At school, violence erupts and becomes part of my life. At home, there’s a contrast, a refuge, a calm afternoon in which Grandmother and Great-Grandmother drink tea, listen to a soap opera on the radio, and work at adjusting seams or making new dresses on hire for women in the neighborhood.

Great-Grandma Natalia utters in cranky disdain about these modern women who can’t make their own dresses as she cuts cloth and wonders why she has to do this—for a few extra escudos, was the answer. My grandmother is more tolerant: city women work and still have to take care of the home and the children, so give them a break, she argues with her mother; we provide a service for these women and use the money for summer vacations.

It’s a small world of work and duty, and long-term planning. But at my school, the aggression, masculine bravado, and sportsmanship of hunting down the faggot fall exclusively upon me, and I am left to fend for myself. At home, my mother opens up a store, and we trade used magazines and books to a neighborhood in need of a little culture, if only pop culture, comics, and illustrated romances. A cartoon version of Don Quixote might get passed around, along with a couple of non-illustrated Agatha Christies, the only books even aspiring to high culture. Reading is still reading. Words become real. My life at home opens up my eyes to the world. But at school, it becomes about learning survival strategies.

My early education is a world in conflict.

I was sent to school to be battered, harassed, sometimes injured. That’s what boys did. It was natural. I wasn’t supposed to complain. If I cried, I
was a sissy. But I was a sissy anyway, which was one of the reasons I was beaten up to begin with, and if I cried, I became more of one—sissier and sissiest—and then netted further abuse. I also got perfect scores in most of my assignments, another reason to receive severe beatings. A know-it-all is even more dangerous than being a sissy. When I placed first in the class for four years in a row, I must have unleashed other resentments on top of homophobia. I came to associate school with a jungle that I would one day escape—and yet I did well in school because I absorbed learning from every other aspect of life around me. My mother felt torn. She contributed to the acceleration of my learning, but that also contributed to the resentment at school. She wanted to protect me from abuse, but she often succumbed to the cultural pressure of letting boys be boys.

“Boys are supposed to play rough,” one of my Socialist aunts told her. She might have been expected to stand up for the downtrodden, but she didn’t defend me. “If you protect him all the time, how’s he going to grow up and protect himself?”

This aunt—and I had my share of them—bitterly opposed the dog-eat-dog world of our capitalist society. She romanticized the saintly proletariat, the oppressed masses, but with me (and apparently just for me), she was laissez-faire all the way, baby. Darwin meets Spencer meets Pinochet, and may the best man win. She was not really my “aunt,” but all women that age who were cousins qualified as part of a sisterhood. She was an aunt, but she consistently sized me up from the eyes of a masculine world. She seemed to be horrified by my femininity.

“My boys are tough,” she constantly repeated. “My boys know how to fight.”

I could see my mother turn away, intimidated by her and feeling a sense of deference. She looked up to this slightly older cousin, an assertive woman in an admirable, stable marriage to a young man from our hometown of Mulchén. Association with this aunt appeared to make a difference. My mother felt compelled afterward to tell me I just needed to be tougher. I needed to fight back. Yet, I didn’t know how. My idea of being tougher was to get more perfect scores, but then almost everybody, including the girls, would resent me. My mother wouldn’t accept less than perfect scores, but this also set me apart. My uncle and my grandfather were immersed in their own lives. My grandfather enjoyed his retirement by fixing up houses for people in the neighborhood, doing small paint jobs or
often transforming chicken coops into guest houses. My teenage uncle chased girls early on in adolescence and wasn’t particularly interested in fighting, though he certainly knew how. He was tough and followed the ethos of boys in the neighborhood, which was to hang out, whistle at women from a corner bar, and make obnoxious comments about women’s behinds. My Socialist aunt came home feeling flattered.

“I like it when they whistle at me,” she said. She had reached her thirties and felt rejuvenated by a whistle. She continued to talk about the proletariat and the movement to liberate Chile, but boys being boys appealed to her. My mother seemed more skeptical. If any men whistled at her, she tended to turn around and give them a dirty look. But nonetheless my mother followed the advice not just of cousins but of any other people who warned her of the consequences of my apparent femininity.

I didn’t want to learn how to fight. Fighting back seemed alien to my character. At school I had to grin and bear it, and even today I don’t get much sympathy from this tale. People who knew me then seem to imply I asked for it. As a child, I was expected to take up arms and defeat the enemy without weapons training. If I bled, I had a handkerchief to stem the blood from the nose, and bruises one learned to take for granted. Things began to get cruel at home, too. My mother showed me an illustrated book of Roman times. Soldiers were throwing a man down a cliff.

“That’s what they used to do to faggots once,” she said, the implication being that they could again if I didn’t straighten out my act.

It was an uncharacteristic moment of cruelty. I believe she thought she could “cure” my condition by scaring me straight. I had no allies left in the fight. Even my mother seemed to be threatening violence.

At school I formulated my own rules: be careful whom you talk to. An amicable new boy in school began by talking to me about his family, his hobbies, the music he listened to, what he did on weekends, and so on. I imagined I was making a friend, at last. But once the other boys got a sight of this, the pressure began: what are you doing talking to him? He’s a faggot. You need to stay away from him. The next time he saw me, he walked away quickly, or to prove himself worthy of the other boys, he pushed me out of the way. “I’m not talking to you, faggot,” he shouted. “Get the fuck out of here.”

I was apparently not allowed to have any friends among the boys. As a result, I often played with the girls, which only compounded the problem.
My schooling became an education in a caste system, proving that people did their best to make themselves feel superior to others. I contributed to it by declaring myself more intelligent. I was the teacher’s pet, and I deserved what I got because of my condescension, but it was often hard to tell which was which. The boys found plenty of excuses for making me a target everywhere I went regardless of what I did.

In my neighborhood the people who were literally excluded from society were not simply the sissies, but the gypsies. They lived in tents along the path of the main street on Pedro Fontova Boulevard. The women wore loose satin robes draped around them, as if clothed in the seven biblical veils of Salomé. The gypsy boys wore simple cotton pants, with shirts that opened up around the chest, making them look like pirates, and sometimes sexy and exotic. Their golden locks made them look even more alluring. They were from Hungary, people told me. They speak “Hungarian,” but really what did anybody know? I was a child and accepted what I heard. They were more likely to speak the gypsy language, Roma. Their often striking blond looks made the mestizos among us jealous. We were supposed to prize white, European looks, especially among our own locally admired stock of German Chileans, but if these blonds were gypsies, it was as if they had to be hated and marginalized, often beaten, for having wrested control of a prized genetic attribute such as blondness, which didn’t belong to them. How come they were whiter than us when they were supposed to be our country’s n——s?

