
19S17

MEXICO

IT IS MORE THE HOPE

Real life stories of the 2017 earthquake

Several Authors



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REAL LIFE STORIES OF THE 2017 EARTHQUAKE

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By

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PROLOGUE

Women who tell in writing their stories of the 2017 earthquake.

Women who dare to convey to us their intimate experiences of a national catastrophe of which we have not recovered yet.

Here you will find descriptions of what happened in women's voices.

From aggrieved looks that scrutinize through slits and dark holes, will find unusual stories.

They will revive the sufferings of then, because they are stories told without the filter of time.

Stories written the following day, when the sirens still sounded.

Only rage against a destiny that imposes its merciless fury is capable to make vibrate with the eloquence of these writings.

They are vigorous stories that not too many years ago women could not have told in writing because there were no spaces for them.

This volume comes to be added to other volumes from DEMAC publisher which is in charge of rescuing the most endearing stories of women who dare to tell them in writing.

We hope that these stories encourage other women to tell theirs so that they become part of the hundreds of autobiographical testimonies guarded by DEMAC.

AMPARO ESPINOSA RUGARCÍA

Founder and director of DEMAC

Carpe diem

Minerva Mendez Martinez

In memoriam Ana Paola de los Santos Velazquez
and the other souls who departed that day.

Today, I can tell my experiences of September 19, 2017. I am currently seventeen years old and I am in my second year at the preparatory school of General Lazaro Cardenas del Rio of the Benemerita Universidad Autonoma de Puebla (Meritorious Autonomous University of Puebla).

The facilities occupied by the High School correspond to a colonial construction that housed a religious order of closure, so called because the nuns had no contact with the people, and when a visit came, which was usually a family member, they covered their faces with a lace veil and that way they chatted. The façade has finishes in Talavera and its door is made of wood painted in brown. It is necessary to advance two meters, approximately, to reach a metal fence where the security personnel are there daily. When going through it we are in the first courtyard of the ground floor and, in the background, my classroom. On the right side is the Principal's office and, further ahead, one of the stairs that leads to the first and second level, where there are six rooms and cubicles for the teachers. On the left side of the ground floor there is a classroom, an empty room and the staircase which only leads to the first level. There are three cubicles, the sanitary for professors for ladies and for gentlemen, and the accounting office. The first and second levels are connected by a corridor, topped by a wrought iron railing that, at the same time, it serves as a canopy, where any fellow can lean against it to relax during free time. From there we listened to the murmur of the simultaneous chat of the companions and they could see us from above, depending on where we were.

The construction has a second patio and more classrooms; however, I stop here... Like every day, I got up at five in the morning, I took a shower, I got ready and had breakfast. Also, like every day, my dad accompanied me to the bus stop to board the minibus that left me a few blocks away from my school.

That Tuesday, I was very happy because I wore for the first time my tennis shoes and I had gone to school with a lot of enthusiasm, since on Wednesday 20th we would make a study trip to Teotihuacan. Usually we finish school at one thirty in the afternoon, but that day we left at one because the history teacher, responsible for the trip, had to organize our documents and do administrative procedures for the next day.

I went out of the classroom with my schoolmate Sofia, she is very small in weight and size, but she is tremendous. We chatted with some schoolmates about our expectations for the next day. Later, we went to the first patio, where we found my schoolmate Yuicelik, very similar to Sofia in her physical constitution, and very sensitive and kind. She asked us to accompany her for a while, since her younger sister, who is in first year, would go out until half past one. Sofia and I accepted, because it was early and we did not want to leave her alone.

There were several schoolmates scattered in the courtyard. We were in the center, the principal on the side, and next to him my classmates Shakti and Ana Paola, sitting on a bench. While we chatted, I pulled out my phone to check the time. I will never forget it: 1:14 p.m. I put away my cell phone and immediately felt “dizzy” and I thought I was getting sunstroke, since we had been under the sunlight. I looked up and looked down, my two classmates held me tight by the hand. I heard the principal shout: “Everyone to the center, all you guys to the center”. I started to feel fear and insecurity, my hands sweated and my smile left my face. There were more classmates of different grades and groups in that same courtyard.

