roads here, pre-Columbian roads, the Paez road. Of course, because the Variná had a lot of influence from the Timoto cuicas, that is, from the indigenous people from the mountains. They lived in communities, walked through all these savannahs of the foothills and reached the mountain villages of the Andes. Until what they presented to us as the Discovery arrived, one of the biggest farces in our history, one of the biggest lies they sold us. The truth is that they invaded us, they ran over us, they annihilated us, they massacred the Variná, the Timoto cuicas, the Caracas Indians, the Goajiros.

It's been 500 years, that's why the historical memory of our people to understand. This is not our original language. Unfortunately I have not had time to learn any indigenous language, of the many we have, a debt I have. The only thing I learned several years ago when the spirit of the infantry, we sang " The Queen of Battles " (La reina de las batallas). Then, I learned that saying: Anakarinarote aunnukon itotopaparoto mantoro, a war cry of the Carib Indians. I am variná and I am also a little quiba and yaruro from the aborigines of Apure, Arauca.

Those varinás were forced to leave the land, the crops and the family. They armed themselves to fight against the Spanish invaders. Of course, the disadvantage was very great, the difference in technology. Those Spanish troops came armed to the teeth, and the

aborigines aboriginals faced them with their fingernails, with arrows and bows, with spears. But they defended their dignity and many, the majority, preferred to die like Guaicaipuro. He told the Spanish platoon that surrounded him, killed his wife and daughters; the chief Guaicaipuro came out and confronted the Spanish platoon, and told them: "Come Spaniards, come and see how the last free man of this land dies".

### ***The party of Elorza***

I am going to tell you how I met the traditional singer Reina Lucero. My friends from Elorza considered that I could be the president of the board of the patron saint festivities, which are the most traditional in Venezuela, the most traditional in the plains. I remember Father Gonzalo who was a member of the board, Joel Garcia, so many people who collaborated: Emma Guerrero, Elvira Bracho, Carlos Becerra. We decided to bring a good group of Venezuelan singers to rescue as much as possible the festivities that had lost a little and had become very commercialized.

And on the gala night Eneas Perdomo, Reina Lucero, Luis Lozada sang. Where is Luis Lozada? God has him, over there, singing, cheering up the savannahs of heaven. How I remember



Luis, “El Cubiro”, how much shouting and how much joy. There I also met Luis Silva. I remember that Denis del Río also came, also as well as that boy from Maracay, who was a sergeant in the Air Force. Well, a group of singers, Cristóbal Jiménez also came. It cost ten bolivars, a popular party, almost free. It was March 19th. I was already in conflict with the governor. At that time he was an adeco gentleman, from Jaime Lusinchi’s gang; I am not going to name him, because it is not worth it on a day as beautiful as this day of San José. Those people did not want to collaborate with the patron saint festivities. We had a conflict, even a personal one, the governor and I, who was older, a very hard discussion in San Fernando de Apure. They wanted to impose themselves, as always: “We are going to support the festivities, but I have some friends, you know, major...”. I told him: “I do not accept conditions; governor, keep your check”, and I came. He gave me wrote a report claiming that I was disrespectful and so on.

So I said, well, let’s work here with the board. We went through the savannas to collect skinny cows. I told the ranchers: “Look, give me the skinniest cow you have”, one skinny cow, four skins, and the people collaborated, many ranchers, humble people. I asked the Municipal Council to give us the barge. With the boys from the high school, we charged for the barge two days a week. At that time there was no bridge over the Arauca. We had raffles, stands on the

corners, right here in the house - in front - we sold beer, meat, all kinds of things, we raffled pigs, cock fights, we did everything and we collected some money. I remember, Reina, I paid you fourteen thousand bolivars at the airport. I had forgotten to pay her, Reina was leaving and I wasn't going to pay her. She sang here for about three days, imagine that, a very special price. I had coordinated with my boss, who was General Rodriguez Ochoa, commander of the Division. He helped us a lot, the paratroopers came and jumped here. We brought a team, Pompeyo Davalillo came to play softball here in Elorza; our team against a team from Unellez, from Barinas. But they called me in the morning to tell me that the army plane, which was coming from San Juan de los Morros, was damaged. In that plane they had to bring me Reina and the harpist Guillermo Hernández, from Reina's group band. They told me at eight or nine in the morning that Reina was not coming. My God, what did I do? Do you know what I did? I took the plane away from the governor, ha, ha. We were in the middle of mass and I approached one of the governor's aides, who was a friend of mine: "Look, I am not going to talk to the governor", because we were not speaking to each other. The governor was sitting in the mass. And I said to him: "Look, okay, convince him to lend us the plane, don't tell him it's for me, tell him it's to get some emergency medicine for Mantecal, for a boy who is sick. Give the governor a piece of your mind Make something up". These friends came, they gave him the coba they came up with a lie and I got on the plane with the pilot, who was a man from here

in Elorza. I went from the mass to San Juan de los Morros, to pick up Reina who was waiting at the airport. And Eneas Perdomo, they were both waiting.

We were caught in a storm passing Mantecal, but we finally arrived after noon midday in San Juan de los Morros. Reina was there and she told me: "Well, it will be next year". "Next year?" "How do you do, I am Major Chavez, Reina, let's go, here is the plane". But only one plane and they were Eneas, Reina and the whole band, they did not fit. "Well, let's go on the wing, but tonight we have to play. The people are very excited. I believe that you had not come here for a long time, several years because the festivities had become commercialized, they had lost their folkloric and cultural roots, their beauty". I called an official friend in San Fernando de Apure, from the San Juan airport, and I told him: "Get me a small plane, okay, how much does a small plane cost? Five thousand bolivars charged for a small plane to go to San Juan de los Morros. "No, no, but you have to come here and from here to Elorza"; well, ten thousand bolivars, he had the pilot right next door to him. I did not have the money at hand. I told him: "Ok, tell him that I will pay him that however I can, that he should come to San Juan". The plane went to Calabozo, we made a transfer in Calabozo. Eneas Perdomo told me: "We look like smugglers jumping from one plane to another". And the governor's plane in which we were coming from San Juan, returned to San Juan to pick up the harpist, Guillermo and the group band.

We arrived, but in another plane. It was about six o'clock in the afternoon. The governor was furious at the airport and all the High Command, the general of the National Guard, the chief of I don't know where, and we got off very proud, laughing our heads off, I was happy, I brought the people with me. Then the governor came, he had already been told about it and he had spent the whole entire day waiting. He had to leave at two in the afternoon. He comes and confronts me: "Look, Major, where is my plane?" I tell him: "It's in the air, Governor, don't worry". That man was shooting sparks, some mutual friends had to get in and take him away, they threw water on him. The truth is that we went straight to the coleo sleeve and there we started the activity.

That night we staged the great Criolla night with Reina Lucero, Eneas Perdomo, Luis Lozada and all the people I have already mentioned. There came that boy who also died: Septuagésimo, what a singer that boy was! Unfortunately, just like Luis Lozada, "El Cubiro", I remember them all from my heart, in this Cajón de Arauca Apureño. That night, full of strength, of that love for this town, of those roots that one carries, I introduced Eneas, who is the father of all of you. That is the main pillar. The 'general in chief' it what I call say to Eneas Perdomo. I remember that I improvised a song, I will see if I remember it: *The Cajón del Arauca shakes / and its back roars / for tonight in Elorza / Eneas Perdomo sings. And that harp was bellowing, the Arauca was vibrating.*

## **Penurious**

**H**ow they have run over the poor in Venezuela! How they have run over the peasants in Venezuela! I was Captain over there in Alto Apure and a soldier from my squad arrived one day: "My captain, I have a problem, my father was wounded, he was shot by shotgun". And I say, "But how was that?". He told me the story and I was with the boy two days later. I went out in civilian clothes like everyone else, in a civilian jeep, so to speak, and we got out of Mantecal into the Alto Apure.

It turns out that a landowner who has thousands of hectares, but thousands, twenty, thirty thousand hectares, had decided to take out the peasants who were born there, the "Pisatarians" who there had even cemeteries, where they had buried their grandparents, to their old, peasant communities in the Apure. But this gentleman said that those lands were his, that those rivers were his, that those trees were his and that those people had to leave from there; the Middle Ages, then, the feudal lords. He had hired a group of terrorists who walked at night, masked with shotguns and rifles. They were killing this soldier boy's father's pigs, The pigs killed this soldier boy's father and that's why they wounded him, because he went out to defend his pigs. That cost him his whole life, more than thirty pigs were killed, the molechal banana plants were was

knocked down with a tractor, half of the ranch was taken away; they went inside and knocked the ranch down. The children went to school on foot, five kilometers away, and on the way the masked guys came out to scare them and beat the children.

At that time we investigated that. Of course, I had no more power but to investigate. They weren't my powers either, because they weren't a captain's, but I was already getting into those things, right? I took pictures and sent the report to the superior command in the military area. But I waited my whole life for a solution. It never came. Why? because this gentleman, who owned the land, was very close to the governor of Apure at the time, who had been imposed by the president at the time, that gentleman named Jaime Lusinchi. A whole mob, and the judges of Apure, all from the same gang.

Then So, the poor peasant gets shot, the pigs kill him they kill his pigs, the his ranch is knocked over, sometimes his daughter is raped, the his boy is beaten and he has to die quietly. That's when things happen that have happened in the world, because people have dignity. Suddenly, the peasant stubbornly grabs a machete and anything can happen. That's when the problems occur, because of the abuse of power. So I am committed, because I come from there, I was born on the ground and with pride I say: I am a peasant, penurious.

***Take your neoliberalism away!***

**I** will tell you what they did to a friend of mine, from Sabaneta, a corn producer, who told me the story when I was captain in Elorza. There he went to ask me for help. He thought I, being a Captain, could help him. I passed the news to my superior command, but no: "That's none of your business, Captain. Get into Stick to military trouble business". But that man cried. He came to visit me one day at my Farfan Cavalry Squadron in Elorza. We were childhood friends.

He had his tractor for all the effort of a lifetime, an little old tractor, but it was good, he had a rake, he had a small plot of land he had bought, a cottagesmall rural house and a family: a woman and four or five boys. He asked for a loan to plant forty or fifty hectares of corn. He obtained the credit by putting the land, the cottage, as collateral; they asked him for all the guarantees. He harvested an excellent crop of corn, because those lands are very good. Those riverbanks between the Boconó and the Masparro, are the best lands in South America for agriculture. So, my friend comes along, gets some trucks, rents them, of course this is all by going in debt. Look, pal, you got the truck. Well, rent it to me but I'll pay you after I get paid for the corn, and they make a gentlemen's agreement, and the bank. Of course, he will pay, he has no capital, his capital is his

arms and his little piece of land, his work, his dignity and his word. That man took, I think, three or four truckloads of corn to the silos of La Veguita. That was run by private sectors of large companies, supported by corrupt government at the time. They say, "All right, stop park the corn trucks there". A day passes, because corn has to be weighed and applied scientific methods to measure its moisture, its quality. And the man would be every day there, stuck in the fence. He saw trucks coming and going, and that honest and humble man waiting his turn. A few days passed by, finally when they were going to weigh the corn, when it gave the will to the businessmen finally felt like it and the corrupt government that there were combined for years, working in silos that are of belong to the nation, made with the nation's money, that is, of the people.

So, they said: "No boy, that corn is very wet already, that corn must be discounted half, we will pay you half". What causes gives?!? That's why I tell the Venezuelans, that this force strength is not mine, I was calm content as a captain, with my 120 soldiers. But listening to this man and remembering the childhood of the two of us, that we were friends, we sold fruits, we went fishing together, we studied together in the notebooks, we were like brothers of life. And when I saw that man, with his wife and his boys, there in Elorza one morning, telling me the story on the bank of Arauca, for well I began to cry with him.



It was like this that, little by little, of after so much crying and so much suffering, for I looked at my rifle full of impotence. That is how what happened here happened, and that strength is therefore not mine, it is yours that one day passed it on to me, and that God has allowed it to be preserved here as a great battery, a great accumulator of pain, but of love and strength. That is what you have made me, an accumulator, a battery and you are the ones who give strength to me and God, first God.

That man was in debt, that wasn't enough to pay the bank, the trucks, the fertilizer, or anything. The bank took away his house, he lost the tractor and he was left on the street. They took the land because he was already carrying debts. That was like when the bullfighter gave him the last thrust, ras! Take your neoliberalism away, then.

***These are not the times of doña Bárbara***

**T**n Apure I faced many of those people who have large tracts of land. On one occasion, a landowner wanted to stop my soldiers from passing through those lands. Then they blocked the road. I did what I had to do. I get a corporal comes to me and he says: "Look, my captain, we can't go through because there's a lock blocking the way". I grabbed the radio and said, "Soldier, put a rifle in shoot that lock with a rifle". it was blocking the royal road, brothers, and the Armed Forces are patrolling the border. The man told me he was going to prosecute me. "Sue me, but you are abusing your power, because you are not the owner".

You see, once I got ran into some peasants, some fishermen, they came to me there to at the command, because my command was also a place of arrival of the Indians, the Guajiros, the cuibas, the Yaruros complaining of abuse, of arbitrariness for years. Do you know what some landowners did? There was a pipe creek that becomes a river in winter became a river. In the summer they would cover the pipe creek with a machine to dry it, so that the fishermen or the peasants, who were in a small boat to go through all those fields in winter, would not get into it. I had to send a machine with some soldiers to knock over all

those plugs. Because they then said: "This land is mine, and the water that passes through here is also mine". I said: "You are wrong, sir, you do not know, this are not the times Dona Barbara, nor the time of the Middle Ages".

### ***Elorza, like to la India***

I remember in Elorza, when I was commander of the Farfán Squadron, that in order to get a cow there you had to practically beg the cattle ranchers, the producers. Nobody wanted to kill a cow to sell it to the people. It was not to be given away, we did not go around asking for anything. They made their calculations and realized they made more money with this extensive cattle raising that requires invests almost nothing, because it all they had to do is to put load the cattle on trucks and sell them in Maracay or in the center of the country, in Barquisimeto. They sell it much more expensively because they inflate the costs. So, the people of Elorza did not eat beef. I was once told by a colonel who went there for some maneuvers. He was Chief of Staff of a brigade and he told me: "Chavez, this is like India, they pass the cows walk pass to you like this, but nobody can eat them". Eating babo

aligator and chigüire capybara, when there was an opportunity. It is capitalism, they are thinking of maximum profit and this or that person does not care if the people are fed, if the children eat.

### **Santos Luzardo**

**T**just got ran into one of my godchildren: Santos Luzardo is his name. Imagine his name. He is a cuiba indigenous, from the coasts of Capanaparo and from all these lands. I never baptized him in a church, but he is my godson. Luis Jicuture wanted me to be his godfather. I met Santos Luzardo on the banks of the Capanaparo, there in Carabalí, a ravine in Yopaleño, in 1986. I remember that I took him with my soldiers and friends who were on a bongo (typical long boat used in the rivers of Venezuela), sailing the Capanaparo. Since then he is my godson from the heart, as one has so many. But I had never seen Santos Luzardo since 1986. How many years, fourteen years. I have never forgotten that little cuiba boy. So much, and I didn't know I was going to see him today. I didn't know and I get it meet him as soon as I get here.

And last night, in one of those moments I steal from the hurricane -sometimes you steal from the hurricane-, I invited my son Hugo to dinner, and we went to a Chinese restaurant in Caracas. The two

of us, without escort, without paraphernalia entourage, and we sat down to talk. And last night we remembered him for two hours of conversation from friend to friend, from father to son, listening to his anguish, his doubts, and me trying to be a father and a friend in the middle of this hurricane. I reminded Hugo of his life, since he was born, and, of course, the time we were here in Elorza, with his mother, with Rosa and Maria.

