

# Living Memory

Ana De Almeida Amaral

**Marcela:** uhh, what is this called....

**Ana:** A guanaco?

**Marcela:** A guanaco! yes girl, good! [laughs]

**Ana (Narrator):** That's Marcela, she's 27, and was born and raised here, in Santiago, Chile.

**Ana:** are you proud of me that I know?

**Marcela:** Yes, my friend, the fucking guanaco. The guanaco is the one that throws water at you.

**Ana (Narrator):** She has long, fiery-red hair and a tattoo that reads "feminist" across her thigh. She's a badass and brilliant.

On this day were walking through the center of Santiago, along Alameda-- the main avenue that goes straight through the city. Marcela agreed to show me some interesting memorial sites connected to the history of the dictatorship here.

The streets were moving with vendors, busses barreling down the avenue, and Chileans rushing out of work and school. Everything moved quickly around us-- and every once in a while, the wind would change directions and we could feel the itch of tear gas in our throats -- There was a protest here yesterday.

On our walk, we turn down a side street and found ourselves on a European-looking road, cobble-stoned and trendy.

And we stumbled across a building called Londres 38. The massive, wooden double doors are haunting. And yellow graffiti is sprayed across the bottom.

**Marcela:** oh my friend, how heavy... and the doors are so horribly big too.

**Ana:** Yeah it's like a huge door.

**Marcela:** They must have been so scared...

**Ana:** And do you see what is written here.... It says, "My son was tortured here". You can tell that they tried to cover it up...

**Marcela:** It's because you can't erase what has happened, no matter how much you want to. You can't.

**Ana (Narrator):** The graffiti on the door reads, "My son was tortured here." and I can tell there was an attempt to cover the graffiti, but it's still there --a bright stain-- visible and lasting.

If you know anything about Chilean history, you've probably heard that the country suffered a dictatorship from 1973 until 1990. Although, if you grew up in the US, like me, you probably haven't heard much about the involvement of the United States in destabilizing Chile's democratic socialist government in the 60's and 70's. Ultimately leading to Augusto Pinochet seizing power as a right-wing dictator. The military coup of 1973 shattered Chile's democratic path, and immediately, Pinochet's regime began using horrific violence and fear to control Chile.

**New caster:** The army is diverting all its time and considerable force to hunting down the remaining Marxist and Allende sympathizers. Arrests continue day and night.

**Daughter of Victim:** Many say that the detained and disappeared were thrown into the ocean. I want to know in which part of the coast of our country my father was thrown out into the ocean so I can go and pay him a proper tribute.

**Ana (Narrator):** Behind those haunting wooden doors, Londres 38 was one of many clandestine detention and torture centers created by the National Intelligence Directorate. This building, hidden in plain sight, is where leftist organizers, specifically student activists, were tortured and killed by the dictatorship's forces. It's still unknown just how many people were detained and tortured here, but we do know that at least 98 people were killed in this building.

Outside the doors, are these bronze square plaques. They have the names of the victims of Londres 38.

**Ana:** Luis Alberto Canales Blanco, 17 years old. Alejandro Patricio Gómez Vega, 22 years old—He is my age... or he was my age.

**Ana (Narrator):** When Marcela was a college student, she was also a student activist -- She worked to coordinate under-the-table abortions for women, she helped found a network of sexual assault resource at her university, and she participated in plenty of protests. So, seeing the names and ages of these victims was shocking.

**Marcela:** I always feel this sense of emptiness when I'm in a place like this. Just, emptiness. It's just, it feels uncomfortable. There are some feelings I just can't explain with words, like the things that just come to my head when I'm in a place where such *horrible* things happened.

**Ana (Narrator):** Today, Pinochet's regime is notorious for killing and disappearing over 3,000 citizens and torturing over 40,000 political prisoners. But all of this ended in 1990, when Augusto Pinochet stepped down from executive power. And since then, the rhetoric of "nunca mas", never again – has been central to the discourse and memory of the dictatorship.