Their kids were not even enrolled in school. Their parents didn’t want them to learn, people say, but I doubt that any of the gypsies would survive a day in our school, which was ruled not by the teachers but by the bullies.

A gypsy woman stopped me on my way to school one day, in winter 1968. With her odd loose garments, and a withered look and wild curly hair, she looked frightful, like a witch ready to sell a poisoned apple. She wanted to read my fortune. I told her I didn’t have any money, which wasn’t true. I carried a little pocket money to buy roasted chestnuts from a vendor. She wanted to talk, however, and said her parents came from muy lejos, but she was actually born in Chile. She claimed a passion for Sandro, the gypsy showman who had become a popular pop singer throughout Latin America and a heartthrob in movies in which no one mentioned his gypsy background.
“I like Sandro, too,” I responded with some enthusiasm, but I had to watch it. I had been warned many times not to mention I “loved” a male singer, no matter how crazy I was for any of them. Girls screamed when any popular song came on the radio, and I wasn’t allowed to scream with them. I had to temper my enthusiasm. Liking was strong enough, and suspicious for a boy.

She touched the leather bag in which I carried my books.

“I wanted to go to school once,” she said. She could have been in her late twenties, or maybe older, prematurely gray. Age wasn’t something I estimated well at that time. On a wintry day, she had stopped me close to the entrance of the school, next to a rail where usually vendors gathered to sell candy to the children during breaks. No vendors were to be found on that dark, gloomy day. Fog that enveloped the city during the night had begun to clear slowly, but it still lingered, clouding up the road. Bus drivers kept their lights on. The gypsy woman had emerged from this fog, but the initial fear in me had begun to dissipate. I grew more comfortable around her.

“Why didn’t you go to school?” I asked, naively.

“You people don’t want us to learn,” she said. I had never thought of that. I didn’t think there was an official policy preventing gypsies from enrolling in school. But it seemed true enough, because no gypsy children were enrolled in our school, or were some enrolled and managed to hide their identity? How did one hide one’s identity? I thought of Margarita, the curly red-haired girl who sat in the last seat in the back of the class because she was the tallest. She looked “exotic” enough to us but never admitted to gypsy ancestry when kids teased her. We thought of her as “Spanish,” which was foreign, but nonetheless still part of our ancestry. The idea of hiding one’s background hadn’t occurred to me at that point. I would use hiding or disguise later in an American school. “My father said one day gypsies would start our own schools, but then we moved into another neighborhood, and every year it’s a new place for us. And they never got around to enrolling me. . . . I still want to learn to read and write.”

“I’ll teach you,” I volunteered. A smile sparked up on her face, but then just as quickly, it dissipated.

“Oh, no, no, no,” she said. “There’s always trouble.”

At that age, I only felt a mild disappointment, as if somebody didn’t want to play with me. But it began to dawn on my young mind that some
people weren’t wanted, or felt unwanted, or had been made to feel that way. One day at the local movie theater my mother made a point of moving out of her seat when a gypsy woman sat next to her. “They’re thieves,” she said. I didn’t question her choice and moved with her. I never connected the dots. My mother, who was warm, loving, and caring, made a hateful comment, but I didn’t see her as the same mother who also claimed faggots could be thrown down the cliff. It’s just the way things were.

The woman decided to move on that day, realizing she was not about to score some pocket money from a child who insisted he didn’t have any.

“Sometimes little kids with money want their fortunes read just like their parents,” she told me. “That’s really the only time you people let us into your homes,” she added, “because you think we have magic powers.”

“Well, don’t you?”

“We must have some sort of power that you people believe us. . . . Yes, so I suppose we do.”

I only heard the last part. They did have power, I thought. My eyes brightened up, and I decided to go running, as if scared that she would cast a spell over me. I looked back, and she was waving at me, laughing as well.

That was my only conversation with one of the people who lived in the colorful tents. From then on I would hear rumors, for example of a cousin attending a picturesque, extravagant, gypsy wedding that turned to tragedy when a jealous lover killed the groom. I would later discover that the highly charged scenario actually came from a play by Lorca, Blood Wedding, but my relatives in Chile seemed to get their stories from anywhere they could find them.

I would never see a gypsy student in my school, though years later another cousin claimed one enrolled in his school, and that the kids stared at him as if he’d been a Martian. By then, I knew the feeling. School was the place where one trained in the skills of condescension, hatred, and worse, but attitude came from home as well. For me, the bullying finally became too much, even for my mother. She finally broke down and lodged a complaint—for very specific, limited reasons, but it was something. Not only were my peers pushing me around in the third grade, which was of course considered natural, but now older boys began to get into the act. A group of boys from the sixth grade were coming up to me during recess and pushing me around, stealing my snacks, and unleashing a wave of punches and kicks on me. The boys from my class looked on in disbelief,
and probably some resentment. He’s our faggot, let us take care of him, was the apparent response, but they weren’t about to defend me in front of older boys. I began to arrive home with more severe bruises all over my body (the earlier bruises had never really shocked anyone).

My mother walked me to school one day and demanded to talk to the school principal about this new group of older bullies. The principal came up to me and made me tell her everything I knew, everything I’d told my mother. She actually looked shocked. How can that be? Such things shouldn’t be happening at our school! Where is the pride of being a good citizen and a good Christian? She seemed sincere, if naive, as if she really couldn’t believe such things went on around her. It wasn’t an act. The principal told my mother she’d take care of it. I was suspicious at first. When my mother left, I thought: There she goes, leaving me in this nest of vipers again. But the principal was a woman of her word: she walked me into the one classroom of sixth graders and made me stand in front of the class. The sixth-grade teacher then told me to point to the boys who’d been bullying me. I felt like a traitor, but I did it anyway. I pointed the finger at all five of them. They looked horrified, as if they feared being sent to some detention camp in Patagonia. Alas, humiliation would be strong enough to get the message across.

Their teacher made them get up, and in front of the class, she went up to each and every one of them. “You ought to be ashamed of pushing around a smaller boy like that!”