Then he remembered Santos Luzardo. Because he became friends with Santos Luzardo, they are the same age. Hugo had an old bicycle that I bought from for him sometime around at the ipsfa (a military store), probably at a modest price, on credit, and he brought it to with him. But that year I bought him another one, very modest simple but new, so he had the old one over there in a room. Right here, we are half a block away from the place where we lived for three years, sharing the roots of this beloved town. And one day Luis arrived with his wife, my brothers the cuibas and the yaruros are always around, and with them we have a vital commitment, also existential, to give them back their life, their dignity. We did it a little, as far as we could, in those years we were here. I remember that Huguito sent the bicycle to Santos Luzardo as a gift. That bicycle must be somewhere on the banks of the Capanaparo. I have seen Santos Luzardo again, I give him my blessing. He had a problem in one eye, and there is my compadre Luis Jicuture. He tells me that Santos Luzardo was

shooting arrows and some arrow shot by another boy hit him in the eye; he has lost the sight use of one eye. We have to take that boy with us, we are going to do a study on Santos Luzardo's eye and on all the children that need to be attended to.

### ***"The Cubiro"***

September 24th, day of Our Lady of Las Mercedes. Congratulations and a kiss to all the Mercedes and the Merceditas who are struggling, fighting and full of optimism for the future of Venezuela. There is a song by Luis Lozada. Well, I don't think the lyrics are by Luis Lozada, but he sang it, recorded it and continues to sing it, because "El Cubiro" left us at a bad time, two years ago; one of the strongest voices that the Venezuelan plains have given birth to.

Luis Lozada was born in El Rial, back in Barinas, in the south, very close to Santa Inés, the land of Zamora. That is the strip that goes all the way to Apure, southeast of Barinas, following the course of the Santo Domingo River. One goes and gets there to Santa Inés, where the great battle took place in which Ezequiel Zamora, at the head of the revolution, defeated the troops of the oligarchy in December 1859. Very close to there was born, in the second decade of this century, our great friend, a humble man, a revolutionary. I was a child and

you could already hear it all over the savannahs of Barinas, Apure, Guárico, Portuguesa, Cojedes, but especially in the savannahs of Barinas the cry of “Eyyy, Eyyy” vibrated, and “El Cubiro” started up. Do you know the El Cubiro? You have to grab go deep into the savannah inside. The cubiro is a bird that sings. My grandmother Rosa Inés had many cubiros. “Grab me the little cubirito”, she used to say. They are yellow birds, colorful, a very vivid color and they fly very happy. Since he was a child Luis Lozada began to sing. He had a characteristic shout, a shout that brought out the emotion in all those places that saw him for more than forty years, composing songs, gathering from the savannahs, from hope, gathering from men, women, children, from all that passion for what is ours and launching it with a gigantic love, an extraordinary strength.

“El Cubiro” spent forty years collecting from the marshes, from the lagoons, from the palm groves, from the heron places, from the palm trees, from the savannah flooded by the winter, from the savannah parched by the summer sun, on the banks of the rivers, from San Fernando to Guasdalito, from Guachara to El Cajón, as the verse says, from Barinas to El Baúl. Traveling and collecting the feeling of the savannah and expressing it in song, expressing it in poems, expressing it in verses.

I had the good fortune to meet “El Cubiro” when I was president of the patron saint festivities of Elorza. Do you know how much

he sang non-stop? An hour and a half. He threw a chain sang non-stop and I remember that he finished one, turned around and said to the harpist: “HArp, compadre! That man was like possessed, very excited and he did not stop, he played for two hours! Cristóbal, who was the star, we put him last in the program, and then he got angry: “Well, Major, do you think I’m a rooster to sing at dawn? The sun was rising, but he sang about three songs.

“El Cubiro” spent eight days singing in the corners of town. The little we paid him for his professional fees he spent in town playing rooster betting on cockfights, playing skittles bolas criollas. They gave him a rooster and he came with his rooster asking for cola hitchhiking from Elorza to Mantecal, going to Barinas. Well, I was remembering Luis Lozada, because he has a very old song that he recorded many years ago, called

*“Mercedes”.*

*Mercedes*

*Where did you go, where did you go*

*Mercedes, where did you go*

*I want to plant again*

*Listen, Mercedes,*

*An inspiration in your chest.*

*This is to all the Mercedes.*



***Eneas Perdomo***

**T**he composer I know best, I know his soul and I want to see him soon. I want to see you old man, I know you are listening to me. You are there in San Juan de Los Morros, there with Atamaica, with a cup of coffee. I imagine you in a “chinchorro” hammock, there under the sun of the savannah that gave birth to you. I am referring to Eneas Perdomo. Eneas was born in El Yagual, on the banks of the Arauca River, I don't know how many years ago. I was a child and I already heard those songs. Eneas is a composer, songwriter, coplero, improviser and an authentic man born in the savannah.

Since I was a child I relate him to Florentino, the one from Florentino y el Diablo (Florentino and the Devil). I believe that Eneas Perdomo beats the Devil in singing. He is like Magallanes to La Guaira, nine arepas to the Devil. You have to see him singing and hear him singing. Songs that he has composed, well, extracting them from the estuary, extracting them from the herons, from the rivers, from the banks of the Arauca, from the Apure:

Fisherman of the Apure River,  
fisherman of the Apure River with your  
honest and Good soul on your back you  
lay on the beach and cover with the  
sand. You go like the cotúa following the

lever locking with lever and hook and  
*sinker with harpoon.*

Y And Eneas every time we see each other there, on the road, he  
always dedicates a song to me, because he knows that I carry it in  
my soul.

*That song "Goodbye, Barrancas de Arauca":*

*Good bye, Barrancas de Arauca,*

*Beautiful Barrancas de Arauca land*

*from the plains, clear water Whirlpool*

*of clear Whirlpool and prairie in the*

*Savannah*

## **Shadows in the night**

**I** was talking about Guacharaca to La Rompía. That is in the Cajón de Arauca. I know La Rompía, I know all those plains as Cristóbal Jiménez says in a song written by Pedro Telmo Ojeda, one of those poets of the plains. It is a poem-song, he talks ghosts *aparecidos* come out. "La Sayona", "the weeping lady" "La Llorona", the "Ball of fire", all that comes out there, the llaneros say. One has seen shadows in the night. I have not seen "the weeping lady" "La Llorona", nor "La

Sayona”, nor the “Ball of fire”, but there are llaneros who say they saw the “Ball of fire”. The tales of the savannah. Once a “llanero” told me: “Captain, don’t go through there. There comes out a dead man with no head, smoking appears around there”. Ha, ha, ha, ha. I don’t know, a guy who had no head and was smoking.

### ***Like fish in the water***

Geography has a lot to do with it. You talk about La Matica. Why is it called La Matica? Many people maybe don’t know and things get erased. I remember for example El Yopito, near Elorza going south. One passes by there all the time, along the road where the “Mi Luna” horse-breeding estate is located. In El Yopito there are some very large mango trees, a small school and a hamlet. El Yopito sounded very familiar to me, until I started to investigate. I had already read some of the stories from the beginning of the 20th century, until one day, here it is, there was the battle of El Yopito.

It was there, in 1914, that Gómez’s forces, commanded by the Coriano general León Jurado, from Coro, confronted the revolutionary generals who invaded from Colombia trying to take San Fernando. There, León Jurado confronted Alfredo Franco, the one from Tinaquillo. Pedro

Perez Delgado was close by in the guerrillas at the beginning of the century. One day I took the Squadron with me and we played a war game simulating that battle. With a map, I explained to them and the soldiers knew, and the inhabitants of El Yopito too, why the town was called that way.

Nobody knew why it is called La Mata del Congrio, which was beyond further away, and why it is called Laguna del Lake of Término. Many people still do not know that the border between Venezuela and Nueva Granada passed through there. It passed through the middle of the town of Elorza, it touched the top of La Mata del Congrio, it passed through the top of the Laguna del Lake of Término to Meta, down there. We redid that border line. Do you know what we managed to get found under the mountains bushes? We got found the old road under the mountains and bushes, the old inns. One day we got found some very thick mango trees, very old trees. We were walking with a historian from Apure, recounting historical facts and geography on the territory. We started to clean that bush, under the mango trees and we found the footprint of what they called El Paso. That's where the horses stopped for centuries, because it was the border. From there to there on forward was Colombia and from there to here, Venezuela. There was a treaty well into the 20th century and the border shifted. But Elorza was half Venezuela and half Colombia, there in Arauca. Nobody knew where the Mucuritas site was and when we arrived at that small monument they had built there, it was covered in bush

and someone who owned it had locked the entrance. The key did not appear. "No, you have to go to El Samán to look for the owner," someone said. "This doesn't have an owner," I answered. It is national patrimony, the monument where the battle of Mucuritas took place, where José Antonio Páez, with his centaurs - among them Farfán - defeated the troops of Pablo Morillo himself.

And to say Apure is to say Barinas. You see Paez's biography and he says: "I was born in Curpa, province of Barinas". The fact is that Barinas was went from the limits of Cojedes to beyond the most nevermore, as we llaneros say. It encompassed all of what today is Apure, all of what today is Barinas, all of what today is Portuguesa and even part of what today is Cojedes. The great Province of Barinas, which was later called Zamora State; the Venezuelan oligarchy took away the name of Zamora and divided it.

Do you know why we are called Elorza? Because of Andres Elorza, also from the centaurs, invincible, untamed of the savannah. Andres Elorza, captain of Paez's troops. Hey, do you know why the river is called Arauca? Hey, do you know that this was Colombia here? Then, the people began to get like fish in the water; while they did not know they were like fish in the air, gasping, breathing artificially.

7

# *Embracing the mass*



## ***The people's catacombs***

I remember very clearly the day I left prison, on March 26th, 1994. It was the Easter of year '94 and there, in Los Próceres, in the monoliths, one of the first questions a journalist asked me was something like this: "And now where are you going? I remember saying: "I'm going to the people's catacombs." And since then we left. It's not that I'm leaving, because in truth one never walks alone, although sometimes the desert is pressing, the sun dazzles and the sand overheats. One never walks alone, although sometimes it seems so. But we went through the people's catacombs.

We visited solitudes, we visited hamlets, by day, by night, in the rain, in the sun, with few people or with many people, it didn't matter, but with a flag held high, with a long project, with an open road and opening towards The horizon. That path here leads us. It is the same course for us to get out of the catacombs, to get out of the abyss, to make a truly new Venezuela.

They say on the plains: "Where are you going to go with that swollen leg?" Where am I going then? I understood this the day I got out of jail. I was very nervous that day, I confess, nervous. What will happen to me now, God? We had planned a press

conference at Los Próceres, and a group of friends set up a small table there, a microphone, and some journalists. I was very scared, I confess. I took off my uniform. I cried there in the rain tree and the oak, in my beloved alma mater. I put on a clear liquiliqui suit and headed out.

The military comrades brought me in a van and released me there; “Well, Commander, good luck,” a Military Police captain told me, who was the head of the escort for that prisoner who was me. He even allowed me to walk, because I was like I didn’t want to go out. “Let me get off here”, in the academy gym I got off. “And what are you going to do, my commander?” “No, let me walk over around here.” And I went to the baseball field, I remembered many things. After about half an hour he told me: “My commander, let’s go. My general is calling”. “Well, let’s go”, to avoid problems for the captain. But I wanted to wander around for some time.

I got in and we go to Los Próceres on the way to the the checkpoint there, and there I got off. A captain, a soldier, the other soldier, a hug. And when I turn around, what comes is an avalanche on me, an avalanche, brother. I saw it clearly, I said: “My God, now what should I do”. They knocked over the table, the microphone, there was a motorcycle there, it fell; a soldier got in the way telling them to stop, they knocked him down, the rifle rolled over there. I rolled, they broke my liquiliqui. That’s where I understood my destiny.



## ***With my goat to Caracas***

**T**remember one night we arrived in Coro. There was nobody. No one was summoned. There weren't Three people who had been painting slogans, were put in jail. Two people who had been making a flyer in a high school, were detained. Nobody was put in jail for delivering flyers in a highschool. Nobody knew that Chávez was coming. It was Sunday, and there were twenty people in the square. I went to see Bolívar. They gathered around, and I stood on a little bench.

There was this holy drunk man repeating everything I was saying. I remember I said, "Let's go to a march demonstration in to Caracas". We were summoning to a march demonstration that never happened, those dreams one has. I said, "By car, by donkey, by goat". Then the drunk man, "I take my goat to Caracas". You I had to be patient, man.

## ***A political drunk***

**T**here is a state of drunkenness, not so advanced, when drunk people tell the truth. I remember two drunk expressions that stuck with me: two political expressions, political drunkards, then. One, that time when I went to Havana for the first time. I met Fidel; he surprised me waiting for me at the door of the plane and we gave

ourselves that first hug. Here almost all the newspapers headlined with the color photo, and those politicians said: "Now it is true that Chávez is over." I was coming out of prison and they had made a lot of efforts to liquidate annihilate me morally: "the murderer", and I don't know how much more. They accused me of everything a human being can be accused of and said: "Now if it's true, Fidel killed him", "Chávez with a shot in the wing", front page and television. And they repeated the thing believing that with that they were going to hurt me.

I returned to Caracas two days later. We had that office downtown, at the Inorca building. That was in year '94. We arrived and took a taxi in the from Maiquetía airport to Inorca. Lieutenant Isea was with me that day. I was wearing my green liquiliqui suit, as always. I was skinny, starving. It was night of December 15th or 16th. Then I got off the car, and there was a man in the middle of the street, drunk. He was enjoying his binge blind drunk, bumps into me and he says, "You look like Chávez". I say, "I am Chávez. How are you, brother?" I shake his hand. He was carrying holding a bottle in his hand, and he was almost unable to talk. "Chávez, Chávez", and he went on my in the opposite side direction I was headed. A few seconds passed, he gave a couple of steps, I gave two steps more, when I hear his cry, "Chávez!" I turn around "Yes, tell me. Carefull, Don't fall!" He rose the arm with the bottle as he could. Do you know what he said? "Chávez, long life Fidel!" That's what those politicians don't know: : the idiosyncrasy of our people. Instead, they did me a favor by showing the photo so much.

The other drunk man that I remember was one day, with so much sun! Cristóbal Jiménez was there, who was a candidate for governor. We were entering Guasdualito on horseback. Marisabel, then my wife, was riding a very trotting mare. We were entering on horseback and a lot of people walking, but it was a reverberating sun, and one of those scorching noons on the plains noon days. That was an overflow of people everywhere in red shirts. So I'm go on the horse and a man was walking, but drunk. Security was moving him away because he got in the way and the horse would pushed him, but he insisted, it seemed like another horse. We arrived at the Guasdualito Bolívar Square and I kept an eye on the man, worried that he could be run over by a horse. He looked everywhere and threw yelled an expression, a rudeness that I can't say. In Spanish, the word had a "c" and a "ñ". Let's say he said "Caramba" (Wow). He said: "Wow, the adecos are over!" But it was like a cry of liberation, it was like a cry of "it's over!", boy, finally, like it was impossible.

### ***The Ilk***

**T**he indigenous people used to say over there in the High Orinoco that the mayor of the area – I don't know who the person is, or what his or her name is, or what party he or she belongs to, nor am I speaking ill of him them – I am repeating what the people told

me, the indigenous people. They told me, by the way, that during the electoral campaign, last year, the mayor of that area and the adecos walked along the rivers bringing them food. So they talked to them about a certain Chávez, look at check this. A witness was Monsignor Ignacio Velasco, the Archbishop of Caracas, who worked there for many years witnessed it. He had not gone been there for five years, I invited him and had the honor of being accompanied by him, there with the Yanomami indigenous people.

Well, it turns out that the adecos, that kind of people spread through those rivers and do you know what they told the indigenous people? That there was this guy “Chavez”, the one who had given the coup, he wanted to the president, and that if Chavez made it to President he The President was going to open their bellies in half. He even told me: “I’m still scared, are you Chávez?” “Yes, I am Chávez.” “I’m scared,” a chieftain cacique told me. “Don’t be scared, come here, give me a hug. Those who have opened your belly, those who have taken your soul out, those who have destroyed your soul, are those gentlemen, the ilk that for half a century ended Venezuela.” But they even went so far as to tell people that I was going to open their bellies in half, that I was going to take out the little boys from pregnant women. Look at you Imagine such a macabre thing, worthy of the ilk of the “adecos” that ended Venezuela.