Londres 38 is not particularly a unique site to see in Santiago-- it is only one of *many* places of memory like this. For Chileans like Marcela, going about her daily life is marked by these national memories of violence from decades ago. But some days, what is more shocking are the ways the dictatorship doesn't feel like something from 50 years ago, or even 30. Sometimes, it doesn't feel like a memory at all.

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**Ana:** Do you think about the dictatorship in your normal life?

**Marcela:** Yes, of course I do. Like I don't think it's something we can just not think about. Because at the end of the day, you are just walking through the street and thinking about that. Eh, not every day, but at least three times a week.

**Ana (Narrator):** Marcela was born in 1996, 6 years after the end of the dictatorship. She's never lived in under a Pinochet's rule-- but for her, the long roots of the dictatorship don't just exist in a memory of something that happened 50 years ago.

**Marcela:** Honestly, the new generations don't even have an idea of what it was like to live the dictatorship, but we are marked by it. In some way or another, we are marked by it. We can't escape that.

**Ana (Narrator):** In my time getting to know Marcela, she told me a lot about how the right-wing policies put in place during that time still personally impact her – like the cost of living, the deep economic segregation and economic inequality, her struggle to find a job, the inaccessible cost of education.

**Marcela:** At the end of the day, I think everything goes back to that. *Everything* goes back to that. Because sometimes you start thinking, “what is everything, why is everything just so shitty dude? Why can't we move forward as a society? Why can't I, someone who went to university, succeed in this country?” I don't see education being free, you know? I don't think people will ever stop working for the rich. I don't see people having a better quality of life.

**Ana (Narrator):** It's not hard to see the ways that a right-wing dictatorship, even after 34 years, continues to live on in Chile's institutions and economy. And this frustration that Marcela feels, is not uncommon.

**Crowd:** The state, the president! The state is a sexist rapist! The state is a sexist rapist!

**Ana (Narrator):** In 2019 over a million Chileans took the streets to protests in massive demonstrations to protest against various interconnected economic and social issues. The protests lasted for months, and it is estimated that there were over 3.7 million participants in what is now known as the Estadillo Social. during these protests, a level of state violence was revived. And once again fear ruled these streets.

**Protestor:** This is what happened in Chile. Record it, record it!

**News Caster:** And now they are repressing!

**Protestor:** They are killing people, but the state is not taking responsibility for it.

**News Caster:** They were peaceful! They were peacefully!

**Ana (Narrator):** The Chilean National law enforcement garnered international attention during these protests for their intensely violent response to citizens.

Amnesty International reports that over 12,000 people were injured. Many of them became blind because of their shot in the eyes with tear gas grenades and rubber bullets. Over 30 were killed because of state violence.

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**Ana (Narrator):** Back on our walk, we continue further down Alameda, the main avenue in the city, down toward the federal buildings. The avenue has 5 lanes going in each direction, and parked in the center are these giant militarized vehicles. Another sight that is not uncommon in Santiago.

They look like tanks, armored on every side and with big metal grates mounted on the outside the windows. These are militarized vehicles belong to the Chilean national law enforcement, or as Marcela calls them: "los pacos"

**Marcela:** Dude, here at la moneda, there is always, always these tanks. There is the skunk, which is a type of vehicle that is armored, and it throws "tear gas". It throws tear gas like as if it was a gun of tear gas, it's like a skunk. It throws like a river of tear gas that makes you feel horrible. And this is nothing in comparison to when there are protests. When there are protests there could be 10, 12 more of these things. It's totally normalized.

**Ana (Narrator):** These militarized vehicles are used to control the public in moments of unrest and became symbols of state violence during the mass protests in 2019. But on days like today, where there aren't protests, they sit parked in the avenue.

Marcela told me about one time that she was targeted by police on this avenue while she was out protesting the high cost of living as a college student. Before the protest even made it three blocks down the avenue, the police started coming after the college-aged protesters, tear gassing them and spraying them down with high pressured water. Worse was that when she tried to peel away from the crowd, she realized the police were in formations all over the surrounding streets, closing her in.