There I realized that it was not dizziness. I had never felt the uncertainty so clearly, the confusion, the anguish, all at the same time... and the death so close. I knew I was not alone, but I do not remember being holding hands with my classmates, but my thoughts: first, it was to accept that it was a tremor, I tried to calm down, I thought about my family, about my youngest sister and my dad. Because of the time, I knew that they were together and, to some extent, that reassured me. Then I thought about my twelve-year-old brother, who is in his first year of secondary school, but just a few months ago he was in elementary school and my parents used to take him and pick him up along with my little sister; I still could not believe that he would arrive alone to his school. It was his entry time and he was alone, I was afraid of losing him and not seeing him again. That was when I felt a great desolation. Then, I thought about my mother, at the end, because deep down I knew that she was fine because I know her work area. Then, I thought of myself: will I be able to survive? Will I be able to get out of this place aware? Will I reunite with my family? Is it going to hurt me? What will happen to me?... I remember every instant, every moment, every action, every noise...

The floor was shaking brutally, a deep crunch was heard, the second level or third floor of my school moved back and forth, the windows jiggled, you could hear the cables moving, but that was not the worst, many ideas kept passing through my mind. I thought that I would stay there, really. I felt my body very hard and tense, I think that I was just waiting for the moment to receive and feel the rubble on me.

I thought about every pleasant moment that had marked my life, like when I was little and I played with my cousins, the time when I acted in kindergarten, or every Monday when I was part of the “escolta” (flag escort), or that I ran the civic program, plus those two days unique in my life, when I found out that I would have two life companions: my brothers.

I also thought about the bad times that I had been through. Many images came to my mind... They were only seconds or minutes, but I felt them as if they were really eternal, because the movement did not stop nor the crunching under our feet; I felt how the earth moved more each time and stronger.

The same movement, joined with the fact that we were holding hands, made us reel. I felt the need to step back and I pulled my classmates. When I looked up again, the worst began, I saw too much dust and I heard a very impressive roar... My glasses fogged up and my face got all the dust, I felt how some stones went into my sneakers. I knew that the school was falling down and I saw what I supposed: rubble, rocks... and a boy... a boy lying among that rubble, with his mouth and eyes opened, I do not know why, I looked him in the eyes and I could feel his pain... That day I learned that his name was Brandon, that he was an alumnus and that he was there visiting.

The floor was still vibrating and the movement was getting more intense every moment; I only wanted everything to end, I wanted to get out of there alive... When the intensity began to diminish, the principal said: “Get out of the building!” my classmates were still in shock and I had to pull them out. Those three meters from where we were until the exit, were eternal. I prayed in my thoughts so that nothing would fall on us as we moved, we had to jump among the pieces of construction because part of the corridor of the second level, which was the canopy, fell off; there was where Brandon got trapped, and we walked around him to not expose him anymore. Almost upon reaching the fence there was a girl lying with her leg injured, bleeding and showing the tissue of her muscle. Once again, the emotion was big and we felt terribly

impotent, we understood that we were not prepared for those circumstances... We all prayed that the structure would not continue to fall.

When we managed to get out of school, buildings, poles and light cables were still moving. Outside, the confusion was greater because the transients, everyday neighbors and tourists, who stopped their way to shelter themselves, saw a huge cloud come out from the preparatory school. Of the schoolfellow, the ones that we had already gathered outside, some were crying, others were still impressed, and no one knew what had happened exactly. When I saw Yuicelik I realized that she was crying, I hugged her, and among all her tears she said: "Mine, my little sister, my little sister does not come out!" I started crying, because I also thought about my brother, who was studying two blocks from where I was, also in an old house, and I did not know if the same thing had happened as here. We both felt that great fear. I tried to calm her down and reassure myself, I told her: "Everything will be fine and I will not leave you until we find her".

We started looking for her among all the people who were in the street, we shouted her name several times, we kept looking in opposite sides to find it faster, until finally I saw them hugging and crying together when they found each other. After, the two of them thanked me for helping them, and although I felt good for having seen them together, I still felt the fear and anguish of not seeing my brother again.

We heard the voices of some teachers who told us to go to the Main Theatre, because it has an esplanade and is a block and a half from the preparatory school. I still did not believe what was happening. Just thirty meters away, I stopped at the corner of the Casa de Alfeñique, an exemplary construction of Baroque art at the end of the eighteenth century, and for a few seconds my mind evoked what I had experienced a few minutes before. I felt the tremor in my body again, then I breathed deeply and felt a slight pull in my hand, it was Yuicelik who told me: Let's go! When walking a block and a half, which is the distance between my prep school and the theatre, I felt that the earth was moving, but I will never know if it was really happening or if it was a reaction of my body.