***It is hell here!***

**A**s always, there is the mass of the people and I throw myself on top of the mass, I embrace them, I sweat with them, I cry with them and I find myself. Because that's where the drama is there, that's where the pain is there, and I want to feel that pain, because only that pain, united with the love one feels, will give us the strength to fight for a thousand years if we had to fight against corruption, against inefficiency, and for the good of a people that is a noble, dignified, courageous people like the Venezuelan people.

You don't have to look far to get to the tragedy. Yesterday, a woman with her son in her arms – this is incredible, but it is true – the child underwent a bad operation I don't know how many months ago and his abdomen is open. You are not going to believe this, but I saw it with these eyes. The lady walks with her child with a plastic bag attached to her skinny belly, and the entrails are in the bag. It's hell here!

I see that gruesome painting scene and another child further back, also in the mother's arms, and the disfigured face here. The jaw on one side there and the disfigured head. I think a horse kicked him and broke his jaw, split it open. She healed on her own, because her mother couldn't get anyone to take care

of him. So the child is deformed, it's like he has like two jaws. That is happening here in front of mayors, governors, presidents, doctors, everyone.

### ***His eyes in the soul***

Yesterday I was crying hugging a mentally handicapped child. She I was crying. He, since he was born, has been like this and he doesn't have a wheelchair, boy. He I was in great pain. I picked him up, in the middle of the crowd, because he is already big and thank God I made him smile, God allowed me to make him smile, when I told him that we were going to give him a wheelchair with a whistle, a bugle, like a cart. He didn't want to look at me. When I told him that, he looked at me; His eyes were engraved in my soul. And I told him: "It's going to be a fast chair, it's going to run fast but it's going to have brakes and you're going to learn to drive your chair, that's going to be a little cart." That boy started laughing and looking up, my God. I ask God and all of you to unite, because it cannot be possible! So much has been stolen here and so much is still spent on trips, on parties, on I don't know what, and there are the mentally handicapped children who don't have a wheelchair and, what how are they going to go to school with? that? What with? They don't even have anything to eat sometimes.

## ***A little angel***

I remember the sad case of a child who finally died. A boy whom Marisabel and I met on December 24th, 1998. A boy, fourth bat on a baseball team. He had lost a leg, we took him to Havana and he spent three months there with his mother. Fidel went with me to visit him when we were there in January 1999. He was happy. There is a picture playing baseball. But there was nothing to do. It was a terrible disease. He finally came here to die and today he is a little angel. I don't forget his smile, his eyes, his fourth-bat photo, but nothing more could be done. Things of God, we Catholics say. A big, boy, he looked healthy. Suddenly, one day he hit a ball, he was running towards second base and fell, his knee hurt a lot. That's where he when the bone cancer started bone cancer. He told me and his father told me that he had pain, they thought it had been from the game. And the doctors in Cuba said that if tests had been done a year earlier, maybe they would have proceeded on time. But when they acted, one of his legs had already been cut off amputated here. And there they couldn't do anything else, the disease had advanced a lot. How many children lose their lives because there is no prevention, there is no attention. Not only that, but when something serious is discovered, he is not attended they are not seen to either, because he they cannot pay.

I'm announcing some of the details, and this is going to be very important to our people. I am going to use the presidential plane

a lot to send Venezuelans to Cuba. It will be every month. To what for? Well, they will operate there and they will not charge us anything, we will pay them with a percentage or something of oil or oil derivatives. That is part of the agreements that we are going to sign in a few days with the good friend and tremendous leader of Latin America, whose name is Fidel Castro.

## ***Génesis***

**I**t's like that girl. Oh, here I have it I carry her here. Her name was Genesis. One day, at an event, she came running up to me in the audience from the crowd. I think she was at the Poliedro. She went and hugged me. She had brain cancer. And they tell me that she only has one year to live. What can I do for this girl, God? She gave me a flag, I have it there and I will have it with me until the last day of my life, because that flag is her with me. She told me: "Chavez, take my flag." oh! What a pain when I found out the reality! I spoke with Fidel and we made a plan for her. I sent her to Cuba with her mother. They walked took her around and showed her everything, they made her a pioneer. "We will be like Che," she said. I even have the video. She was happy until the last day of her life. See, what else can you do? She is a little angel who walks is around watching over us. There she is made a flag and here she is made life, Genesis.



## ***That forehead is throbbing***

**T**he José Gregorio Hernández Mission, that is another great secret. It's a great mystery and it turns out that at this moment there must be thousands, and especially young people, going from house to house, visiting people with disabilities from house to house. Many of them must be sentenced, in the last room of the house, to live their whole lives in bed. Now many of them are walking, studying or receiving tools to get around, a wheelchair, etc. A child without arms has already left for Cuba. The little devil kid left for Cuba, brother. Do you remember the boy without arms? I get things encounter so many cases everywhere that, oh, my God!

Once deep in Sabaneta, where I was born, it occurred to me to go down a road after an "Aló Presidente", like "to relax" the soul looking for the savannah. A llanero looking for savannah. "Let's go to the savannah," I told some colleagues. I was driving, I got into some roads that I had never forgotten. I hadn't been there Since I was a child. I arrive at a house, I get out and people come out. "Chavez, look!" And a child comes, a very alert little kid little wasp kitty like that and a photo. The girl, the mom and the dad. It was out in the fields, fields and some cows. Suddenly I see the boy and I see something strange on his forehead. "Boy, that forehead is throbbing. Come here, come here." I touched him carefully like this and then I found out. Dad tells

me that when he was little, a horse kicked him: pa! He's alive by a miracle, he destroyed all this, they sort of fixed him there and sewed him up, but they left his brain throbbing behind his skin, boneless. Any blow, any accident and his brain was there unprotected. This is the hardest bone one has, or one of the hardest, right? The front bone, to protect the brain, because nature is wise. Well, for Cuba I sent I sent him to Cuba, it to Fidel. Oh! there he is, he is already a little horse, they put a prosthesis there to protect him.

Over Around there I got met other children, on a plain in Apure. I stopped to say hello to a lady who was on the side of a road. We came from San Pablo Paeño and I see an already big boy, a playful. There we loaded had some soft drinks with us and I say to him in from the truck car: "Look, guys, you're sweating, do you want a cool drink?" "Yes", and I pass him the can of a soda. When he grabs the can I feel something strange in his hands. "Hey, come here, what do you have in your hands?" His hands were stuck together like frogs, toads, fingers stuck together, both hands, and he I called to his mother: "What happened to this boy?" When he was a baby, she was in the kitchen, the man for out in the fields and three or four boys; there was a candle fire burning in the patio, a piece of some garbage that was being burned. The boy left came crawling. Ay!, he got in, well, and they stayed there sticking his little fingers got stuck together and he screaming; she ran out and her hands were already burned. Off to Cuba I sent him to Cuba! Ah, if they could see him right now holding the ball and everything!

## ***Chávez, send me to Cuba!***

**W**e were in Havanna on a very successful lightning short visit. That visit to La Pradera and having contact for several hours with President Fidel Castro, my friend and brother, with that group of Venezuelans, who have gone there to receive high-quality medical care, and also completely free of charge, and with their families.

We got saw that boy from Elorza; that child was horribly burned, disfigured, and one arm immobilized because he was burned. We found him there in the Estate Zamorano Santa Rita, among the landowner dust, the people, and the horses. He came running with his little arm raised, he couldn't move it. He hugged me with the other one and says: "Chávez, send me to Cuba!" That same day we took him with his family, we brought him in the Camastrón with the security people and we sent him to Havana for treatment. I met him there. Do you know what he did? He hugged me. "Chávez, look!" He waved his arm. "Look, Chávez, look at the arm!" And on his face they already did a first surgery, they go in phases. He can already see his face, and the eyes that were not seen you couldn't see before.

In La Pradera we find met women of all ages, little boys, people with very delicate problems; very young people, military, civilians. The poor never had anyone to care for their pains, their sorrows. Sometimes, diseases that became tragedies without having to be, just because

they were excluded and this is what you, wise oligarchs, do not understand. Some have been there for a year, some were bedridden have left prostrate and are already walking, taking their first steps. Like that other child, who is recovering; he had given him gotten meningitis, and he is alive almost by a miracle.

### ***For the poor, nothing***

**T**his gentleman who underwent surgery the day before yesterday in that field hospital for the Plan Bolívar 2000, was twenty-seven years old with a hernia. He told me: "I felt like I was going to burst inside." He's a blacksmith, he owns a blacksmith's shed and, of course, sick and unemployed. We already made some plans to activate a micro-enterprise there. We are going to support this man to so that he gets out of there healthy, and to work with his wife, his family, his neighbors. But the truth is that he had had a hernia that was growing for twenty-seven years.

Also some old people who could no longer urinate. Imagine the tragedy of a man who reaches sixty or eighty and cannot urinate due to that difficulty, one of them commented to me with a smile, but happy; he even sang some songs. I told him: "You don't know this one." We sang a song there: "I bring dust from the road..." She He

knows it completely. That man is eighty years old and he whispered in my ear like this: "Chavez, I couldn't urinate anymore." And he had a herniated testicle that couldn't even walk anymore, boy. And I ask him: "And how long did you have have you been like this?" "Well, like ten years." Imagine, having spent a lifetime fighting, working and reaching that age to carry such a heavy cross. I want to thank God that allows us to help so many poor and needy people.

And a young man who had a car accident two years ago has been waiting for an operation ever since. It turns out that they had operated on him but he was came out almost the same, because they had to put a prosthesis on him and yesterday they did. A prosthesis that they brought from Barquisimeto and placed it on a young man who told me: "I am leaving here like a horse to continue fighting, working and defending the cause, the Revolution." That is the Bolivar Plan.

Right now a man just came out on the corner when we were coming. He walks with a poporo here, but a big, gigantic poporo. Maria laughs, that's what my grandmother used to say: "Boy, you have a poporo there". It is an inflammation, a bulge. Here on the plain we call it poporo. Well, he comes out to me like this: "Chavez, look how I am." Well, we've got people with poporos, people with no legs, people with no arms, everywhere, sick people. A little while ago a young lady came to me crying, with very

pretty hair. But she covered her face on the side of her because she got burned. You have to operate on her face. She has the right to be happy, to open her hair, to smile and to live fully. They must have had surgery on her by now, plastic surgery. Sure, the poor people can't afford it. Fortunately, those who have money can and do their things, fix their noses, get like that, what do I know. But for the poor people, nothing.

### ***Orfeon Universitario***

I always remember September 3rd, 1976 because I lost several friends, several friends, one of them very dear, a high school classmate, at that beautiful age of fifteen, sixteen. She was Coromoto Linares Pinzón, from the very beautiful city of Barinas, in those years of '69, '70, '71. It was September 3, 1976, the day that Venezuelan Air Force plane crashed in the Azores. There went all our University Choir, with its director and with their voices. There is no September 3 that I don't does not remember that tragedy. We had met weeks before with a group of friends who sang in the Orfeón, with some of them we made political reflections. Coromoto was studying Pharmacy, she was about to graduate, she was from that group, from over there by Cheo Rodríguez. Morela was her older sister, her father

Abraham –the poet Linares–, her mother, there in her house on Avenida Mérida, where we were going to study mathematics, history. Sometimes we woke up studying, especially in July for final exams.

Those were the days of that movie “The Strawberry Statement”. I remember that with Coromoto we once went to see that film at the Verdi cinema. It was one of the first movies with Charles Bronson. We both really liked Charles Bronson’s. “Someone behind the door”, “Visitors at night”. Wow my feeling and my memory from the soul and that of all of us to the voices that did not leave. They stayed singing with us, the Orfeón Universitario (UCV University Choir) and its director, maestro Vinicio Adames.

That September of 1976 I remember that we came very happy from San Cristóbal with Lieutenant Arleo Espinoza, driving a “poisoned” very fast Camaro. We were second lieutenants; we had played baseball in San Cristóbal. The Barinas Battalion won the San Cristóbal baseball championship, out of all the battalions of the Infantry Division. We were coming from there, and I: “Arleo, don’t run so much because it’s raining.” “No, this is a Camaro with wide tires.” We took a curve halfway between San Cristóbal and Barinas, and suddenly we found ourselves in a lagoon. The Camaro? Lie!, what wide tires or what! We met, I remember that Arleo said: “Conchale oh no, again!” “Didn’t I tell you not to run so much, Arleo?” We still came with the baseball uniform of the Cedeño Cazadores Battalion, and the broken radiator.

I will never forget that I stopped on the road and told him: "Stay here, do you have the gun? I'll take mine, I'll go to the battalion to look for the tow truck." It was about an hour from Barinas, so we started to stand in line hitch a ride. A man from Barinas stopped in a small truck; he knew me. "Chavez, what's up?" "Arleo, take care, I'm coming with the crane." The man, the family were talking and he turned on the radio, Radio Barinas: "Last hour Breaking news. A plane fell in the Azores", and they give the list of the dead, Coromoto Linares. "Oh, oh, it can't be, my God!" Among so many pains from a plane crash on Terceira Island in the Azores archipelago, Portugal, the young men and women died. The real causes of the drama were never fully revealed. The governor of the Azores told that the weather was bad and the boys had to make a stopover there. He was an Air Force Hercules. The pilot took headed for the wrong island. He had to land in Santa María, which is the international runway where the "Camastrón" always lands. They went to the other island that is beyond, with a small track landing strip and they couldn't didn't make it. They went against crashed into the darkness, which took them away. A memory, then, for the boys. Long live the Orfeón Universitario!



### ***Why doesn't she show his her face?***

**I** was once on my black donkey: a van I had. It was stolen, and I said, "He They needs it more than I do". That was at the Central University of Venezuela. I think it was the Disip of that time. They were after us, and I was a precandidate. We had left the van parking parked at the UCV. When we returned, they had taken it away.

So in another time I was in that truck one day around the east of Caracas, on a corner in Chuao, where the traffic light is. On the left side of my window I see a luxurious car and a very elegant lady. And there came children asking begging. What a big dilemma, a child next to you, there at your window, and what you want is to tell him something, but there's the queue and the traffic light. So either you get out and grab the child, take him and talk to him, something that sometimes there is no time due to the dynamics of the days, or you give him something. I gave something to the child. I don't like it, but I did it.

I saw the woman in the car next door. Do you know what she did with another child that was there? Since her glass window was made of buttons automatic, because glass goes up quickly and she raised closed the glass window, I'm sure she did not intend to. But she did and then she got so nervous that she put even the child's life in danger.

She grabbed caught his hand with the glass, then she couldn't find didn't know what to do and the boy screaming there. I got off, I made a mess yelled at her for that lady. Her boy was pulling her his hand and that could have at least broken her his little bones. The boy wanted to get his hand out of it and he couldn't, and I yelled at him her: Why can't you face the boy? Why are you going to close the glass so ugly like that? Then she recognized admitted to it, calmed down and left.

### ***The three wise men***

**W**e went to the J. M. De los Ríos hospital in an unforeseen meeting. As soon as we got out of the vehicle, I said to Elías who was with me: "Look, look! What is that?" An immobile promontory and a light green blanket covering it, right on the entire sidewalk in front of the J.M. De los Ríos Children's Hospital. We had to go directly straight to the hospital, but I said: "No, no! Let's see what that is. What people are those there?" His feet were sticking out the promontory. We started calling, "Whoa Hey, who's there?" And someone gets up quickly, sits down, a chubby, a chubby black boy: "We are the children of the street, Chávez." Ah, the children of the street!

Sleeping three sleeping children piled up on the sidewalk on some cardboard boxes, which they open and place as if it were a mattress. The three of them lie down there and wrap themselves in a blanket

borrowed from a house next door. Street children!, a gift from the Three Wise Men. Those boys were like the three Wise Men. Then there is one who did not want to get up and called him his little brother. One will was be about ten years old, the youngest; the fat one will was be about thirteen, and the skinny taller one was be longer than fourteen. There they were, they woke up on the sidewalk. And we talked for a while with them. They are talkative, they did not run away, they sat there: "Chavez, what happened?", "How are you?" "How is Farinas?" They asked me about William Fariñas. Ah, William! It made me very happy when the children asked for you. Because I know that you hang around with them and helping. "Well look, what about your mom and dad?" "No, my mom kicked us out of the house." "Did your mom kick you out of the house?" Who knows what the problem and tragedy will could be? But the truth is that there were those three children.