**Marcela:** All of a sudden, they arrive and it's like one blocked street, another blocked street, I run to this one and no. I run to another and no. They have us totally surrounded. And we had to escape towards Bustamante Park, but honestly, cops were in that area too, and I had no idea what to do.

**We were desperate, it's like I can't see, I can't breathe. And when I'm there all wet because they pushed us with the Guanaco. I'm all wet, I can't see, I can't breathe dude. And so, I remember there was this girl that said "come over here!" She took me by the hand, and she took me to a side street. And she made me hide behind the wall of a fence of a house. But the cops started looking for us there. And I just remember her telling me, "Calm down. Get down and cover your mouth, they won't hear us."**

**Ana (Narrator):** As Marcela crouched down, covering her mouth, her eyes burning from tear gas, she couldn't believe the fear she felt, worried about what could happen to her if she had gotten detained. There she was-- a student activist hiding from the same government that had transitioned to democracy 30 years ago. Violence, fear, and control should have only been a memory.

That's what I'm telling you, like how could I not be afraid of the cops when they are so violent? Like what happened in 2019, that was just around the corner. That literally *just* happened, and these dudes were taking people's eyesight. That's what they were doing. They were taking eyesight from people. How could you not be afraid when these things keep on happening?

**Marce:** That's what I'm telling you, like how could I not be afraid of the cops when they are so violent? Like what happened in 2019, that was just around the corner. That literally *just* happened, and these dudes were taking people's eyesight. That's what they were doing. They were taking eyesight from people. How could you not be afraid when these things keep on happening?

**Ana (Narrator):** Marcela made one thing very clear to me: she knows that the risk of her protesting is different than that of her parent's generation who lived in a time where torture and murder were the systematic practice of the dictatorship. Yet, the Estadillo Social in 2019 showed that in a moment, Chileans could go from being citizens to being targets of the government's violence, once again.

**Marcela:** Obviously, an institution that is famous for having tortured people, for making people disappear, for murdering people, having raped people—and all of the worst things you could imagine—the military and the cops are the institution who did that. And even until today they keep doing ugly things. Maybe, the level of horror has lessened, but they keep doing things that are bad, just bad.

**I think it is obviously a sign of that it have a certain power—the power of the dictatorship. And there is not greater example of something that has the dictatorship than something that causes fear. You know?**

**Ana (Narrator):** Sometimes, it feels like the function of the dictatorship's violence, to control, is still working. She knows that this violence happened 50 years ago, and it's happened again since, and it keeps happening....

**Ana (Narrator):** Towards the end of our walk through the center of Santiago, I asked Marcela if she feels like today, the dictatorship has truly ended, 34 years after Pinochet left power. It took Marcela a long time to think about her answer and through her sunglasses I could see her staring at the floor.

**Marcela:** I think that the dictatorship ended... but it's like... if it was a tree, or a disease. I think there are many roots of the dictatorship everywhere you look. You know? Like I would say sure, it's over because they aren't torturing people anymore. But when I say that I just think, what about what happened in 2019?

**And it's because when the people speak out, when they want to dissent—the dictatorship is revived once again. It's like we are trapped. We can't do much about that.**

**Ana (Narrator):** It was clear that if the dictatorship is one person, he's been gone for years. But if it isn't, if its more than Pinochet... then something's still here, alive and well.

**Ana (Narrator):** As Marcela and I walked further down the avenue we stopped to buy some bracelets and to look at a mural with the names of people who had been killed by state violence in 2019. There had been a protest in this area yesterday, and the dissenting graffiti was quickly being painted over again

Marcela took my hand and led me into a bar on the main avenue. We needed a drink, and in Chile the slang used for getting drunk is "curar" -- to heal.

Inside the bar, Marcela felt the same tightness in her lungs she had learned from her encounters with the police. The smell of day-old tear gas floated throughout the bar. Still, every table was full of young Chileans with 6 or 7 people squished into booths meant for 4. Marcela and I sat down and ordered two piscolas.

**Ana:** Tell me again! Tell me again!

**Marcela:** Where else in the world can you find a bar that feels like tear gas but you can dance and drink and you get drunk.

You're healing! We're healing!

[END]