The boys looked down at the floor, their faces blushing in embarrassment, and tears were falling from their faces. The shame of having to stand in front of their class and be accused of beating up on a smaller boy worked wonders. They never bothered me again. But the ethics of bullying were limited to this one phenomenon, this one unscripted rule: you may not bully boys who are smaller. Bullying boys your own size and age, however, was allowed. My mother never lodged that other complaint and seemed to fear that I would come across even more of a sissy if she—mommy—were to come to school to denounce those boys as well. I was on my own. Much later in life, she’d say she feared I would not grow up to be a man if she were always protecting me. Sending me off to a school every day where I’d be harassed and walk around in fear was supposed to make me a man.

At home the world created by the tightly knit Bravo family created a completely different structure. I was lucky that school was simply a
four-hour ordeal, from eight a.m. till noon. The Chilean school system couldn’t afford an all-day shift. The schools had two shifts, two separate classes. Afternoon victims populated the school from noon to four, and I would spend the rest of my day at home, where safety and comfort reigned.

My enterprising mother quit her job in the assembly line of a vitamin factory and opened up a used magazine and book store. The commuting to and from work had become monotonous. Two buses in the morning and then back made the whole thing a waste of time. Having my mother running a business from home seemed ideal. This new business allowed her the freedom to run it as she pleased and to control her own hours. My grandfather knocked down a wall in the one bedroom facing the street, and this became the store where I spent afternoons reading everything I could lay my hands on. Our neighborhood was by no means wealthy, but it was enterprising and populated by the country folk who had gone into the city to make their mark on the world. We were all settlers in the area. We couldn’t afford to open up an actual book store, and most people in our neighborhood couldn’t afford to buy books. So we did not sell them; we traded them. That’s why it was called a cambio de revistas, a magazine exchange, which also became a book exchange. People would bring used books or magazines and trade them for a minimal fee. My mother also added candies, which attracted children and were an extra source of revenue. Every penny counted; they added up to savings and greater financial independence.

Imagine the traffic of a small neighborhood shop where people came to get their magazines. The latest Superman, or Batman, Lone Ranger, the Archies, or Little Lulu. Adults had their own magazines—romances for women, girlie magazines for men—although naked centerfolds were unheard of yet. In a few years, they’d take over. Meanwhile, a woman in a tight swimsuit kept the gentlemen looking satisfied and coming back for more. Women preferred illustrated romances and specifically the novels of the Spanish author Corín Tellado, a phenomenal raconteur who sold millions of books depicting and revealing the love fantasies of young and older women alike. I was a fan of the superheroes myself; but an occasional new magazine would catch my attention and imagination, such as an illustrated import from Mexico about the adventures of Aztec Gods. The popular Chilean cartoon the Little Condor, or Condorito, would also be exported to Mexico and other parts of Latin America, and the pop culture weekly Ritmo
revealed the latest showbiz gossip that alerted us to the latest scandals, Elvis’s wedding to Priscilla, the Supremes touring the world, a Jackie Onassis sighting, Julie Christie winning her Oscar for *Darling*, Liz Taylor for *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

“That was my husband and me,” commented a friend of my mother who dropped by to talk about the movies and trade a copy of *Ritmo* for another. Like Martha and George in Edward Albee’s play of marital discord and existential delusions, filmed with Liz and her husband Richard Burton, this friend smoked and drank late into the night. She wasn’t a drunk, she made sure to emphasize, but when she and her husband got into it, things got nasty. “Maybe I don’t start making out with the young guest, but we often throw things against the wall. It’s about getting it all out, and then making up afterwards. That movie was about us.”

People dropped by and shared these tidbits with my mother, who listened patiently and soothed them whenever she could by offering a cup of tea. I would listen in on these conversations, while pretending to read my comic books. At other times my mother withstood the assault of vendors who showed up carrying eggs, homemade bread, churros, German pastries (*el berlin* in particular, a donut look-alike minus the hole, with a creamy filling), and countless other concoctions we couldn’t buy all day without losing our appetite for dinner. My mother politely turned down the various offers, such as shoe shine and housecleaning services and whatever else people cared to offer.

None of these people sparked the children’s imagination quite the same way as did the homeless El Falabella, a local man with mental disabilities who slept in alleys until the neighbors built him a wooden shack that looked like a dog house. There was no such thing as a NIMBY (not in my backyard) movement in our neighborhood. These people actually built the shack in between two front yards, facing the traffic of the streets and quite visible to everyone. Falabella would crawl into the space and sleep because it was too small for him to actually stand up inside it. The same people would allow him to use their facilities, and neighbors took turns feeding him. When a gang of hooligans attacked him one night, men from the neighborhood ran out to chase after them and later to soothe him with a glass of wine. The police came and took away a couple of teenagers who had mistakenly imagined this man had money in his shack. El Falabella survived through handouts. He did not live in a cash economy.
He had been named after the most elegant clothing store, Falabella, in downtown Santiago. His own clothes were hand-me-downs, which he wore until they were in tatters and somebody else in the neighborhood came along to replace his raggedy sweater or his torn pants. El Falabella wore his rags and accepted his name without ever signaling he understood the irony. He spoke like a little child, and he often came to sit at the doorstep of our store until he would tire and return to wandering the streets. But if anything appeared sad to him, one would find him in a corner crying like a five-year-old.

“Why are you crying?” I asked him once, surrounded by other children who gathered around him looking curious. He reached into his pocket and showed us the lifeless remains of a pigeon he had found by the road.

“‘Ta muerto,” he said.

He stood soothing the head of the dead bird with loving care. The children told him to bury it. He allegedly carried it until it disintegrated in his pocket.

It occurred one day to the local movie owner to put El Falabella to work, to join the market economy and thrive. He made El Falabella sweep the entire theater with a broom every morning after a long night of triple features. One day in winter, storms brought a violent downpour into the city, which flooded part of the theater. El Falabella came out screaming, “Es el diluvio.” El Falabella knew enough about the Bible to think it was a sign of the end of times. He broke out into tears again until the children consoled him that this was an average winter flood, which had damaged at most the interior of an old movie theater, but was not the end of times.

Many years later, El Falabella was found dead inside his shack, and his body was laid to rest at a local cemetery with the help of a priest and a couple of neighborhood men who were the pallbearers. Nobody else showed up. No one knew where he’d come from, or how he’d gotten there. The priest threw away the countless Nescafé containers that he used as plates for his daily meals, and which were his only possessions.