Now the gift is that last night I was able to convince them to come with me, because there they were, imagine, you!, without bathing, without eating, in on the street. And last night we were there, the vice president, a group of ministers, when Lieutenant Andrade told me: "Here are the boys, you have visitors." The three boys, bathed, came and ate. The fat one man was wearing a bright yellow flannel t-shirt and a grin from ear to ear. But I was struck by the uninhibited way these guys talk to anyone. "Vice President, oh, nice to meet you!", and a kiss. "Look, I present let me introduce the doctor here." Happy, and well: "Chavez, we want to hear music, why don't you put music

here?" And I say: "Where is the music?" "What we are doing here is working, boy, to see how we can fix the country and continue to fix it." A dialogue with them and after a while they left. They're here for a day, for two days, while we locate them. Well, that is the gift that the Three Kings Wise men brought me yesterday, three new friends and they are from Magellan support Magallanes. I told the fat one man, who is the leader, Musulungo, to help me find the others. He told me: "I know where they all are, in Sabana Grande", I don't know where. "And how many are they?" "Uffffl, many." The fat one man is going to help me look for them all and I ask for help from every Venezuelan who knows where there is a child, a group of children. Because they have their places, they go around during the day and go to sleep under a bridge at dawn, in a square. Venezuela in this new stage, in this revolution, we cannot afford to have abandoned children.

### ***A revolution for the children***

**T**his is a revolution of children, they go to school, boy. Finally, my God! I remember a lot of a little boy in Zaraza, a little blond bachaco, just like me when I was a child in the savannah, very playful and he came to wash the car, on one of those tours, about three years ago. I was alone in the desert, with only two or three people, going from town to town. Then he comes running and starts washing the

car. "But, well, who told you to wash the car?" "No, no, I wash it and then you give me what you can." We gave him what do I know, twenty, thirty bolivars and we offered bought him an empanada there.

"Are you at school, boy?" "No, no, I'm not at school." "Because you're not here?" Then he said: "Because my mother has not registered me". But very clever, with very clever eyes, God help him. "And why hasn't your mom signed up you, boy?" "You don't say 'register', you say registered," I told him. "Oh, I was wrong." "Yes, it says registered, not 'registered', don't say that again," I told him. "Ok, I'm not registered." "Because?". "Because my mom doesn't have money and they are charging her twenty thousand bolivars and she doesn't have it, well. I barely just go around here to eat, to bring about four empanadas and eat with my mom". He lived alone with his mother. Hopefully that blond boy today is one of those who has registered. I guess so, it has to be, sure, because he is very smart and he wanted to go to school.

## ***I'm happy trying to help***

I received a little boy last week who was asking me for a ball. He wants to play baseball. This caused me a lot of pain. Of course, I'm not going to say his name, because it's a family drama. His mom and dad separated. The father left for another distant part of the country with a new wife. The little boy's mother left with a new husband elsewhere, and the little boy stayed with his grandmother. And the grandmother lives by renting two rooms in the house that is not hers. She is paying for the rented house, but she rents two rooms, and her grandfather had both legs cut off due to diabetes. The old lady is looking to see how trying to make ends meet.

That little boy is studying, he passed with 19 points for into fifth grade. He wants to play ball, brother, and there they went. They sat in the chairs where the heads of state sit. "Sit there," I told him. "Boy, look at Bolivar." There is the large portrait of Bolívar and the sword of Bolívar, the replica and look, this is the people's palace. The little boy left with his ball, with a little bat, and also, we got him a registration in the minor baseball league that works there in Miraflores. Well, I'm happy trying to help someone, even if it's with a little ball, with a hug. We are going to help the old lady, her husband who is handicapped, she he cannot walk, the wheelchair is useless, she it's old. It's a drama.

## ***A matter of consciousness***

**B**eware with that story about a friend of mine from over there, from the plains of Barinas. I had never seen him again, nor did I know that he had obtained a low-cost tractor on credit; How much did it cost us to bring that tractor from China! Here in twenty years the peasants did not have tractors or machinery.

Then I see him over there in a riot bunch of people, just like here, and I give him a hug: "How are you, how are you doing, how is your wife, your children?" Then he very happy tells me: "Hugo, I thank you." "Because?" "No, I already fixed myself." "What is that, what does it mean?" "Well, the tractor you lent me." I didn't lend it to him, the revolutionary government lent it to him, I didn't even know that they had lent him a tractor on credit. There I stop, grab him by the shoulder and ask him: "What have you done with the tractor? How many hectares have you planted?" "No, I don't plant now, boy. Now what I do is rent the tractor and I have already earned about twenty million bolivars, I bought a new house, now I am rich".

Look at the conscience part, he thinks that's good. I scolded him and told him: "You are a...". Well I'm not going to say the word. "How are you going to do that?" He was exploiting his brothers because he had a tractor. The same thing that the owners of the machine did to him

for a long time, who rented him the tractor and took charged him an eye out of his face, and all the money, all the profit went to the owner of the machine. And those peasants working all their lives and never came out of misery, that is the truth, that is capitalism, that is the perversion of capitalism.

### ***The solidarity***

**I**n each old lady I see I also remember Rosa Inés, may God rest her soul, because it is the same face, it is the same mischievous eyes, the same wrinkles, it is the same long white hair. It is the same kindness. That old woman with a kidney problem: “My urine is blocked,” she told me. Oh, her urine is blocked, my God, they operated on her, she reproduced then got I don’t know what, but then they have her lying on a stretcher that she doesn’t even have a mattress. The stretcher bare, cold that, the poor old lady.

So she is on her side because she cannot lie on her front, on her side with a catheter and a bag, so that she can drain. Imagine that you want to urinate and cannot. Sometimes you go running around to see where you urinate, because you can’t stand it. Imagine that being every day. What suffering for an old lady! So there they have her on



her side and with her head bent because there isn't a pillow, there isn't a blessed pillow.

Now, I ask the doctors, ok, the hospital doesn't have pillows. But isn't there a neighbor around the corner who can lend a pillow at this hour? It is assumed that at this time everyone is working, people are not sleeping. Not everyone can lie with a pillow. Go find a pillow. A pillow appeared turned up after five minutes, or after three minutes. And we put his gave her the pillow. If they you had seen how her face changed when we put her pillow on it. Those are the things, those are the details that make great towns. Solidarity, love, whoever it is.

### ***You're right***

Once in this same room I met with a group of Cuban doctors. We have to support them in some things, because I don't like that they are sleeping over there in those situations that I saw. They brought me some photos, and I sent a team to inspect. Well, the house of the poor, then.

Then a man about forty years old stood up and told me: "President, don't worry. I come from Africa, where we used to sleep in the jungle, sometimes on the ground. The situation there is twenty times more

serious than the poverty you have here". And that doctor gave me a class because he told me: "President, locate imagine yourself in one of these neighborhoods. Suppose you arrived, a doctor, and the next day, a bed arrived with a new mattress and people are sleeping on the old mattress. No, we have to sleep like them, there can be no privileges". And I told him: "You are right, forgive me for my audacity. You are right, professor of truth."

### **Alí Primera**

**W**e wrote a few verses to Alí Primera. Those were the days of the five hundred years of the "Discovery of the Americas", that's how they called, wasn't it? In October of 92'. Then I say here:

*500 years of marching aimlessly with ghost ships of windless  
sails with echoless screams under the stones of all the rivers  
without channels.*

*Five centuries of indigenous outlaws behind the mountains  
beyond the roads, in landless places*

*in submerged mountains of faceless gods with rocky eyes and  
invisible smiles.*

*Of children without a world, like Santos Luzardo the Cuiba,  
the one from Capanaparo who crosses my dreams.*

*His earthen face fell on Catire, my son, and his dull eyes look at me*

*from the bars, from the sheets of Carabali and he shouts his  
absence to me with torches that light the water of the Caño  
Caribe Cuiba de Apure. I will return with 500 years on my back.*

### **Arturo Usalar Pietri**

**L**ife, someone said, is like a play. I remember a lot the writer Arturo Usalar Pietri. The time I visited him at his house, I met him and greeted him. In those days he had withdrawn retired from a column that he had in the newspaper El Nacional, and I asked him: "Doctor, why did you withdraw retire?" "Look, before they throw me out," he told me something like that, "because life is like a play, and I retired on time." "There are two very important moments for an actor in a play. How do you enter the play, the moment the actor enters the play? How does he get in? And the moment when the actor leaves the play". So he told me: "I left. You entered.

Go see how you're going to get out of this play."

## ***“El Gabo”***

I was with Gabriel García Márquez from very early this morning, until late. this morning. He has given me this book, *Living to tell it* “Vivir para contarla”, a tremendous gift. Here he gathers a whole life, from his childhood. He says that when he was a child he was already a storyteller, he invented things and earned fame in his family as a fortune teller. It is magical realism at its finest. There is nothing like reading to get into the world of the real and also of the magical, of the wonderful and above all novels like this one, from a man who is already a legend, Nobel Prize for Literature and to our pride, Latin American, Colombian and, furthermore, a great Bolivarian. What a great novel, “The general in his labyrinth”. He says that his grandfather was a colonel and from there maybe that novel, The colonel has no one to write to him.” “Bolívar is around here”, the grandfather told the boy García Márquez one day, when he was pasting the portrait of the Liberator. “This is the greatest man ever born in history.” Then the boy was thoughtful and asked him, remembering something his grandmother had told him: “Is Simón Bolívar greater than Jesus Christ?” The inquisitive boy put his grandfather in trouble, who replied: “One thing has nothing to do with the other.” And the boy was left with the fact that those two men were the greatest in history.

I will never forget when I met him in Havana with Fidel, in January 1999. He had to go to Barranquilla and he told me: “Okay, give me

the tail a lift, well then, I'm leaving tomorrow." We were a group there and "El Gabo" wanted to talk to me, ask me some questions. But as always, Fidel did not give us time. I think it was Fidel himself who proposed: "Go on the plane, talking." And so we did, we came from Havana to Caracas, talking for about three hours. I remember that at some point he wanted to drink some liquor and we told him: "No, you don't drink there's no drinking alcohol liquor on this plane. Then a very spontaneous exclamation, very Latin. "I have been on I don't know how many presidential planes and I am going to write this: "First presidential plane where there is no whiskey". And he wrote it. "No, what we have is guava juice." We drank about five guava juices between Havana and Caracas.

From here my memory, the admiration of this people for Gabriel García Márquez, his "One Hundred Years of Solitude", his Labyrinth, his General and his Colonel, his Macondo and his yellow butterflies and now "Living to tell it", wonderful novel, wonderful human being the Gabo, may God take care of him forever.

### ***Jacques Chirac***

**I** remember very much a man who is from the French right, my friend Jacques Chirac. Not long ago our friend, Dominique de Villepin, also came by, he was Chirac's minister. We were talking for several

hours and he reminded her him: "Dominique, you don't remember the last visit I made to Chirac". Chirac is a good conversationalist and a very effusive man. We were at lunch and I was with some maps that I always carry, explaining ideas of Venezuela for the future: the railway and the Orinoco belt, petrochemicals, agriculture and rivers, the Orinoco. All that. Suddenly Chirac stands up and grabs the glass of wine and says: "Here's to Venezuela, which will be a world power!" I get up and humbly reply: "Well, I toast, President, but no, we will not be a power, we will be a developed country." And Chirac replied: "Don't put limits on your dreams!"

### ***Go plant potatoes!"***

**I**recently fired a cannon into an office and no one was left. "Go plant potatoes!" I told them. "Go plant corn there on the Orinoco coast! But here you are useless for this." I told all of them, like five officials who had been there for twenty years and did not want to process the papers documents, because they were leaving at three in the afternoon. And I told him: "Give me the paper here that you have there on the table. Are you going to leave it there?" "Yes, it just arrived." "But don't you see that this is urgent? Look, a girl who has to be operated on". I myself began to process the case: "Are you going to go home leaving this pending?" "Who is going to do it, if it is a girl who is seriously ill, she has to be operated on and they need money?"

## ***The queen***

Once, at a summit in Central America, a Spanish president asked Fidel about democracy, when there will be elections in Cuba. Fidel responds: "In Cuba there could be elections when you elect the king." And the king is the head of state in Spain, and he is my friend, Don Juan Carlos de Borbón y Castilla. Am I going to criticize the figure of the monarchy in Spain? That corresponds to the Spanish men and women, it is their problem. There they have a debate, because there are many people who do not agree with the monarchy. In France, since a king's head was cut off, the monarchy is over. They did it his way, they cut off his head on the guillotine. And that was the reason why all the European monarchies went against France, they invaded France. Of course, the fear of the French Revolution. And they managed to stop her it , unfortunately. That was one of the reasons why Francisco de Miranda, who was far away, came to France. He put himself under the command of Bonaparte and rode a horse as Marshal of France, to defend the French Revolution.

In England the same. There is a queen there, Queen Elizabeth. I know her. I can't say that she is my friend, because I only went to visit her once. She a very respectable lady. I remember when she as I was getting me out of the car, I saw a little coin on the ground and I picked it up. It was a coin with her face on it. A coincidence, it

was on the ground, on the street, and I put it in my pocket. When I see myself with her, I give it to her. "I got this. They say it's good luck. I leave it to you here ". Now, do you know who is the head of state in most of the countries neighboring Venezuela, in the Eastern Caribbean? The Queen of England! I have been to those countries. There is a Prime Minister who is elected by those peoples. He has no time limit on re-election, the head of state is there in London. With what morality are they going to criticize us and why don't they criticize that? No one has been asked in those countries if they recognize the Queen of England as head of state. Why don't they hold a referendum?

### ***I will take some clothes***

**I** am going to tell you something so that you can see how far the world has come. Once they came to ask me, a high political leader of a certain country, that the commissions that are paid and collected in the world, for sales of anything, that "that is normal." I told him: "Don't talk to me about that topic, I don't even want to talk about that topic." It is the decomposition, the ambition. I ask all those who may be listening to me: let's look at Jesus on the donkey, let's ride our donkey with humility. I swear once again, before God and before all of you: if I get out of this commitment alive, I am not going to have my own home, and I am going to die without having my own



home. I don't mind. I don't want my own house. I will not have my own car. The gifts they have given me, some very valuable. A gift, for example, that our brother – who died under strange circumstances, by the way – Yasser Arafat once sent me. Once some people from Palestine came to me with an invitation to spend Christmas there, in Jerusalem. I could not go. It was 2001 when that eggplant of madness caught fire was happening here, of violence injected by the media. Yasser Arafat once sent me a gift, the Venezuelan shield made with jewels, pearls. Well, that's worth millions of dollars, because the colors yellow, blue and red are also natural colors. What is that shell called? Mother of pearl? Also, with the explanation that Arafat sent, where they brought the precious stones from, from the sea from I don't know where. A beautiful thing. And they have given me I don't know how many watches, that I even feel ashamed to wear them. I once put one on, I don't know why I grabbed it. They peeled tore me up!, over there, in a column: "Look at Chávez, the watches." None of it is mine, none of this is mine! Well, at least I'll take some clothes. I humbly invite all of us who are governing to do the same.

## ***The Vargas tragedy***

I had such a beautiful feeling when the first Navy ship was finally able to reach the shore of the beach at Caraballeda. Because the beach was blocked, about a hundred or two hundred meters of beach were blocked by logs and stones. The boats could not reach the shore, only by helicopter one could come and go, by land impossible. We wanted to put these boats, of which three thousand people can fit, to dock them as close to the beach as possible. Because these boats, since they are flat on the bottom, reach ten meters, as close as possible, and with some ropes people enter the boat. They are gigantic ships, for transporting troops, for marines more than anything else.

Finally we managed to get the first boat in, the waves receded a bit and the boat ran aground near the beach. Two ropes and the marines to the beach. We landed instantly, when I was informed by radio that the ship was ready. It was impressive to see where so many people from Los Corales and Caraballeda came from. They had told me that no one was left alive there and it turns out that no, boy. From Under the stones, behind the bushes, under the roofs of the houses, from tunnels that were between the gigantic stones, children, women, men, old people came out.