My mother’s shop helped open up the neighborhood to me in ways I would not have experienced behind the safety of our home. In that comfortable world, my grandparents carried on as if living in a garden, watering plants and looking over our vines year after year to point out the annual blossoming of buds into grapes in various colors—shades of black,
red, and rosé—which would hang from everywhere in our patio, looking sumptuous. My grandfather’s rule was not to touch them until they were ripe and ready to be eaten. The store, however, brought the public further into what had once been a bedroom. Into it poured fellow citizens, some genuine eccentrics, and also the vendors and beggars, and it was a new education for me as well. The rest of the world opened up, too, now that we had access to countless books and magazines.

My mother supplemented my initial reading of cartoons and children’s books with specific choices she made on my behalf. She started to bring home one by one the issues of an encyclopedia called *El Monitor*. Once you owned all the issues with the letter A, you then bought a cover that bound all of them together, and it created a piecemeal encyclopedia. Unfortunately, my mother left for the United States as we were completing the D’s, and because the collection stalled at that letter, today I have the habit of saying, “I learned everything in Chile from A to D.” In the United States, one would have access to encyclopedias at a public library.

The popular magazines also sponsored contests, and stores like ours sold the coupons necessary to enter them. Participants bought an album made up of categories, such as singers, movie actors, the seven wonders of the world, or famous landmarks such as the Empire State Building, the Eiffel Tower, or the Sistine Chapel. The pictures came in tiny envelopes, which I opened with anticipation to fill up the album. But the business of selling them required the publishers to try everyone’s patience. Some of the pictures were not released till the last weeks of the competition. Our store became the crossroads for the trading of the repeat pictures. Once the album was filled up, the participants entered the drawing held at the end of that trading season. We attended a concert by well-known Chileans singers, and that’s when the announcements were made. Top prizes included a trip to Disneyland and a French Citröen. Smaller prizes would have to make do when the bigger ones proved more elusive. A neighborhood woman, in her late fifties or so and not exactly an athlete, had her picture featured in the latest issue of *Ritmo*, as she proudly held her prize: a soccer ball. We had a good laugh with that one, as we imagined the tiny woman going home to put her ball on top of a trophy case and exhibit it to all her friends and relatives as her prize in the contest, not letting anyone play with it.

The woman who won the trip to Disneyland was featured in another issue of *Ritmo* after she traveled to Anaheim, California. She went into a
store where she found a Chilean woman working her shift. The Chilean woman, an immigrant herself, is said to have broken down in tears to have found a fellow Chilean so far from home, and the two women were pictured in the magazine embracing. An old lady read the article and started to cry in front of my mother, who soothed her, as she did so many others, with a cup of tea. Other comadres came around to read about the woman who’d gone to Disneyland. My mother got sick of the weeping women and put away the issue. “Ya basta con el lloriqueo, por favor,” she said.

What type of education was this? Few children in my neighborhood had access to the information I was privy to, for better or for worse. It was a pop culture bonanza. Surely, Ariel Dorfman, the Chilean writer/novelist who later wrote an entire book (How to Read Donald Duck) denouncing the protocapitalist propaganda found in cartoons such as the Disney ones, especially Donald Duck, would—I’m certain—denounce my education as the brainwashing of a child that enabled his participation in the excesses of the market. Mr. Dorfman’s book reveals an aspect of my childhood to the world. At least in the Western democracies, of which Chile was one, popular culture would compete with the local parish, or temples, or the various other faiths struggling for one’s attention. Ours was not a monolithic culture. Chile boasted a range of political parties, from conservative and Christian Democratic to Socialist and Communist. Ideologies ranged from extreme right to extreme left, and the country had not yet succumbed to a dictatorship of either political persuasion that would limit points of view to one chosen ideology—as would happen in Chile on the right, as it happened in Cuba on the left. To blame Donald Duck (or actually Disney) for the brainwashing would be to ignore that Ariel Dorfman, a leftist, himself lived in Chile and contributed to the competing ideologies of that period. Somebody in Chile—or at least books by foreign writers allowed to be read in a permissible cultural climate—had clearly contributed to shaping the ideological fervor needed to turn against Donald Duck. In his memoir, Looking South, Headed North, Dorfman narrates how children marched outside his home denouncing his anti-Donald Duck book. It’s possible, had I known about such a march, that I might have joined them, although today I understand Mr. Dorfman’s contribution to the debate and would avoid this march as being against my own Voltairian principle of defending freedom of speech for points of view I don’t share. Dorfman also valiantly
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admits his own ideological excesses at the time that made him write a book denouncing Donald Duck, helping him come to terms, one would think, with the duck.

My mother felt so strongly about learning that she couldn’t rely on the magazines at our store alone. She bought me illustrated books on the history of Chile as well as world history, technological innovations, the making of cars and planes, flora and fauna, and geographical landmarks. The first book I read was, clearly, a Marxist’s worst nightmare: *Cinco centavos para gastar*, or *How to Spend Five Cents*. A child gets coins from his family, and he goes around comparing prices, to see how best to spend them. Nobody warned me about credit cards at that time, which would have been a real service considering my future dependence on them, but no one owned a credit card in my family until we moved to the United States, where we would pick up such a ghastly habit. In comparison, a child learning how to best allocate his five cents now appears quaint by comparison, even economically sound.

Then came the fairy tales—Little Red Riding Hood, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty—with the obligatory Disney tie-ins. Hours were spent learning the basic story, then singing with the songs that played on our record player. The soundtracks and the illustrated books—all contributed to that whole new world of unrelenting sweetness and wonder that Mr. Disney advocated, as long as one wasn’t a unionized worker in Anaheim. The illustrated biblical tales came next, in the form of an album in which I would collect pictures of all the Bible’s heroes and heroines, including the semi-clad Samson and Delilah. The Bible held an alluring sway for a child like me, not simply for its religion, but for its sensual delights. Pictures of biblical heroes in loincloths did not help abet modesty and innocent thoughts. And albums on national and international soccer teams did not simply make me aware of the national pastime. Soccer was something in which I wasn’t normally included, since boys wouldn’t play with me, and I in turn never learned how to play. But the pictures of soccer players in shorts kindled a mild sensation I couldn’t define at the time, attraction for the forbidden male.

Next came acceptance into the Disney Club. I never knew if Mr. Disney owned the local branch of his office, or some enterprising local businessman opened this up as a chain store of sorts. We collected “points” for the Disney magazines we bought. We sent in our points, and the club
honored us with military designation, a rather creepy practice in a country in which the military would eventually depose the constitutionally elected president. Since we owned a magazine store, we had obvious access to this privilege. My mother sent in the coupons to prove our devotion to the Disney cult, and we would get in the mail a pin labeling the lucky child a “sergeant” or a “captain.” I eventually earned enough points to be declared a Disney “general,” and then I showed up at the Disney office downtown for a special tea service with all the other little “officers” from throughout the city. I wore my general stripes, and I was one of the few, one of the brave. This was clearly the type of education Dorfman railed against. I was a proud Chilean general, fighting for the international nation-state of Disneyland.

My mother paid for private English lessons. We couldn’t afford a private American or British Academy, so we had to make do with an eccentric, bizarre old lady tutor who once showed up at our school calling herself an expert. Several parents took her up on her offer, and on Saturday afternoons, the school would lend her space for private lessons. This old woman, dressed up in a delicate gray suit with the reddest face I’d ever seen, a product of overdone makeup and powder gone wrong, or perhaps just plain alcoholism, stood in front of the class, making us repeat words. Behind that look of austerity and sternness, I came to sense desperation. She wore the same suit every week, and she hardly ever smiled, as if life had been rough on her. Why wasn’t she in a regular teaching job? Had they eliminated English teachers from the schools? Or just her? I felt her pain, but I didn’t like her. My grandmother and other elderly women were warm and friendly, loving, and eager to touch and hug. This lady kept us away with generous dabs of cologne that assaulted our senses and made us keep our distance just to avoid fainting. This sad little woman had no lesson plans other than lists of words meant to be repeated over and over again. I had no idea whether her pronunciation was English or American, or anything Americans or English would recognize as their own. I fear today that she was a charlatan soaking money out of parents who wanted their children to gain the distinction of speaking English. Repetition of words is all we did for eight weeks until my mother put a stop to the whole thing. She didn’t have to go to class to see the debacle for herself. I came home with the list of words that we repeated in class, badly pronounced at that, and that was it.
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“I could have done that,” my mother said, and stopped paying for the lessons.

Learning English was eventually accomplished the hard way, in the sink-or-swim policy of language immersion a few years later in the United States.

Most important for my education, however, and above all the decisions that she might have made on my behalf, was my mother’s enthusiastic, restless need to simply get away from the house and the neighborhood whenever she could. She left my grandparents in charge of the store, and we would go off into downtown Santiago to explore a new facet of the city, eager to learn what was new, or whatever would stir our imagination. My mother needed to see it for herself—the latest hit film, the latest art exhibit, an international exposition, a troupe of Russian ballet dancers on a goodwill tour. A visit to relatives would also do. My aunt Gladys (another cousin) ran races, and we would go see her train. Sometimes, we joined her for laps around the National Stadium. She and her equally athletic husband, Hernán, were artisans who made copper figures they sold to tourists, and they would take them to expositions that showcased the work of local artisans. I would sit watching customers ogle at their products, and the money—always modest, but an income nonetheless—begin to pile up. Artisans held parties, too, along with poetry readings, theater skits, and dance, with their children making circles around the adults. These children, including the boys, miraculously, appeared too busy enjoying themselves to dedicate their time to beat up on me. I met cousins who actually talked about arts or were learning themselves to make pottery vases and copper figures, and who showed me how figures got made. Thanks to these excursions, I learned that children did more with their time than think up ways to hurt the local sissy.

My mother’s constant and insistent practice of taking me out of the neighborhood whenever possible was one of the most enduring memories of those earlier years. Mother was the prototype of the exuberant nanny, the Maria von Trapp of the Andes instead of the Alps. This exuberant young woman made us children run through the streets of Santiago singing Chilean songs—all that was missing was the Rodgers and Hammerstein soundtrack. The kids often complained that their parents didn’t take them anywhere, mostly citing lack of money. My mother showed that it
didn’t take great amounts of money to attend an exhibit or hike up the hill of Santa Lucía. A short bus ride away, in downtown Santiago, a big city could be explored, taking one away from TV sets and, more importantly, from the dreary sameness that our impoverished neighborhoods often created. My mother excelled at fulfilling a child’s curiosity. From the national museum to the former Spanish fort of Santa Lucía, she provided the field trips necessary to make me yearn to know more. She also knew how to back up a field trip with an illustrated children’s book—the Spanish Conquest illustrated. Stories of Indian warriors, Lautaro and Caupolicán, the Spanish conquistador Pedro de Valdivia, whose portraits hang in the national gallery, and the hero of Chilean independence, Bernardo O’Higgins.

An international exposition would open downtown, and Mother would find a way to be there. Exhibits of world cultures, pictures of people living in China, in Russia, in Europe or Africa with demonstrations of dress, music, and food made for fascinating viewing. My mother would scour the papers for announcements of these events, and the moment she found one, we got dressed up. The idea was to look one’s best. Mother wore a distinct dress sewn by my grandmother with a movie star in mind, an elegant riff on an Audrey Hepburn outfit in Breakfast at Tiffany’s, perhaps with a bit of cleavage and leg showing. I would have on a white shirt, with a jacket, sometimes a bowtie. When we visited downtown, we were expected to show class, no matter how poor we might be. Lower-middle-class people especially seemed eager to show good taste and manners.

Then my theatrical ambitions got an inauspicious start when my mother told me we were going to see a Disney film. It turned out she had lied. She couldn’t find a babysitter, and she had tickets to go see a play instead. When the curtain went up in a darkened theater, I didn’t see any animation, no talking or singing animals, no flying elephants with long ears. Instead, a live human being was talking, a young woman in a party dress mouthing off some adult dialogue about relationships. It couldn’t be! I began to protest, to cry, loudly kicking the seats in front. We were sitting on the last seats up against the wall. In order to get this crying child out of the theater, my mother had to make the entire row of patrons stand up, as I continued to wrestle in her arms, rebelling against the idea of live theater. Fortunately, my mother found a better way to get me to see a play—one with puppets, which drew my attention and made me feel the theater was something I could enjoy, and even participate in.
She bought me an entire set of puppets of the Red Riding Hood saga, which included the title heroine, the wolf, the grandma, and the woodsman. She bought the plastic heads, to be exact, and my grandmother sewed cloth onto them to give them a body. My hand would slip into the cloth, and I manipulated the heads with my fingers. After a while, I started playing all the characters myself. “Fine. If you’re going to play all the characters,” my mother said, “then let’s put on a puppet show.”