Do you know what I saw there? Life. I said: "There is life for all this all around. My God, how did these people survive? It was thought that this was a kind of graveyard. And not only that people came out, making a very long queue of about three thousand, four thousand people who were grabbing each other. Not only that, but to see the eyes of those people, to see their life, to see their pain, but on the other hand, their optimism, their moral integrity. "Here we are!" they said, "and with my old man and with my grandmother", and some with their little dog, lining up for life. And that ship with its big doors open and headed for life.

### ***National network transmission***

**T**omorrow nobody saves will keep us from the national network transmission at half past seven. They will be safe from a flu, those who don't like it, for I know everybody likes it. They say that the women are mad angry. Lies. Soon Not long ago three boys with their girlfriends in Caracas were talking on a corner. I was driving, and I stand on the traffic light. "Chávez, when do we have network transmission?" I thought they were going to criticise me, and I said, "Do you like it?" "Yes, man. It's very good, for because you're teaching us. Don't let them. Do them whenever you want, we the young

people, want to learn". It's true, for they listen and take notes. We were recently looking at the moon and Rosinés asked me: "How many kilometers is the moon away, dad?" She asks me so many things, like every child. Finally she concluded: "The universe is big, how was the universe born?" We were sitting in a yard; I tell her several ideas. One of them is that God created it. "Is that true?". I said, "Yeah, I think so, but no one saw him." "But what work would it cost take for God to make all those bushes and all this?" "Yes, he worked a lot." And do you know what she told me? Basically a claim. "Yes, but God rested on Sunday, right? Why don't you not even rest on Sundays? Because you have Aló Presidente". Ha ha ha, that was Rosinés' response.

We must say to the country, "Hello, President" will not rest. So tomorrow, those who criticize me will be saved from a shock, but not from the national network transmission. With all the irons Full power!.

### ***Not lazy***

A lazy revolutionary, no. A lazy worker, no. There is a joke about two friends who were each in a hammock there, lazying around two in the afternoon. The puppy sleepest hour. And the women brought them coffee and they had to give feed them coffee in his their mouth. They blew air into it and they didn't move, nothing! They were so lazy they didn't even talk about laziness speak. Suddenly they say to each other one says to the other: "Brother, what will could be good for the a snake bite?" So, the other one says to him: "What was it, buddy? Did a snake bite you?" And the other one, about the lazy mother, says: "No dude, but here comes one and it's going to sting me."

### ***Those who have ears...***

That lady from the Washington Post was asking, ¿What its Saddam Hussein?, ¿what do you do? ¿Are you friend of Fidel Castro, President? Y yo And I: yes, yes, yes, he is my friend. Fidel Castro is my friend. I was driving, and the journalist asks all kind of questions. Those questions they always ask. "In my country, they say that you finished the democracy" Yes! "Do they say that

in your country?" "Who says that?" "They say that. Versions". We were arriving to Macuro. A boy on the road and I stop. "Hi, son!" "He comes and waves. We ask him some things and I say to her, "If you have eyes: See, If you have ears: listen". Entering to Macuro a group of people appear show up. Among them, a great ball player in Macuro. The Macuro baseball field carries his name. Besides, they are relatives of the governor of Cojedes, commander Johnny Yáñez Rangel. They sent their regards, Johnny, your aunt from Macuro. There in the whole entrance was the family. This gentleman and the journalist approached asking about him and why democracy here, I don't know what else, I don't know what. I tell him: "Come closer gentleman. Hello, how is he you? I ask him: "Friend, did you vote for the Constituent Assembly, that referendum?" "Of course, yes, here we all vote YES." "And why?" I ask him. A question that crossed the immense space of truth and an answer that came from the spontaneity of the people. I told the journalist: "Don't think that this has been prepared." No, no, that's a spontaneous village thing. We are arriving, a man comes over to say hello and I take the opportunity to convey to the people the question that she is asking me, and I told the man. "Why did you vote?", "And why did you all vote in favor of the Constituent Assembly?" And he responds cortico really short and fast, as is the town norm; the people are quick and wise. "Because what was here was crap." I only added: "Take note if you want, lady journalist."

## ***Feminist***

**D**o you know that story about María León? “President, we the women want to parade in Campo de Carabobo.” And I root much for women, a feminist, I answer: “But, how can I tell you no?” And we took some people there: the women’s parade. The parade begins, and groups of women pass by, what a discipline! They would stand there, and then the people: “But keep going, walk.” What are they going to be walking? They were throwing flowers! Each group stood for a while in front of the stands, they came from blocks. One by one, that endless parade passed by. It had been six hours now. So, I look over there and I see groups. What was going on? They turned around again! They turned around there, it was an endless cycle. I said: “Look, Maria, I’ll be a feminist, but no, we have to end this.” Finally we reached an agreement, which was not easy. We reached an agreement that where they were passing and they were standing in front, that I would speak to them. Ah!, well, ready, problem fixed the. But new ones were arriving, those who were in the public crowd got into the parade. Sometimes they almost dragged their partner. Those women are wonderful.

## ***Presidential rush***

**Y**ou don't remember the last blast in that Caracas-Tuy railroad tunnel. They took me to give the last blow with a machine to knock down a wall. "You knock that down in five minutes." You laugh, huh? Do you know the worst, what no one knew at the time? Now I say it and I laugh. I was having colic, compadre. I mean, he I had diarrhea. I am a human being like any of you. Sometimes people forget about that. I get on the machine and break out in a cold sweat, and go, pum, pum, pum with the machine. I didn't give him it where he I had to was. And go on, go on and I sweating and pressing, pressing down here, and I would turn in the chair over there, over here and that sweat that ran off me, my God, on the National Radio and Television Network transmission broadcast!

Someone thought of sending a chain starting a National Radio and TV Broadcast , without me knowing. Imagine a radio channel where what you hear is a machine: boom, boom, hitting a rock wall and someone trying to narrate. And me giving birth, because I was really giving birth. Sweat clouded my eyes, I couldn't see with all the duster the one that covered everything. I couldn't knock down the stone, until I finally said to the man with the machine: "Compadre, knock it over, I'm going to spend here all day." And he took her it down in five minutes!



I walk out tight and pass through the hole that was opened in the wall that still divided the tunnel. Imagine yourself, one with those physiological characteristics, in the middle of a tunnel and on the National Radio and Television Network Broadcast. Poor Chavez! That only happens to Chávez! I spend all that dust to see what I get, even if it was a bush nearby. And what I get in front is like a hundred journalists focusing on me, asking me. With that helmet on, I said to myself: "My God, swallow me up, take me out of here, my God!" And I told them: "Gentlemen, I have concluded, please, I am in a hurry, make way."

The only thing there was an internal road in the tunnel, there weren't even the rails and the only thing I see is a bus. I get on the bus. I left security behind, what security or what a dick nothing. I tell the driver: "Compadre, please start the engine and let's go start." And the surprised man. "Go ahead, or I'll leave you here..." I'm not going to tell you what I told you him. And the cameras behind me! Of course, the innocent cameramen, they did not know the drama that I was experiencing. They thought they were eating it doing their best job. The Minister of Infrastructure, General Hurtado, came after me and yelled at me: Wait for me, President! And I told him: "I'm not waiting for anyone, compadre. Leave I'm leaving!" The driver started the bus under my threat and we started off alone through the tunnel. A security guy, running hard, managed to get hooked grab hold and got on. And I: "Hit it hard, compadre!" Because where

do I stop in a tunnel to do what I had to do? And it rolls and rolls, ra, ra, ra. It was several kilometers! And finally I see the exit of the tunnel there. "My God, I was saved!" When the bus finally came out of the tunnel, I say: "Stop here!" and get off in a hurry. "Thanks, mate, hasta la vista!" I yelled at him. And then about forty workers came who were there waiting for me and shouting: "Chávez, Chávez, Chávez!" "My God, have mercy on me!" I greeted them. I don't know where I got the strength to endure that. And I tell them: "Compadre, where is there a bathroom over there around here?" "Look, there's a trailer for the engineers there." You had to go up, besides, it was a climb up a small road. "I'm coming I'll be back, guys, I'm going to the bathroom for a second, wait for me here." The cameras had already been left behind, I saved myself from them.

When I get to the trailer, mate, four of those big, gigantic dogs come out, bulldogs, one of those things. Well. It is that the dogs do not know Chávez and less in a situation like that. Finally they called them, I had to stop and wait for them to be tied up. And I arrived, ahh, salvation! Later I said to myself: "This only happens to Chávez, to no one else in this world!"

### ***Not even with a wig***

Once, we were with Freddy Bernal. We were going to a meeting for Falcón and I was wearing a wig. Then the boy who brought the goat soup and some arepas stared at me. It was

late at night; He looked at me and I, you know, didn't even speak, eating there with my head down. When we went to pay, he couldn't take it anymore and said: "Hey, you look like Chávez, but with long hair." "No, boy, you are crazy, what Chávez or what Chávez". The wig was very bad, Bernal bought it for me, but one of those cheap bugs things. We didn't even have a good wig, besides, he had a lock around here like green, like he waperó a 90's dancer . A green lock that I covered there, and I even colored it with a marker, but nothing, waperó it stayed. So, it was already early in the morning, we were coming from Maracaibo, leaving Carora. I go to the bathroom and when I'm in the bathroom, standing where you go, two drunk guys come, or half drunk, you know. They stare at me, and I'm uncomfortable, very uncomfortable because I was in the bathroom, well, peeing. One says to the other: "A que es I bet that's Chávez!" They had bet a case of beer that it was Chávez. What a tremendous wig!, right? They won the case of beer and I had to have a drink there with them, to celebrate and, of course, I took off my wig. "Take that off Chávez, what are you going to do like that? Everyone knows you."

Another day I was driving with a wig and a hat through I don't know where, I think it was Táchira, and a National Guard checkpoint appeared on the road. "Oh, my God, the Guard! I hope they don't ask me for an ID." So, I lower the glass and the guard tells me: "My Commander, be careful with the cart that belongs to

the DIM, which is they are following you” What a tremendous wig! Everybody knew it was me wearing a wig. I dress up sometimes to go to one of those places like that, flush!, punctual. Another time it was a meeting to surprise one of the most loved beings in my life. I found out that they were meeting in a place and I said to them: “Come on, wig.” Then someone brought me a wig, but like this open over here, right?, like an indian’s. And then I arrived and, when I got off the car to go into the site, someone said: “There goes Evo.” I laughed a lot because I said: “Things are worse, because they are not going to say ‘there goes Chávez, grab him!’ No! They’re going to say: ‘There goes Evo, grab him!’” I looked a lot like Evo, really, with a wig split open down here.

Oh Lord! When I got out of jail, I got divorced. I had a girlfriend and one night we went to the “Hawaii Kai”. It has some little cabins over there, and I went into the little cabins, I wasn’t dressed up at all, I was there very tight. We started talking and they were playing music, some bagpipes Gaitas (traditional Venezuelan christmas music), it was like December. The innkeeper waiter comes, there’s a bell, I told him: “Buddy, don’t go saying I’m here, please, I beg you. I just want to be here for a while.” “No, Commander, don’t worry.” No! After a while the entertainer was there: “We greet and welcome, the commander...”. I had to leave, because photos and I don’t know what else. “Thanks thanks”. Well, but from time to time I still dress up and even as Evo.

## **The Garota**

Once there was a summit of presidents in Europe, and we were the presidents lined up for the photo. Suddenly, from among the journalists who are with the cameras and stuff, a stunning almost naked woman comes out, what do they call it?, a girl garota. I laughed a lot and applauded. Others stood there as if paralyzed. I came and said something that some people there did not like: "The best thing about this summit has been this." The only one who applauded was me, "let's applaud, look how beautiful", huh? "The only good thing was the garota, which was brought by Néstor Kirchner," I said later, joking. Because she came out with a banner, I'm not going to address the issue of the banner. Nobody saw the banner.

Well, once they took me to a neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro. I told Lula: "Look, this is an attack." Nelson Merentes was a minister, he was about to have a heart attack. I controlled myself there more or less. It was a samba school and some girls came out to dance. But too close, compadre, too close. I got like this, scratched myself here, grabbed me there. But she was there at half a meter and that movement, a magical thing. She was a goddess and she also wanted me to dance. "No, no, what am I going to dance with you, keep shaking the world".

## **Mocking**

**D**o you know what happened to me as President? They kidnap here, on the plains, a lady of a certain age. I'm not going to say a name because you have to respect her, but the joke is good and it was true. A lady about sixty years old or thereabouts around there, and then some acquaintances call me. I am interested as in any case, whether or not I know the person. But a lady, already of that age, one worries; she's not that it turns out that she's sick, poor thing, where will are they keeping have her? Some bandits, then. After three days we rescued her and, according to what they told me, she did not pay anything; they were asking for money. I call the lady's husband to congratulate him and it turns out that he is angry with me: "I will never forgive you this one." And I say: "But what, it's not my fault that they kidnapped her." "No, but yes that you are responsible that they rescued her so quickly." Look! It happened to me is the pure truth. Of course! I think he told me he was mocking. Mocking.

## **The happiness**

**Y**our love jo jo jo gave me the happiness ja ja ja. Who sang that song? Today I sing again because of love, everything thanks to looove... who sang that song? How can't you

remember, Yadira, you're not either from the 80's. How about the "Carnations of Galipán": *With the carnations of Galipán, with the carnations of Galipán. There they go. It's the carnations of Galipán.* I lived that. It's the typical joy of our people. Far with those bitters who have always a bad face saying "Chávez out!" It's so sad to be bitter. It causes an ulcer, and takes away your sleep. I guess bitterness even causes impotence. Yes, that's written, ask the doctors. Ask Bianco, he has made studies on that, and he has every Saturday night a television show, "Con sexo". We must watch it and take notes. *Your love jo jo jo gave me the happiness ja ja ja.*

Sometimes there are programs at romantic music radio stations, and they say, with background music, "Coming up, enjoy one of those songs that grab your heart" Then you listen, *"I'm at the corner of a canteen. Listening to the song that I requested. They are serving me my tequila right now and there goes my thought towards you. Or that other one that says, all romantic: It seems like yesterday, you were my girlfriend and I had you on my arm. It seems like yesterday, when I was asleep I dreamed in your lap. I am so happy, because you are still the fragrance of my life. In our love there has never been a distance, may God save you for making me so happy. Well, they play those songs and between one and the other they add the little poison. It's blue, love is blue. Girls don't know about that, it's an old thing, ha ha ha. Oh my God. I am so happy, because you are still*

*the fragrance of my life. In our love there has never been a distance, may God save you for making me so happy.*

*I really like that other one, "Footlights"; It is from another time, the last century. You don't know anything about that because you weren't born: Between footlights I adored you, between footlights I loved you. Although I know you will never return, between the footlights I loved you, between the footlights I adored you. The happiness that you gave to my life is gone, it will not come back, never again, I know very well. And although I know that you will never return, I will wait for you in that place... Yes to love! It's more than love, frenzy.*

## **Eternal hits**

That's where I found my daughter María, a few days ago, dying of laughter, but dying of laughter. "María, how much do you laugh why are you laughing that much?" "Dad, I'm listening to the last record recorded by you." "As What do you mean?" "Yes, Chávez's yesterday hits." Teresita Maniglia has put together a record an album, okay, like I sing of me singing in these programs. I sing very badly, but believe me I do sing all the same. It doesn't matter. Then Teresita recorded and some rancheras. oh! that I sang I don't know what else, so I sing a ranchera, "México lindo y querido", and she puts background music on it.



Suddenly I'm singing, but lousy, and also, for more aggression she gives continuity to the song in the voice of Vicente Fernández. Imagine! The contrast between Vicente Fernández and the disaster of my songs. Well, and the llanera songs and I don't know what else. That record is out there, "Eternal hits", Hugo Chávez. And Maria laughed out.

### **Constanza & Oumarú**

Once upon a time there was a girl named Constanza. Constanza is ten years old and lives in a beautiful neighborhood in Caracas. In the morning she gets under the shower and in fifteen minutes she uses up a hundred liters of water. What did you think of her? She lives with dad, mom and her two little brothers of hers. Her mother uses eighty liters of water a day for her housework, and five hundred liters a week for washing clothes. Every day Constanza and her family use about two thousand liters of drinking water; in a month sixty thousand liters; in a year more than eight hundred thousand liters. Colorín, colorá'o, the story is over. That's how the story goes.