“A puppet show. Sure, let’s do it,” I said.

In our store, she passed the word around to all the mothers in the neighborhood. Puppet show on Saturday at three p.m. My grandfather nailed together a frame for my puppet theater, and I set it up in our magazine store.

That Saturday, we filled up the store with children who bought up all the candy, an early lesson in commercial tie-ins, and then out came Little Red Riding Hood inside the frame box where I hid below manipulating the puppets. With the help of a little cousin, who was my “backstage” assistant, I played all the characters’ voices while he held the opposing character—Red Riding Hood vs. the Wolf, the Wolf vs. Grandma, the Hunter vs. the Wolf.

We were the only spectacle anywhere in that vicinity. Puppet shows often came with traveling fairs. Otherwise, locals just didn’t do such a thing. The puppet show became an addition to Saturday afternoons, except that my mother couldn’t afford to buy more figures. There were only so many kids wanting to watch “Riding Hood” over and over again. The puppet show, repeated too many times, predictably had a limited run, and my mother began to prepare for her radical departure for the United States. At this age, however, I felt the stir of theatrical frenzy—I wanted to put on more shows. One afternoon, a throng of relatives and neighbors’ kids gathered to celebrate a cousin’s birthday party. I decided then I would re-enact Zeffirelli’s film version of *Romeo and Juliet*, which had stirred enthusiasm for the stage and for the sensuality of the love story, but, of course, I didn’t have the script, and I had no idea where one could locate such a thing. Stay put, I told the other kids, I’ll write a new script based on what I could remember from the movie, so I went off into a bedroom with paper and pen and isolated myself, thinking that in fifteen minutes I could pen the dialogue needed to at least re-enact a scene. But the words wouldn’t come. The simplest scenario, even when borrowed from somebody else,
required language, which failed me. The parents came to pick up their children, and still I hadn’t written a word. The cousins came to stare at the sight of an eight-year-old writer suffering from a major case of the Block. They left looking disappointed since I’d stirred up their enthusiasm for spectacle and then couldn’t deliver.

But I did manage to stage a beauty pageant. My mother had recently left for the United States, and I doubt she would have approved of such a thing (there was also the stigma of a boy getting too enthusiastic about such a feminine enterprise). I was left to the care of my grandmother, who died within a month of my mother’s departure. My grandfather became immediately preoccupied with marrying the younger woman, Teresa, and the other relatives taking care of me were obliging and busy enough to let me go ahead with my strange scheme to honor local beauty. I chose to crown a proud Miss La Palmilla, a junior one. But I didn’t have time to actually to draw up elaborate rules and judge contestants. I chose the next-door neighbor, Charo, to be Miss La Palmilla, by proclamation, and then two more girlfriends from the neighborhood who didn’t mind being declared the runners-up, or the “princesses,” as we called them. I set up a podium in the backyard, and I invited a set of curious kids from the neighborhood, bribing them in with soda and cake. My grandfather readily handed over the money for the treats, and I even went shopping by myself and set up the snacks on a table in the backyard. The girls used their white communion dresses to play the part, and my great-grandmother Natalia made the sashes for the three winners. It was a good distraction for an eighty-year-old woman who’d come to Santiago to see one of her daughters convalesce and die. It was a case of a child keeping adults distracted and occupied. I played the host in our backyard beneath the grape vines, which were beginning to flourish in the late spring. I invited the contestants to stand in front of the crowd and revealed, in ascending order, the first runner-up, the second runner-up, and then . . . there she is . . . the winner, Miss La Palmilla herself.

Charo took her victory seriously. She shed tears as she waved at the kids applauding her with a somewhat lame, bored look. Charo had been a neighbor ever since I could remember. Her slanted eyes made people rudely call her “la china.” She was pretty and, yes, exotic looking. She was my playmate for years, and people predicted we would grow up to marry. In fact, when I went to visit in 1975 in the full blossom of the teenage years,
she taught me the delicate craft of French kissing. She declared her love, but I simply took her technique and, eventually, rather shyly, applied it to a few young men later in life. My eagerness to crown her queen, however, was interpreted as love and conviction.

That afternoon, knowing the party would end quickly after the crowning, I determined we would then parade the queen and her two princesses around the neighborhood. We should walk, I told my gathering of curious kids who had never been involved in a beauty pageant before, and then the queen and the princesses can wave at everybody. One of the princesses had a better idea.

“My dad owns a pick-up truck,” Princess 1 said. “We can ride in the back and wave at the people from above, like a carriage.” She went to fetch her dad, who arrived looking perplexed, even dizzy. He’d been drinking at a local bar. He was perfectly game, even enthusiastic about our idea—but he was also dangerously drunk. We didn’t care; we wanted spectacle. The kids piled up in the back of the truck. I set up the queen and her princesses on their own chairs. Where was my liability insurance for such a thing? In Chile, nobody in our neighborhood talked about such a thing as insurance. Our lives were a game that destiny played, and there was no point worrying about it. The drunken father drove us around the neighborhood slowly and at an even pace in order to allow curious passersby to stare at the spectacle.

A bunch of boys ran behind us. “What’s going on?”

“It’s the queen,” I told them. “Behold the queen!”

“What an idiot! What a faggot!” was their typical response, but the rest of the neighbors seemed eager to play along.

“Wave at the queen,” a mother told her little children, and then a whole bunch of other children came by to wave along. “Look, she’s so pretty in that dress! Look how pretty!”

“How can I become queen?” one of the girls shouted at the truck.

“It’s a privilege,” I told her. “Many will try, but only one will make it.”

“But I want to be queen!”

“Try next year!” I told her. One of the princesses stuck her tongue out at her.

The truck went around the neighborhood once, which must have taken half an hour or so. We had managed to attract the attention of all the children, who came running to stare at the strange spectacle. Some of the boys waved obscene gestures, but most of them appeared genuinely in awe.
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When we got back to our house, the mother of Princess 1 was waiting, looking upset.

“You’re drunk!” she shouted at her husband. “You’re driving these kids around the neighborhood and putting them all at risk.”

“Mommy, he was driving slowly!” The little girl came to defend her father. “Nothing happened!”

“We just wanted to exhibit the queen,” I told her.

“Oh, what queen?” She took one glance at the sensitive Charo, who still had tears in her eyes and who seemed to think this woman was ruining her day. “Who chose her queen?”

“I choose the queen!” I shouted back.

“Who says?”

“I say! It’s my pageant!”

“That’s right,” said the driver. “He’s the master of ceremonies, more respect for the boy. But hey,” he turned to me, “next time, you make my daughter the queen, you hear?”

“Of course,” I said, making promises I’d never keep.

“All right, we’re all going home!” announced the mother. “Get these kids off the truck. No more beauty pageants for any of you.”

Thus began my career in theatrical spectacles . . . of some kind or other, and the reviews that go with them.

At school, the usual bullying, pushing, and pulling continued unabated for the remaining time of my residence. At first, my mother’s personal tutoring appeared to complement whatever I learned at school, but in reality, it was school that ended complementing, if barely, everything my mother taught me at home. Whatever the teacher tried at school, my mother did better, including reading, writing, and arithmetic. Her tutoring ensured I got perfect scores. But my local school would remain an unhappy place for most of the children. Poverty—and the poverty of imagination among most parents and teachers—seemed to ensure failure. I don’t remember these children talking about the future except to dread it. I sensed the sadness and the frustration in my peers’ lives, and I felt distinctly set apart. My mother made it clear I was destined for greater things, and my ego was swollen enough in this one aspect of my life to make me feel that attitude. I refuse to believe I was haughty and condescending toward the rest of the students, but I simply felt that with better grades, I would get out of such an
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environment. I at least held on to the hope that being different would make me special, a cut above, even though paradoxically I was a sissy, not quite a man, not quite human. I made the best of my distinction nonetheless. I knew I had it better than most of these kids. My mother’s imagination—her unique enthusiasm and curiosity for everything—allowed her to stir up mine. Imagination was the one resource we had plenty of. But it was difficult to share it with children in my school, a place most went to fail.

Another important difference, which worked in my favor for once, was that my mother was single and felt no qualms about leaving everything behind and going to the United States. This aspiration began early enough for me to sense hope during all those years of attending the same school. I had reasons to believe I would one day leave my abusive peers behind and start a new life far away.

The first glimpse of this life was the announcement that my aunt Nelly had landed in Valparaíso on a ship in the middle of the winter in 1968. She was making her way back to Santiago, and we would catch a glimpse of this traveler at her sister’s—Aunt Gladys’s—house. It meant taking a bus downtown and dressing up, which was part of the event. She had returned, this much-vaunted, talked-about cousin who had left to go work in the United States. She already inhabited a special place in my imagination. I imagined her as one did a foreign visitor, an adventurer, or a worldly traveler, someone with stories to tell and maybe gifts. She had flown away to the United States once, and now she had returned in an ocean liner. I remembered her vaguely as a figure from earlier in my childhood, mostly a plump woman with small eyelids and a big infectious grin. She had been one of us, a commoner. But years had passed, and my grandmother said everything changes about you once you travel abroad. Some grand transformation would bring her back to us in some charmed new form. I expected a leaner, taller woman looking like a dancer from one of the Elvis Presley movies, dancing the go-go while wearing miniskirts, boots up to her knees, and a fat ribbon to keep her long hair away from her forehead.

I was wrong about the look. She still looked like the aunt Nelly I remembered, but the changes were in her attitude, her smile, the way she could answer questions about Washington, D.C. She had walked the streets and seen the monuments, and yet her work was altogether humble. The disparity between what a maid could expect in Chile—mostly abuse, poor wages, and a classist condescension verging on disdain—and this maid from the
United States made the jobs seem like worlds apart. She was the live-in maid for a Bethesda, Maryland, couple, and yet she could somehow afford international travel. Aunt Nelly had just landed on a Chilean commercial ship, not a cruise liner. She and a Chilean friend (a lovely, humorous, warm, older lady, La Chepita, who also worked in the D.C. area as a live-in maid) had managed to get a cabin on a ship that normally didn't carry passengers. It was bringing back auto parts from Detroit and other American exports. La Chepita was blessed with contacts, one of whom happened to get a friend to grease the wheels, and they were allowed to ride with Chilean merchant mariners who serenaded them as the only women on the ship.

My mother explained it this way: “La Chepita has a son who's now a lawyer, and he knows people.” That was it. That was supposed to explain it all. But what was odd to me was that a lawyer in Chile was considered a prestigious position, and yet it was no secret that his studies were paid for by the hard-working woman who spent considerable time working as a maid in the United States. And now these two women had undertaken a virtual cruise that allowed them to visit their family in Chile. They crossed the Panama Canal and arrived in Valparaíso, Chile, rested, tanned, and full of life. A country that allowed the domestic help enough leisure time to undertake such an adventure seemed miraculous. Aunt Nelly was still the plump, lively, woman in her thirties, but she showed the stamina and spark of Nell Carter singing “The Joint Is Jumping” in Ain't Misbehavin’, a monolith of a hard-drinking, hard-partying woman during the Harlem Renaissance. Nell and Nelly became one person in my imagination.

During this get-together, I noticed Aunt Nelly approach my mother and, handing her an envelope, say, “My boss sent you this letter.” Why would the boss do that? Correspond with my mother? I discovered that Aunt Nelly had been planning to bring somebody to the United States to work alongside her. She had been alone for a long time in a neighborhood in which nobody else spoke Spanish. Her boss, a matronly woman with a protective, motherly attitude, had advised her, through a translator, “Stop crying, Nelly, I'll bring you one of your sisters to the U.S. so you won’t be so alone.” None of her sisters was available. They were married or had some other commitment that prevented them from coming. Instead, they found a cousin, my mother, eager, willing, ready to undertake the adventure. That evening the two women conferred about future plans. I didn’t know my
mother was preparing to go to the United States. “I didn’t want to disapp-
point you,” my mother told me years later. “If things didn’t come through,
it would have seemed premature to get you all excited beforehand.”

For at least two more years, I heard my mother talk about her visits to
the U.S. Embassy in Santiago. After the passage of the 1965 Immigration
and Nationality Act, Chile got its quota of resident alien visas, and my
mother had been among the first to apply. Knowing her, she was probably
the first in line. With the sponsorship of Aunt Nelly’s boss, my mother was
offered a job in the United States. Some time in June 1970, my mother
went to another routine meeting with the embassy people, who had been
holding her off for nearly two years. To her surprise, she was presented
with the paperwork that would later finalize the steps to get her an official
green card at a time when such cards were still green. She had become a
legal, fully documented immigrant to the United States.