This is another story. Oumarú is a ten-year-old boy who lives on a continent called Africa. In the village where Oumarú lives

there is no river. Very early, he and his mother leave the house with some containers that they carry on their heads. They begin a seven kilometer walk that leads them to a stream. The round trip takes about four hours. Oumarú and his mother bathe in the stream and his mother takes the opportunity to wash clothes. On their way back, under the hot sun, they bring about six liters of undrinkable water. With that small amount of liquid they cook food, quench their thirst and do housework. They walk about 1,300 hours a year to look for water; in a year they consume about two thousand liters. On the other side of the world, a girl named Constanza and her family spend that same amount in a single day. What do you think?

And they lived happily ever after.

Well this has to do a bit with the realities of the world. I end the comment by saying the following: one who has had the opportunity to visit countries like Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Libya, for them a little bit of water is worth gold. We were favored, by the hand of God and our nature, that we have that great Orinoco, Apure, Arauca, Capanaparo, Caroní, Caura, and great lakes. We are one of the countries with the most fresh water in the world. Let's not waste it. Let's take care of it and take care of the balance in the world.

***The Meme has come***

I don't know how far my state of health would have gone that early morning when a worm bit me. I didn't even listen to him pay attention to it, rather I pushed him it away. I put the little worm over there, poor worm, it seems that it was cold and I put my hand to on one side, to a stone and, wow! I barely felt like a mosquito bite. About ten minutes pass and I begin to feel very intense pain. Few pains in my life I have felt like this. And he left paralyzing his hand the hand was getting paralyzed. I was still moving it, it was hitting my hand, when I feel that then the poison begins to rise here, it reaches me here, that's where I worry. I feel my arm go numb, it reaches my shoulder and begins to spread like that to my chest, luckily it was on the right side. Since I was a nurse at the Military Academy, one was given a one-month course to go on a maneuver. I was carrying a briefcase, with a red cross. Whoever got in my way I injected him or sent him a black pill that they gave me there. That works for everything. So I have notions of first aid that one is given in the Army. When I felt that this began to happen here, I said: "Oh, mom motherr!" If my airway grabs me gets compromised and one gets stuck here, there may be a respiratory arrest and the heart is closer to here.

That's when I called the guys who were on duty and Barrio

Adentro appeared showed up, the “Meme” appeared came along. He came running there. I didn’t know him, I was writhing in pain, holding on here, searching for ice. It was already about two in the morning, and Meme arrived. “And what happened to you, President?” “And who are you?” “The Meme is me”, he told me. “And where do you come from, Meme?” “No, I am a Cuban doctor.” “Boy, how did they get you?” “Well, I was there at a meeting, I’m with a group there at the hotel.” And there Morales arrived and brought it to him. I immediately told him: “Look, a worm bit me”, and this happened, ta, ta. He injected me, applied ice, first aid, well, and the advance was stopped. I don’t know how far that could have gone.

### ***With wart and everything***

**I**t’s a great movie, I recommend it. I watch a lot of movies at dawn, I went to bed around three but at six I was already awake. Now, notice, what happened? The boy even admires the thief. The game is to rob banks and while you kill more and more blood there is, the more points you earn, you are champion. The more cops you kill and the more money you steal. Tell me, if those are not the video games that children play! Yes, I got my

son several years ago —he was still small— one day playing. I sat down to watch and told him: “Hey, but what a little game.” He even called me one day and said, “Dad, I got one where you’re the target.” They made a game where Chávez was the target! Chávez had to be killed, wart and everything!

### ***I shake them***

*M*y joy is that people don’t call me President, but Chávez. And suddenly they say to me: “Hey, Chávez”. That’s what they call me and I answer just the same, just as one would shout on the plain from one corner to another. Suddenly, there is a bus full of soldiers and you know that the regulation says that the soldier sees the President Stop!, and front. If the President comes walking, face the President and salute at once, firm as a spike. Now the soldiers do the same as the people: “Hey, Chávez!” and they take the helmet out of the bus window like this and I, happy, shout to them: “Hey!”, and I say: “Well, okay, you are very stiff”. “What happened?” and I get into them and shake them.

## **Weak**

**I**welcome the departing presidential candidates. I hope they don't end up weak, and running like a rooster my dad had. That was in Santa Rosa de Barinas, in a patronal party town fair. My dad borrowed a rooster, it was not his. My dad never had rosters. Then he comes with the rooster and I was illusioned. My dad, "that rooster doesn't lose, this is a good rooster, my friend Julián lent it to me", I don't know what else. There was a rooster from apure that looked Good. Then I bet the bolivita a single bolivar, the only bolivar I had in the party to buy ice cream and candies, and cotton sugar, and to ride on the moon wheel and those things. Just when my dad kneels and puts the rooster on the floor, I thought it would jump over him. The Our rooster jumped and left the rooster lane, man! We had to chase him on the streets. "Stop, rooster!", the rooster crossed the corner. I hope these candidates don't do like that rooster of my father. We are going to the end, to the day, and that you do everything normal.

## ***They will never return***

**I**magine those people return to rule the country, that would be the biggest chaos. Therefore, they Will never return. Rintintin will return. Superman Will return. Tarzan Will return and even Kaliman might return. But those people Will never return. No!

8

*Fidel*



## ***A bearded man***

**I** was a child with eight years old, maybe less, when I began to hear about a certain Fidel, a bearded man. Because at home, you know, in a very small town, my father, a teacher, always very dynamic. He was a sportsman, he played softball, he played bolas criollas. He was a party boy, he had many friends, and the house was full of friends. There was a guy named John with a guitar, and they would serenade each other; my mother sometimes got mad, didn't she? And my grandmother's house, which was there, I lived in my grandmother's house, half a block away. One was there, like two houses in one.

A lot of people came, my uncle Marcos Chavez, who was an adeco and worked in Barinas, he was a romulero (supporter of Rómulo Betancourt), he still is. He told me in these last years: "Hugo, I am still a Romulero, but now I am with you". Romulero with Chávez. And my father was with the group that left Acción Democrática and formed the MEP, the People's Electoral Movement. And some of my dad's friends went to the guerrilla. I remember that the town doctor was taken prisoner and then he went to the guerrilla. My brother Nacho's godfather went to the guerrillas. My father spent his time partying in Francisco Orta's medicine cabinet, in Los Rastrojos, and I liked to go with him.



I would stay outside playing metras, but I would listen to what the Orta family was talking about, about a guerrilla group. They talked about a certain Fidel, and I saw Fidel's picture. Imagine the years that have passed! I remember, Fidel, your entrance in Sabaneta and when I saw you entering -you crouched down- to the little house where we grew up. How many years later? Half a century later. And I said: "Incredible, but it's true, that's Fidel Castro". When I was a little boy in this same house I heard about a certain Fidel and there goes Fidel.

### ***They didn't want me to see fidel***

One early morning, walking around Miraflores, hanging around, I get to the telephone exchange and a guy is half asleep: "Hey, what happened? What calls are there? And I start reading the call book. I get about three or four calls from Fidel Castro. Fidel calling, he wanted to talk to me. When I took over the government, on February 2, Fidel was here until February 4. I received in that office I don't know how many presidents. The Colombian came, the Prince of Spain came, the President of Guyana came, Menem came, almost Carlos Andres Perez came. Well, they told me: "This is what is on the agenda", "this is what was coordinated". I was naïve, I was a newcomer: "Ah, well, all right, let it happen". "That there came Menem". "Ah, well, let it

happen”. And I found out, after the parade we had on February 4, when we handed over the banner to the parachute battalions, that the Briceño battalion had been eliminated. I arrive here and turn on the TV after the parade, and I see that there is someone, a Foreign Ministry official -not even the Chancellor- saying goodbye to Fidel at the airport. Fidel in his uniform. I see him getting on the plane, and I say: “My God, Fidel was here all these days and I have not received him”. They simply did not want me to receive Fidel. It was Menem, he was the Secretary of the OAS, It was the establishment, only that I - a veguero at last - began to realize it, and I also began to play my little game. Until that little game led to the inevitable confrontation, the April 11 coup and the revolutionary counter-coup.

### ***The only devil***

**I**n truth, when it came to the meetings of the presidents, I often felt like a loner, until my companions began to arrive. I remember the first Summit of Presidents in which I coincided with Fidel. It was in 1999 and after an intervention I made, Fidel Castro sent me a little handmade paper, telling me: “Chávez, I feel that I am no longer the only devil in these summits”. We were both kind of out of tune.

## ***This doesn't end today***

I do not know how Fidel managed to break the communication siege when the coup took place on April 11. They had knocked down almost all the telephone lines in the Palace, it was almost impossible to call anyone on the phone. But Fidel, a guerrilla at last, managed to connect and we were able to talk on April 11, before I went to Fort Tiuna and was taken prisoner. I remember Fidel's words. He did not mention Allende in his words, but I knew he was talking about Allende because Fidel lived the drama of Chile and the coup, and the pain of knowing and seeing Allende dead, and the Chilean people persecuted and dominated, the Chilean Revolution. Then he told me: "Chávez, do not immolate yourself". I remember clearly that he told me: "One last thing, Chavez, because there is not much time to continue talking". Because you know that when he and I talk, sometimes we talk for hours and hours.

One day, in Havana, we talked since three in the morning - don't think I'm exaggerating -; a small table, a Cuban wine, two little chairs and we sat alone. And the comrades over there, some sleep for a while, get up again, go, walk, bring us papers. I landed at about two o'clock, he, as always, was waiting for me at the airport, we went to the Palace and we started at three o'clock. You know

at what time we stopped, but without interruptions, we did not stop for anything, at twelve noon we stopped. I remember that he put his hand here and told me: "Chávez, we will die of anything, except prostate". Because we did not stand up even though we drank several glasses of that good Cuban wine.

Then that night of April 11th, when the coup took place, he told me: "There is not much time to talk, Chávez". He asked me several questions, "How many troops do you have", "how many weapons do you have", "where is this, where is that", well, and he was thinking there with his experience. And he told me: "One last thing I am going to tell you, do not immolate yourself, this doesn't end today". He was right.

### ***Until he wakes up***

Sometimes you can keep quiet, but there are times when you can't take it anymore. By chance, Fidel found out that I was in a "chinchorro", "echa'o", as we say in the plains. I think he was also a little sick in his soul, after the coup and all those long days of great tension. There was a moment when I got sick, bang, one day, two days, three days, and Fidel sent one of his doctors who had been with him for many years, and another group of doctors.

He told them: "You are not coming from there until Chavez does not get up from that chinchorro he has hung up". And they arrived: "We have an order, we are not leaving here until you...". Well, I got up a few days later.

### ***"Two guys who hang around".***

What Fidel said to me one day on the phone: "Chávez, where are you now? "No, I went for a walk around here". "Ah, well, you are out there". And he said to say goodbye: "Well, I am also around here, and the thing is that you and I, Chávez, we are not presidents, we are just two guys walking around".

### ***He's watching us over there***

Fidel is surely watching us. Fidel does not peel us. Fidel watches us so much that last year I had a little problem with a tooth, around here. But you know that I can't stand up. Sometimes you see me sitting here and you don't know the processions one carries inside. But I have to be always here and always with you, until God wills it. Then I was in pain, a discomfort that lasted about a week. Fidel noticed it and

asked over there: “What is wrong with Chávez? “What is wrong with Chávez that he is laughing so strangely? And he sent for pictures and a video. “Something is wrong with Chávez”. Well, he called here and since Barrio Adentro is here. “What? explain to me”. Finally they explained to him that it is a tooth, that he can’t hold his tooth, I don’t know what else. Fidel is there watching us.

### ***I threw stones to Fidel***

**D**o you know that story? I threw stones at Fidel, hard, didn’t I, because I didn’t want to stop talking? The sun was setting. President Fernando Henrique and I had to go to Boa Vista by helicopter. And Fidel talks like hell. He was giving a class on soybean and the mechanical cow, the one that Brazil once sent to Cuba, which I don’t know how many liters of soybean it produced. Well, he was giving a lecture, a very good lecture. But time was running out, and I started to throw pebbles at him. I hit him. Until I hit him in the ankle and it hurt him, because he stopped talking. It was Fidel’s birthday that day, seventy-five years old. It was August 13TH.

***It was a ball, boy***

**F**idel, how are you? Actually that was a ball, it was very high and Fidel was crouching down. It was for the chest. I recognize five years later that it was a ball. Fourth ball, base on balls. Fidel, next time I'll strike you out. Not long ago Fidel called me and said: "Look, how is your grandson Manuelito? Because Fidel met Manuelito chiquitico and carried him. He picked him up like this, and the little guy, who was about three months old, grabbed his beard, he grabbed his beard here and he wouldn't let go. Little kids squeeze hard, they don't let go. And... "be careful there", "wait, the beard", "he's going to pull it out", "he took a little hair there". Fidel told him: "You are a careful guy". Not long ago he asked me how "the guy who takes care of himself" is doing. "They told me that he hits very hard, he plays baseball, but he doesn't run for first base. It's true, he bats and stands still. So, I said to Fidel: "Well, unlike you, you don't bat, you strike out, but you run for first". And he told me: "That's what you say, but you know it wasn't like that". It's true, Fidel, it was a ball, boy.

### ***Stood in a corner***

**J**ust now, when I got out of the car, there on the corner, there was a yellow pole and I looked at the long street that goes that way, Panteón Avenue. Do you know who I remembered? Fidel. Fidel, what's up! Where is Fidel? There he is. What happened? How are you? One day Gabriel García Márquez interviewed him and asked him: "Look, Fidel, what do you miss most in your life?", after he asked him I don't know how many questions, a simple question. Then he said: "Oh, how I long to stand on a street corner and watch people go by".

### ***Let's be careful***

**I**told Evo about ten times: "Evo, let's not talk, because Fidel is watching us a lot". Fidel was in the middle of a speech at the Plaza de la Revolución, that was full. And Evo every now and then: "Chávez, what do you think? And I: ta, ta, ta, quick. I did not peel Fidel's eyes, because I know him. And Evo again: I don't know what else, ta, ta, ta, ta. And me: ta, ta, ta, ta. I am telling him: "Evo, let's be careful with Fidel". Fidel could not stand it any longer, because he was looking at us all the time talking there, and he says: "You two have a lot to talk about, don't you? You two have a lot to talk about, we will talk later". That's how Diosdado and Elías are, they have a lot to talk about. We will talk later, aha!



## ***The bandit***

**R**ecently we were there on Fidel's birthday, we were telling a story, and Fidel said: "Hey, do you remember when the three of us were kicked out of school? The headmaster, the priest, sent for Don Angel, the father, and said: "Look, sir, do me a favor and take these three children who are the three biggest bandits that have ever passed through this school". Raul, who was sitting there, taking note of some things, me over here and Fidel over there. Then Raul says: "Chavez, do the math, Ramon is the oldest, he doesn't mess with anyone, I was the little one. Who is left, who is left? The bandit, him, Fidel.

## ***Old rooster, we will vanquish!***

**I** was given two chicks, very small, about three years ago. They came out tremendous roosters, compadre, but they fought among themselves. One got hurt, they took him away, he never came back. The other one is over there, he is an old rooster. Yesterday I was fighting with him because he doesn't want to crow anymore, and I told him: "Old rooster, crow". How that rooster used to crow, compadre. That rooster's name is Fidel. "Fidel, sing", and he did not sing. Then, I started to sing "kikiriki", and the one who answered was his son, a red rooster. If you could see

my rooster, compadre! That one is called the Red Rooster, that one was singing, the son. And I said to the old rooster: "Ah, old rooster, you are no longer good for anything". So, I walked away, because I was doing exercises. When I was leaving the courtyard, up there on a rooftop, the old rooster crowed, compadre. I turned around and said to him: "That old rooster, we will win! And there he started to crow.