One reason to hesitate was that my grandmother had become gravely
ill. She had undergone gall bladder surgery and suffered cardiac arrest
during the operation. The doctors revived her, yet she was left in a criti-
cal state. She gradually recovered during that winter but spent most of
her time in bed. My mother decided that my grandmother was dying of
“cancer of the pancreas,” but the doctors never confirmed that. They
could never point at anything other than gastrointestinal difficulties. My
mother’s diagnosis was based on symptoms she had read in a book. A Chil-
lean doctor, el Doctor Elizalde, had written a best-selling book about the
vegetarian lifestyle that also prescribed a specific diet for every malady one
could imagine. Fruits, whole grains, and vegetables would cure just about
everything. (That was the general thrust of his argument.) But my grand-
mother was too far along in a diet that included red meat and animal fats
to be resuscitated with a change to vegetarianism. Nor did she make an ef-
fort to stop eating meats. My mother’s diagnosis ended up being just as
good as anybody else’s because the doctors had no clear answers either.

Whatever her malady, it was killing her. With an ailing mother and a
child who was to be left to the care of a public school system that horrified
him, María could have been easily persuaded not to go, but my grand-
mother herself spoke out against changing her mind.

“My mother didn’t want to hear me complaining that I had a great op-
portunity and didn’t take it because of her,” María said, decades later. “She
didn’t have long to live, and she knew it. There was no point in me passing up this sudden chance to work abroad and do something different with my life. She herself had left the countryside to go settle in a new life in Santiago. Unlike my stepfather, she didn’t beg me to change my mind, and instead encouraged me to take the plunge, so I did.”

During an evening in late September 1970, a few weeks after the historic election of the Socialist president Salvador Allende, a flock of Cáceres family members and friends accompanied my mother to the airport for some history making of her own. Today’s Santiago doesn’t allow for family members to watch a plane pull away and then take off. Security concerns prevent one from walking a member to the actual gate of departure, and one has to watch behind a glass panel where no one will hear a bon voyage shout. Back then, Mother left the gate on a bus that transported her and other passengers to the plane. She gave us a final wave before boarding, and then she was off. We were like a fan club—a crowd of twenty-five or so—waving and applauding, creating a ruckus that people associated with celebrities. The plane disappeared into the darkness. My mother was gone to the other edge of the world.

My mother would not have left me alone, however, without knowing I was well accompanied. An entire family, of aunts, cousins, even my great-grandmother, would contribute their share of coping with a difficult, moody kid such as myself. The family was already rallying around my ailing grandmother, known to everyone as “La Jerny.” A death watch began as soon as my mother left. Visitors invaded the house from every corner of the country. There was no time to be alone. La Jerny held on for an entire month and got a chance to receive one of her daughter’s vivid, detailed letters, revealing the long plane ride to Miami, where she changed planes for Washington, D.C., the taxi drive to the house in Bethesda, Maryland, where Aunt Nelly worked, and then her introduction into a house where she had been set up to work for another family. My mother fulfilled the purpose of keeping Aunt Nelly company, but another cycle of preparations would begin. My mother intended to bring me along.

A month after my mother’s departure, La Jerny died. Her prolonged ailment had slowly taken the light out of her. She kept her daughter’s letter nearby on her lamp table and made me read it out loud every night before she went to bed. Then one morning in October she did not wake up.
Shadwoing these circumstances, at the school—the prison, as I had begun to call it—a small miracle occurred during my final year. Our teacher, a severe, regal, thin, but pretty woman, Señora Arriagada, had fallen ill and required an operation. She was gone for the rest of the year. A substitute arrived, briefly, who added to the usual horror with his bullying and humiliation of students. On the first day he decided discipline would be his theme. Every question that was answered badly netted a slap on the palm of the hand with a ruler—for just about everyone except me. I would pay for that in the schoolyard, but by then I was used to it. This gentleman, rather pudgy and red faced, lasted only a few days. For some inexplicable and merciful reason, he was reassigned to another classroom. And the next day, into our classroom of nearly thirty students, both male and female, walked a certain Mr. Mendoza. He was a short, dark-looking gentleman with a thin moustache. He entered smiling with a comfortable stride, which already revealed a different disposition. A sincere, warm smile went a long way to pacify a classroom.

He initiated his lesson plan by writing out some words on the entire chalkboard. We thought: Oh no, homework of some kind, words to memorize, and whoever gets it wrong would be severely beaten. Instead, he made us get up and sing the words. What he had written down were simply lyrics to some folkloric song about Chilean heroes. It didn't matter really what the song was. He made us get up, to sing loud and proud. What a concept! From then on, Mr. Mendoza began the day's lesson with two or three songs, sometimes repeating ones we'd already learned just to get them right. He created, of all things, a chorus out of us. But more importantly, he created, for the first time, a contented class. I didn't think my schoolmates would ever walk around looking cheerful or generous. I remember that year—even as my mother left and my grandmother was ill—as a time of contentedness, at least at school. The songs we learned woke us up for the first hour, and then we would happily work with Mr. Mendoza on the inevitable math assignments or the memorization of vocabulary. Whatever he cared to address, he had our attention. He had earned it. We sang about everything—about waking up in the morning to plough the fields (a Victor Jara song, most likely), or some distant heroic battle, or a religious song about brotherhood. Somehow, this incredible teacher
managed to salvage school for us all. For the first time, I believed my peers were beginning to learn, and I would not have to stand out and be punished for it.

Mr. Mendoza prepared us for a presentation in front of the entire school, songs about the heroes we were supposed to remember from the fight for Chilean independence. He chose me to deliver a eulogy. I read the words from some book, about two heroic brothers who martyred their lives in the struggle against Spanish oppression. The words hardly mattered. The fact that we created a spectacle, did it in an organized manner, rehearsed meticulously, and then presented it to the rest of the school, which applauded us, seemed miraculous to me. That he chose me to deliver the words was also flattering, but what was more important was the teamwork that went into making this event.

I left for the United States not long after. Visiting Chile in September 1980, barely nine years later, I spotted Mr. Mendoza in downtown Santiago as he rushed to catch his bus. I thought about catching up with him and letting him know that he had saved my public schooling from the daily session of abuse it had become. I would have liked to explain the importance of finding a teacher like him at a time when my mother—my real teacher—had left, and I was in need of mentoring. But the bus whisked him away, and I never saw him again.