### ***A wise man***

**F**idel, who is seeing everything, is wiser every day. I told him: "Listen, Fidel, I hope you survive me, that you live longer than us". Then, he said: "Well, the probability indicates that maybe, who knows". Now he is dedicated to reflection, to thinking, he is no longer directly on the street, there. He is thinking, writing, studying. His wisdom has grown like a white beard. I was listening to him for more than six hours, almost without interrupting him, a question, a comment. A wise man. Do you know what Fidel told me? Well, I am going to tell you this because it is a criticism, but he is right, and I feel obliged to make it public. He told me with much respect: "Chávez, do you allow me to tell you two or three things crudely? I told him: "You are authorized to tell me whatever you want". And he told me: "Two things initially". And he makes notes, every time I go there, Fidel makes notes, he works for three, four days waiting for me, and he takes out his paper. He told me:

“Look, a conclusion I have drawn, you said in the speech...”. And he peeled off the speech, he had my speech in its entirety, and a summary, and analyzed by his own handwriting, notes and numbers. He told me: “You said in your speech a phrase, a figure, that ten years ago there were six hundred thousand university students in Venezuela, today there are two million four hundred thousand”. That is true, a growth of four hundred percent. But he had a long list of advances in education, health, everything we have achieved, the social advances in these ten years. And he told me: “I have drawn a conclusion, Chávez. No Revolution that I know of, not even the Cuban one, has achieved so much for its people in social matters, especially in such a short time as the Bolivarian Revolution”. Do you know what the second one is? This is what he told me: “I have concluded that you do not want to take political advantage of these social advances”.

The phrase sounds harsh, “you do not want to”. One might think that we cannot. That is, to transfer with the same intensity the social benefit, all that we have achieved, to political capital. So, the conclusion is hard: that we do not want to, you see? And it also has a lot to do with the fact that some people do not know how to do it. We have to learn, that people perceive all that the Revolution has been transferring to the people, and compare with the past. And something more important, what would happen if the counterrevolution returns to government in Venezuela?

***Some times filled***

**T**o God what belongs to God and to Caesar what belongs to Caesar. To Fidel what belongs to Fidel. He told me when we were saying goodbye, after seven hours, the embrace and the eagle's gaze, it looks like an eagle, and the nose, you know. And the two hands here on my shoulders, and thus the look, you know: "Chavez, there is the battle, I have done what I had to do. You have a long road ahead, go to battle, unite your people, do not divide them any more, do not confuse them any more, unite those who are out there fighting".

Because he sees them from there and sometimes he knows even more than I do about internal currents and so on. Every time I go he repeats it to me. Every time I come and go, it is fed, like a dynamo. But I never forget that look, "Chávez, come on, I did what I was going to do". Forgive me Fidel for telling these stories. You told me one day that whatever you tell me, unless it is secret, because it is a State secret, I can tell it: "Do with it what you want, write it or say it, as you wish". He says that sometimes I add things to it. Now I told him: "No, I don't add things to it". Then he said: "No, you don't add, but sometimes you fill in".

***Absolved by the history***

**F**idel Castro, recently you said something that honors me very much and commits me much more. You said in your July 26th speech, precisely commenting that they accuse you and me of destabilizing the continent, of doing mischief, they condemn us. Recalling your speech, your defense, you said: "If President Chavez approves it, I will respond". And you affirmed: "It does not matter, condemn us, history will absolve us! I want, on behalf of all the Venezuelan people, and from my soul, to tell you that you honor me with all that. But at the same time, I want to tell you that you, Fidel, said that when I was not born. Now you have incorporated me. Like that character in García Márquez's novel "One Hundred Years of Solitude", José Arcadio Buendía: he invented the time machine, invented lightning as a weapon of war and founded Macondo. Well, you invented the time machine and put me in it, when I was not even born. But more than that I must say the following, in fairness, whether you approve of it or not. You said that fifty-two years ago, you see, I am fifty-one. Aha! My mother was pregnant when you said that.

Fidel Castro was right fifty-two years ago. Fidel Castro has already been absolved by history, but not me! I wish, God willing! I wish I could feel someday that I have been worthy of that phrase of Fidel Castro, and as a humble soldier that is what I am in essence. That is why I brought my campaign uniform, to share this day with you, because this is a day of essences, and I, in essence, what I am is a soldier. I hope that this humble soldier, the peasant that I am, may someday be absolved by history, by the people, be at the height of the hope and love of a people.

### ***You have no way to escape***

**F**idel is one of those who has talked to me the most about it in all these years and now, after seven hours, I told him: “Fidel, go on, rest, I am going to rest too”. Seven hours. He told me: “No, no, sit down for a little while longer”. One more ratigo is two more hours. “Just a little while longer. Give him coffee. “Give me coffee.” “Oh my God, more”. And besides, he reasons it, he reasons it like this, he takes out papers, one hour and another hour and another hour and another hour. He tells me: “Chávez, you have no escape, as I did not”, and for this and for this and for this. Fidel affirms, today more than yesterday, that if Hugo Chavez disappears, this sounds harsh, as if I were too big. No, I am not, I am just that small.

But there are a series of considerations that he exposes and I have ended up sharing them, which oblige me to be here, I do not know how much longer. God knows and the people will say so, won't they? Fidel sees the enemy battling relentlessly, the seven military bases, the paramilitary attack, the issues that affect us, the insecurity, these electricity issues, the water issue, etc. He says: "Chávez is the one who is fighting without rest. Then, he says: "Chávez, your war is very different from mine. Here my most bitter enemies are gone, they are in Miami. There you have them right under your nose. Your Miami is over there Chávez".

It's been a while," he tells me, "that I put distance with the enemy, I have a distance. You don't, you have him right next to you, you live with him". "Sleeping with the enemy", says a movie out there, doesn't it? "It's there, so it's a very different war." He tells me: "I don't know how I would have done it if I had been in yours. Here we did ours, but yours is more difficult for that reason". He also told me the following: "It is good that you tell your cadres, the party, tell the Congress, Chávez, one thing in case they have not realized, especially some who might be carried away by ideas". He says the following, something that I appreciate from here, and history proves it: "Look at the case of Pinochet, nobody was pardoned there". He said to me: "Look, if the counterrevolution manages to take you away, to get you out of there and take power away from the people, the persecution and the sweep will be general. No one will be spared there".

## ***The house of el Che***

Tell me when we went with Fidel to the University of Cordoba, what an extraordinary thing, that mass of people, my God, and above all very young people. I did not want to talk too much. I told Fidel: "You have to speak here". He is the master. I spoke for an hour, but I had to give Fidel the floor. Fidel spoke for three hours, with great capacity, great coherence in his ideas, his reflections. Nobody moved from there, and it was freezing cold, there was a cold breeze blowing that night in Cordoba.

The next day, in another memorable, unforgettable moment, we went to the house where Che Guevara grew up, there in Alta Gracia, very close to Cordoba. We traveled together for an hour by road, seeing the Argentine countryside. We spent the afternoon in the house where Che lived, a group of Che's friends showed up, childhood friends, we had an unforgettable time. When you meet Fidel Castro, you will ask him a hundred questions in the first five minutes. He wants to know everything. Then there was the lady of the house where Che lived, which today is a museum, explaining to us, and many people. And the lady was explaining: "Look, this is the photo of Che", and I don't know what else.

Fidel asked her: "And this house was built in what year?", "What did you build it for? And the lady started: "Well, they built it, for...";



she wanted to explain Che Guevara's things, but Fidel did not. Fidel wanted to know when the house was built, where the wood used to build it came from, who was the first inhabitant. And the lady was looking for the answers there. But the most important thing was when I had to intervene in the lady's defense, because the infinite questioner that is Fidel Castro was massacring her in a merciless way. As the lady answered him everything, he had to find a way. As a girl said to me one day: "You want to scratch me!", because I asked her I don't know what, as if it was in an Aló Presidente. Then, Fidel asks her, and the lady says: "This house was built for the railroad managers in 1914". The very annoying Fidel came and asked her impertinent questions. I said to him: "But, how are you going to ask him that? Then he said: "How much was the railroad fare -at that time- from Buenos Aires to Córdoba? That's when I intervened, I couldn't stand it any longer, I said: "No, boy, but leave the poor lady alone". I hugged her and told her: "Leave her alone! Because she was already worried with so many questions. I told her: "Well, let her explain to us here, okay". Che lived here. Madam, tell us: How long did Che live here, where did he sleep? Take us.

Fidel walked around with one of those little hats that go around. I am not going to mention what it says because we are already in an election campaign. So, Fidel was wearing a red beanie. Have you seen it? I told him: "Fidel, that's interventionism, boy! You can't interfere in Venezuela's affairs". There he goes, look at

him, there he goes, that's Che Guevara's house, look. There is the lady, look, there she is asking him. That's Che's bed, that's where he slept when he was a child, he was about five years old. Look at the look on Che's face, he was a tough kid. And Fidel is relentless, asking questions: "How much was the fare from Buenos Aires to Cordoba, how many cars did the railroad have, how fast did it go?" Look at Che's mother, look at that woman's face, huh? What a face, right? What a character! That's the older sister, she's alive. The other girl, the little one, is dead. There is the ambassador of Argentina in Venezuela. Look, Fidel is looking for a way to ask questions, because he is a questioner who has no limits, right. Look, I am trying to divert him, but he was not, he was with the poor lady. That was a memorable day, unforgettable, great, with a lot of feeling.

### ***Birthday present***

Two days before his sudden illness I received this note from Fidel in Moscow. He sent me a messenger with this note. Coincidences, isn't it? Fidel is an insignificant retailer. My birthday present arrived in Moscow on my birthday. He's like that, it has to arrive on the day, not a day or three days later. He sent someone to bring me my gift and it was delivered

to me on July 28 with a letter, and also a note in his own handwriting, things that I cannot read here. You know that I was in Buenos Aires with a stomach ailment the day I went out there, when I was walking with Kirchner. I don't know what made me sick, I think it was on the plane, but terrible! I was in a serious condition, making an effort. Then, at night I saw Fidel, he gave me a prescription and gave me something he prepares, which he calls "tsunami". I took two "tsunami", almost like a punishment. And another one, a cold cream of rice, that one went down very well with me, but he knows how to prepare it and he loads it there.

So, he made me drink cold cream of rice and then the "tsunami". In the morning he sent me another "tsunami" and another cold cream of rice for breakfast. He has the false idea that I eat a lot. No, I don't eat a lot. So, here he puts me:

*I hope you have been able to subdue your ferocious appetite - ferocious appetite! - and preserve as much as possible your well-being, which is indispensable for the success of the tour. I write these lines to you sitting in bed and without sleep, forgive the handwriting, a million congratulations for your birthday. Greetings to all. A hug. Happy overflight over that fiery region of the Middle East. To victory always!*  
*Fidel Castro, July 25, 2006, at 7:38.*

## ***The disease got me by surprise***

I was surprised by Fidel's illness. I was in Vietnam, on tour. You know that there you don't rest, you finish one event and go to another, and the next day to another country. We arrived in Vietnam, we spent the day with the President, he offered us a dinner. And we went to rest a little at midnight. But we had to be ready very early, at seven in the morning, to pay homage to the Martyrs' Monument and then go to the mausoleum where they have Ho Chi Minh; they have him intact, the comrade, Uncle Ho. Then meetings with the president and leaving Vietnam. We had to fly about fourteen hours to Africa. So, I get up, I go to the bathroom, I'm getting dressed, I turn on the TV. The guys took a little piece of equipment that you connect to the TV and you watch Venezolana de Televisión live on the big screen, on the Internet. Well, so I was keeping an eye on the country.

They were giving "La Hojilla", live, it was six o'clock in the morning in Hanoi. When I am putting on my shirt there, I turn on the TV and I see Fidel's direct assistant, reading something. I was in the middle, so I didn't hear the first thing, worse for me, because I say: "My God, what happened here? I said: "I'm dreaming". I hear when they read: "I transfer the power to you...", so and so, but I don't hear the cause. My God, and I didn't have time because I had to leave right away. I started to call, my brother Adán was with us on the tour, he is ambassador

in Havana, as you know, and I told him: “Adán, stay, because I have to leave”. But how can I leave, with this anguish? What happened in Cuba? I didn’t know anything else.

And Adán stayed at the hotel making phone calls. And I told him: “You catch up with me later and tell me something, please”. So I arrived at the Martyrs’ Square and then we went to see comrade Ho Chi Minh. Imagine my shock when I saw Ho Chi Minh, and I was thinking to myself: “My God, I don’t want to see you like that, Fidel!” And Adam arrived later and explained to me. Well, afterwards I was able to talk to some of the comrades in Cuba and I was a little calmer, but of course, very worried all those days and nights of the tour.

### ***The last straw!***

**N**ext Sunday is the thirteenth. Well, it will be a special Aló Presidente, dedicated to your birthday, Fidel, eighty years old. You have to remember that Fidel, precisely here in the state of Bolivar, turned seventy-five. Ah, that time he had me crazy with questions. He began to ask and ask, and I sent for you (Governor Francisco Rangel), and then you sent for a technician, because he wanted to know. Well, first the power line, which

we inaugurated the following day. He was asking how much a kilowatt was worth, how much it cost to build each tower, how much a kilometer of cable cost, how many cables there were, the voltage of the cables, how many towers, well, and how much we were selling to Brazil per kilowatt per hour.

There we answered almost all the questions. But when we were on the lake, navigating in the canoe, he said to me: "Chavez, what speed do you think the water brings there in the waterfall? I felt like pushing him into the water, what would I know? "But calculate, make a calculation there of when the water is falling, it is not very difficult, you do it like this and more or less calculate. You calculate", he told me: "It must be coming at 300 kilometers per hour and when it is coming down, 350", I answered. But then he said to me: "And how deep will this lake be? "It will be about 15 meters," I made up. "And the temperature of the water?". "Well, I don't know, kid, it'll be like 20 degrees." Then he sticks his finger in the water and says, "No, 17.5 degrees." The last straw! The endless questioner!

***I urge you you to continue***

Sometimes you get tired, and Fidel found out that I made some comment about a spiritual tiredness, not so much physical, because you lie down for a while and put your feet up. Spiritual tiredness is the hardest, you know. And Fidel found out, he sent me a message: "I want to see you". I took advantage of a moment and went over there. But before seeing Fidel, I went around a village and what a thing, when I was standing talking to some boys who were in a cart, that's what made me stop. You know? To see the people fighting here or there, anywhere.

Some very young boys in a wagon pulled by a mule, up the mountain. We were coming by car, I stopped: "Hey, guys!", "Chávez", the boys said to me, "What are you doing here?" "Well, boy, this way" "And where are you going?". And they tell me: "Over there, look, over there in that mountain is our school", a technological school "and we have to go to present a work". There is no transportation over there. They made the wooden cart and an old mule of those good ones to go up there, to go up there, compadre. It was about eight o'clock in the morning. "And what time is the presentation of the work?" "At noon the teacher called us" "When are you coming back?". "We'll be back this afternoon". This is the will to overcome, to struggle, because they are a people who are blocked by the Yankees, blocked hard. They deny them many things, they sabotage many things.

I am talking to the boys and I hear a noise in the mountain, in the mountain coming. A man appears with a mule, and when the boys saw me they were very surprised, a natural thing and said “Hey, Chávez, what are you doing! Not that man. I was surprised at the imperturbability of that human being. He gets down on the mule and sees me: “Chávez”. But imperturbable he got off the mule, we shook hands. Do you know what he said to me? As if he had read me, I do not know, I do not know if Fidel sent him. I am sure he did not. My son was with me. That man told me: “Chávez, in your struggle you have no right to get tired. I urge you to continue”. And I said to him: “Where do you get this exhortation from?” “I don’t know, that’s what I can think of to tell you”. And then he said, “I am an evangelical pastor. God put you here in this corner and I arrived and that’s what came out of my soul. I urge you to continue”. And then Fidel repeated it to me: “I urge you to continue”.





## *The last tale*

*If this was for me, I would go down this stage, and I would go walk again, like in other times, through the streets of San Fernando, the corners of San Fernando. If this was for me, myself, I swear that after walking a few streets, after approaching at the shore of the river and feeling the roaring of the immortal Apure, I would look for a little car, and go to Biruaca. Afterwards, I would pass through Apurito, I would pass through El Samán, I would pass through Achaguas first, then to Mantecal, and I would arrive to the Y. If you turn right, we would go to Bruzual, but I would not go there. I would turn left, and I would go to Elorza, I would go to the Arauca, to pass again that savannah that I take in my soul.*

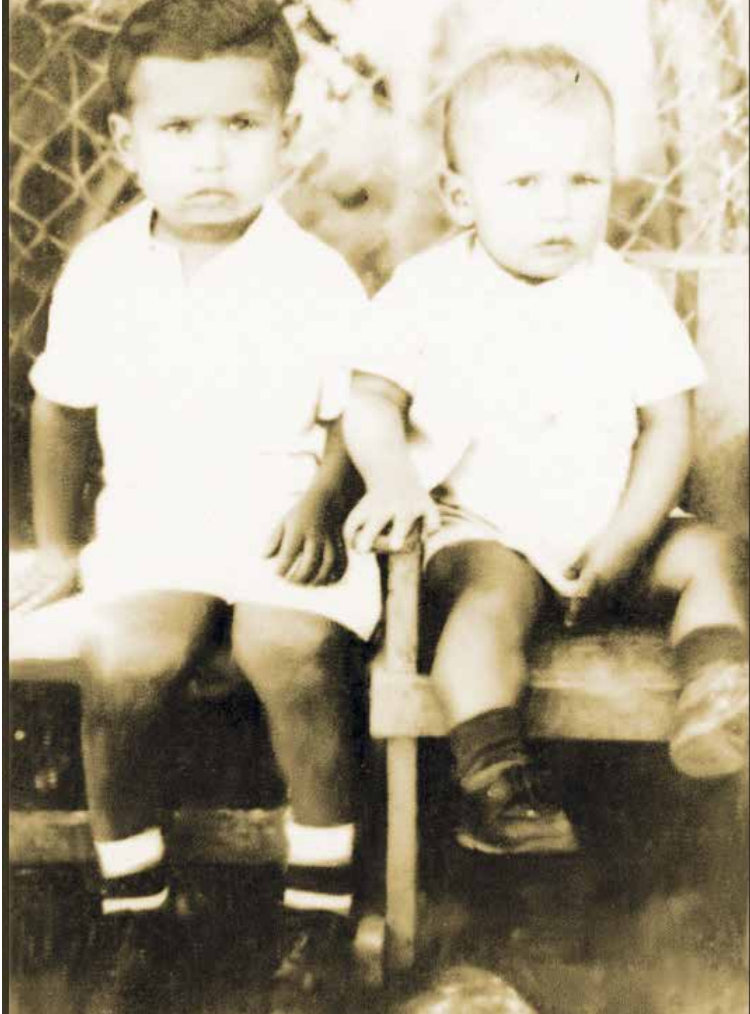
*Sisters, brothers, I would go to key Caribe, to the savannahs of Alcornocal, and beyond. I would go to the river Capanacaro, I would arrive to Carabali, to Barranco Yopal and beyond. If I had, I know /i don't have it, but If I had had Lorenzo Barquero's luck, swollen by the savannah, I would have agreed. If someone would have asked me, would you like Lorenzo Barquero's destiny? To stay far away, at the Cajón de Arauca in Apure, to be dried by the wind, to become dirt and become water of this savanna? I would have said yes, a thousand times yes, for I love this land. Long life, Apure! Long life the Motherland!*

*Only that, you know I can't walk through the streets of San Fernando. I can't make that tour right now, tonight nor tomorrow. I ask God, if he continues to be this generous with us, I ask God to grant me this very last dream, i have said this. My last dream is to liberate myself, but that is so difficult, to be free again, like the wind, at least for a few days, a few months, a year, and free of all this after having accomplished the project for the motherland we dream. I wish to tour again with a harp, cuatro, maracas, some friends though these beloved streets of San Fernando, these savannas of Apure, those savannas of Guarico, those savannas of Barinas, the savannas of Venezuela. God, if you're more generous than generous, I ask you for that vote, or I make that vote. If that were not possible, anyways thank you my God, thank you my people, for this life, this fight, and all this new stage in the life that begins on October 07th with the Perfect Battle and the Perfect Victory. I could tour all this with a harp, a cuatro, maracas, some friends, these beloved streets of San Fernando, these savannas of Apure, those savannas of Guárico, those savannas of Barinas, the savannas of Venezuela. God, if you are more generous than generous, I ask you this vote, or I make that vote, if not possible. Anyways, thanks, my God, my people, for this life, for this fight and for this new stage of life that begins on October 07th with the Perfect Battle and the Perfect Victory.*

San Fernando de Apure, September 12th.  
Electoral Campaign.

# *Graphic testimony*





In Barinas, with his older brother, Adán Chávez.



The Sabaneta Spiders salesboy.



The Sabaneta "spiders salesboy", with his Friends Iglesias, Lucio and Dinora.



At the school "Julián Pino"  
in Sabaneta.



With his older children (Hugo, María Gabriela and Rosa Virginia) at the People's Balcony.



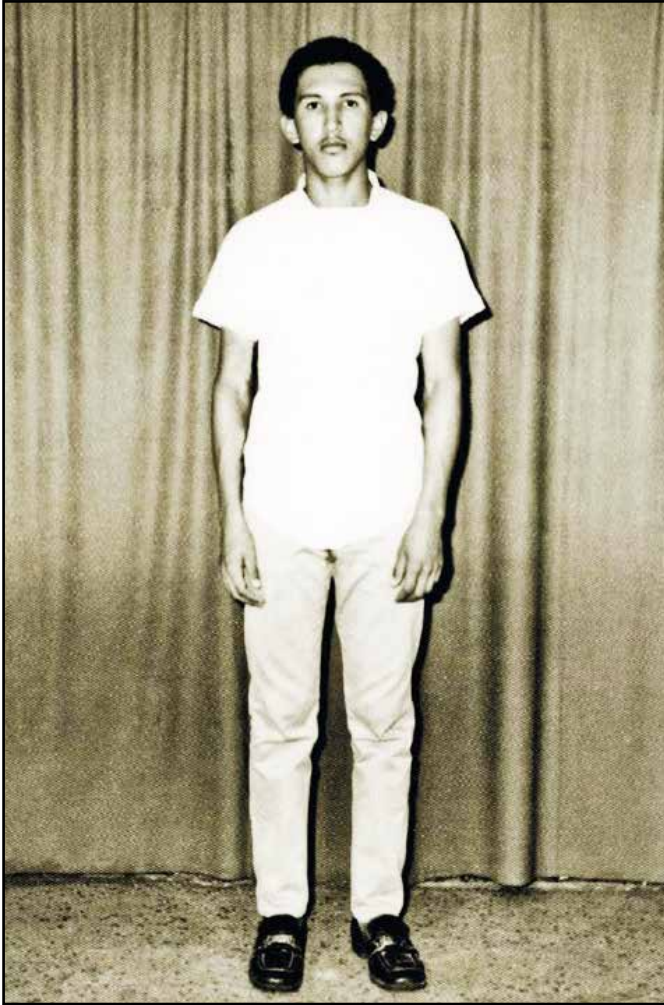
Street match at, together to his daughter Rosinés —left— and his granddaughter Gabriela.





The Chávez Family in Miraflores with his parents, children and grandchildren.  
Back, from left to right, the brothers Adán, Argenis, Ignacio ("Nacho"), Adelis and Aníbal.





That “Bachaco” or “Goofy” arrived at the Military Academy with the illusion of becoming a ball player at the Major League.



The "Newbie" Goofy.



The spiders sales boy as a brigadier (second to the right, up).



Ensign Chávez animating the election of the queen.



Harp, cuatro and maracas...

**Alf3rez Hugo Rafael Ch3vez Frias**

El d3a 26 de julio de 1954 vino al mundo este din3mico muchacho en la muy noble y leal ciudad de Barinas.

A nuestros timpanos suenan todav3a las pintorescas, ilustrativas y no menos jocosas letras de sus joropos, corridos y pasajes, con los que se empe3o en dar a sentir y conocer lo que es su terru3o llanero, cosa que lograba



a toda costa. Su n3mero favorito y que en todo momento llevara en sus labios era aquel que empezaba: "Furia se llam3 el caballo..."; llegando a identificarse tanto con su melod3a que nosotros decidimos llamarle "Furia".

El ejemplo fue la base de toda su actuaci3n y exigencias.

Por baluarte siempre tuvo la camarader3a, que impart3 entre todos nosotros.

Aplicado estudiante de Ciencias, donde se manten3a en duro combate contra Morfeo.

Dentro del base-ball fue de los mejores, el zurdo "Furia" lleg3 a ser el mejor pitcher del equipo y excelente primera base. Dentro de su afici3n deportiva tambi3n cabe mencionar sus grandes dotes de submarinista y buceador del fondo de las piscinas, deporte que practicaba durante la Semana Santa en el Instituto bajo el fulgurante sol.

Pertenece al servicio de Transmisiones.



The day of his graduation at the Military Academy with his parents.



The sub lieutenant.

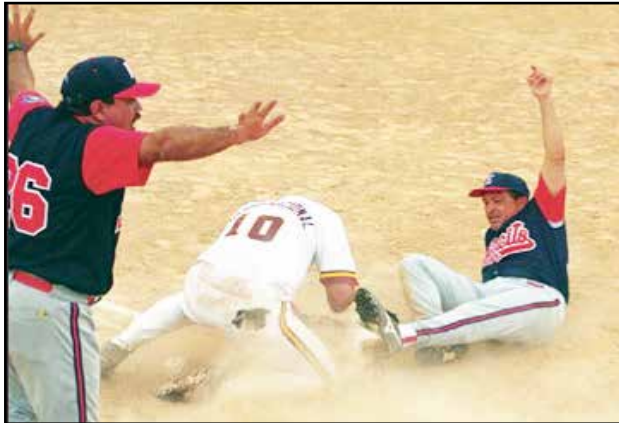


The Lieutenant.





Left-handed Hugo Chávez, first on the bottom right, a member of the Military Academy team. XIV Inter-Institute Military Games, March 1972.

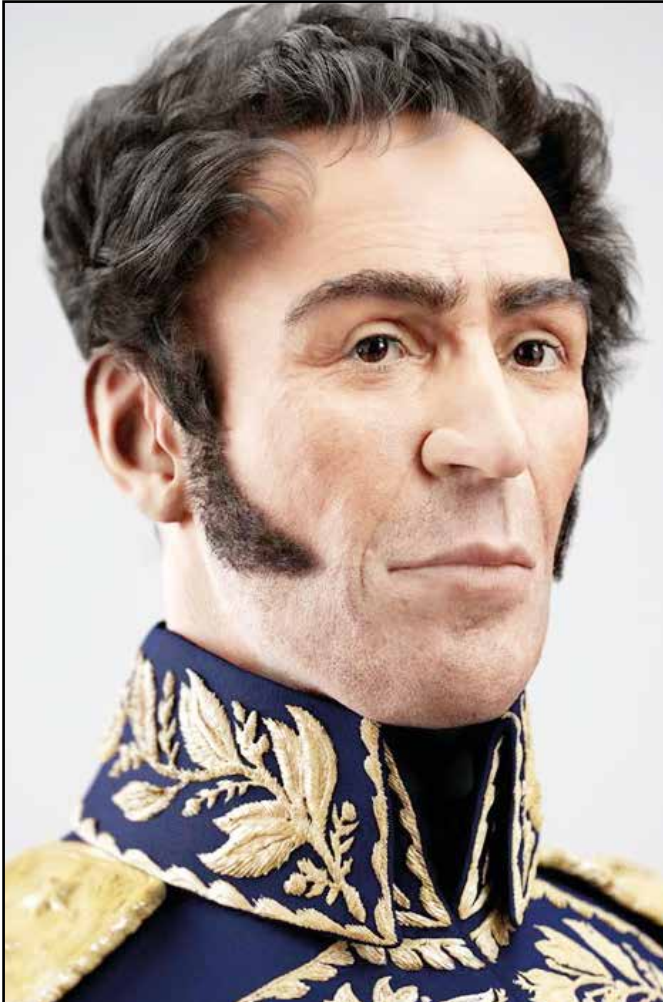


Freeze in third!





Ball o strike?



Face of El Libertador, obtained through three-dimensional facial reconstruction.



In military maneuvers, when the revolutionary movement was being forged.



Pedro Pérez Delgado, Maisanta, "The last man on a horse" (at the right).



At the prison of Yare.



Despite the bars, the revolutionary preparations continued.



"I remember clearly the day I left prison. March 26th, 1994. (...) I remember I said, 'I'm going to the people's catacombs'".





To the rescue of the Vargas victims of the tragedy. December, 1999.



"I sent Génesis to Cuba. She was walked. They made her a pioneer. She was happy until the last day of her life".



Hugged the mass



At the rythm of the joropo.



"I am just a soldier"



With my son Huguito, the students, and the Cuban shepherd of the mountain.





At the house of the Ché in Córdoba, Argentina, July 22nd, 2006."



"You and I are just two guys who wander around"

***Venezolanismos, or Typical Venezuelan autochthonous words***

**Adeco:** A militant of the social democrat party Acción Democrática.

**Bachaco:** half black, half white person with light hair. Mulatto.

**Barrio Adentro:** Public health national program, impelled by the Bolivarian Government.

**Caney:** Stage for traditional Venezuelan music.

**Cachapa:** Corn cake

**Catanare:** big old rusty car

**Chapita:** Street baseball match that uses soda caps instead of a ball. It is very famous in the popular communities and villages.

**Chicha:** rice milk shake, usually served with cinnamon and ice.

**Coleador:** Bull fighter

**Copeyano:** Militant of the Social Christian Party Copei

**Corrío:** Traditional Venezuelan music genre, originary from the plains.

**Cota Mil:** Important highway in Caracas, at 1000 meters above the sea level.

**Cuatro:** Typical Venezuelan four-string guitar.

**El Caracazo:** Popular revolt perpetrated against the neoliberal economic measures imposed by then president Carlos Andrés Pérez on February 27th and 28th, 1989.

**Gocho:** Person originary from the Andes region, in the south West of Venezuela.

**Guacharaca:** Bird

**Guaro:** Person originary from the state of Lara (South west of Venezuela). Typical bird of Lara.

**Hallaca:** Venezuelan typical Christmas tamale dish, corn dough filled with pork, beef, hen, pepper, olives, raisins and vegetables. It is wrapped with plantain leaves. This Christmas dish is originary created by the slaves, who took the leftovers of the Christmas feast made by their masters, and they prepared their own dish for the festivities.

**Helicoide:** Structure of modern architecture, built by Marcos Pérez Jiménez. This building was meant to be a mall in Caracas, but became in dungeons for tortures in the 4th Republic (1958 to 1998). Currently, it's the headquarters of the National Bolivarian Police Corps and the Security University, UNES

**Liquiliquei:** Typical and traditional Venezuelan male suit, originary from the plains.

**Llanero:** Person originary from the Venezuelan plains, in the south West of Venezuela.

**Mantuano:** Person of the colonialist higher classes.

**Mocho:** Cut off person, missing either the arms or the legs.

**Musiú:** Foreigner, or descendent of foreigners; usually from Europe

**Negro Primero:** Pedro Camejo, Venezuelan founding father of the independence of the nation. Free slave who fought together to Simón Bolívar for the liberation of Venezuela and South America.

**Samán:** Rain Tree

**Veguero:** peasant from the Plains.

*"Tales of the spider salesboy"* is a journey told in the first person. It starts in the very roots of President Hugo Chávez, in Sabaneta de Barinas, in that Little palm house with dirt soil, the vivid image of hundreds of thousands homes in the Little villages of the Venezuelan plains.

There are many passions that overflow in the speech and the imprint of those who have marked the recent history of Venezuela: family, baseball, the Armed Forces, the cult of heroes, the infinite love for Venezuela and, above all, to the broad excluded masses.

A pure and proud llanero, Chávez is also a storyteller. He assures that he is not exaggerating, but Fidel Castro, who knows him well, claims that his Venezuelan friend "fills in", at least about the stories that involve both of them.

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