When arriving to the Main Theatre, there were too many people who neither believed nor knew what had just happened, they only had their own experience. The classmates of the prep school began to gather in the middle of the esplanade, the teachers gathered us by groups and asked us if we knew

where the others were. The situation became more and more distressing; we were all so vulnerable...

Suddenly, I saw my schoolmate Shakti arrive, she was alone and crying inconsolably. I hugged her and told her that everything would be fine, without imagining the news that she was going to tell me. She hugged me and, in a voice broken by pain, told me: "Paola..." and she continued crying. I asked her: "What happened? Where is she?". "Inside the school, she stayed there...", she replied. At that moment I did not understand what she was saying to me, until she could draw the strength to say: "We were both sitting on the yellow patio bench when it started to shake. I said to her: come, let's go to the center, and I was holding her hand when I felt that something pulled her, but I kept on walking. The principal and everyone started to gather and I thought that she was still around. When I was able to look back, I saw her lying down, with rubble on top of her. I was caught among so many schoolmates, until they all started to get out and I ran to get her out, but a man stopped me and said: 'No, girl, you save yourself, leave her there!', and he pulled me to get out of there". Her crying was never interrupted while she was telling me, and immediately I started crying too, with much pain, since I knew Paola since kindergarten, we were very close friends at that time, and life had given us the opportunity to meet again in prep school.

I did not believe it, I only thought: why her? Why in that way? Why if she was so nice, so intelligent, kind and... so happy? When I calmed down, I noticed that Shakti had her hand full of blood and a huge scrape. So I asked for water, in a broken voice, and trying to shout: "Does anyone have water and paper? Please!" I repeated it and my classmate Citlalli gave them to me. I helped her wash the wound and I noticed that her white sweater also had blood... With what she had just told me, I thought more about my family, about my brother mainly, because I knew that my father had gone to pick up my sister and that, if something had happened to them, at least they were together. I knew that my mom worked in a more or less secure area, but my brother, my brother was the one who worried me, and I had no way of communicating with him. I decided to go and ask to his school no matter what they would tell me, I only wanted to know where he was, at least to know that I would have someone by my side. Neither I knew if I would have the happiness of seeing my family again.

When I arrived I did not know what to ask or what to say, there were so many ideas in my mind... there were two people at the exit and I asked them if there were children inside the school. They said, no, that they had gone to the esplanade of the Main Theatre, which was from where I came. I went back and saw some children with their parents, I asked them if they were from my brother's school and they said no; I continued my search and found my dad with my eight-year-old sister, I felt calm and I told my schoolmates that I was leaving with them. All I wanted was to get out of there, tell them everything that had happened.

We tried to communicate with my mom and home, but the network had become saturated and it was not possible. I still did not believe it, there were so many impressions and it was getting worse. I told my dad that I had already gone to look for my brother to school, so we started walking back, because as a family we have a strategic meeting point between our schools and where we live; besides, public transportation had been diverted. We walked eleven blocks up to the church of Ocotlan, to the east of the city, because nearby we have another house and we thought it was a possibility. It was around fifteen minutes, but for me it felt eternal. I thought it was very late and it was not even two o'clock. We did not find him, so it only remained the faith and hope that he had gone home. We went in a minibus towards home, they were all full, so it took us longer than usual to be able to get in; when we finally boarded one, everyone was frightened, confused by what had happened.

We arrived home and there was my little brother, sitting in silence. When he saw us, he was touched and we breathed a sigh of relief... I could not stand it anymore with so much pain, with everything I had lived in less than two hours, so we sat down and I started crying. I told everything to my dad in front of my little siblings, although my intention was not to scare them; however, I had to do it because I could not bear a second more. It was very difficult to narrate it. After, I sent a message to my mom telling her that we were all well at home.

I was just thinking about those moments, whether it had been real or everything was a nightmare. A great nightmare, to tell the truth. My mom arrived two hours later; she also had a very big story to tell during our search. When she saw me, she hugged me and said to me that she was grateful to the Creator because we were all well; she was very concerned because she found out that there were wounded people in my school. I told her what had

happened to me and she was very impressed because she went to look for my brother and me, and she already knew the situation of the wounded people in prep school, but she was more distressed to know that, among them, was Paola. I do not know which of the two was worse. We cried together for several hours, on the one hand we were grateful for being together, and on the other, we felt Paola as if she belonged to the family, and we prayed that she would resist, so that she and the others would fight for their lives, although we did not know the others.

Between the schoolmates we were already communicating in order to know how we were and the state of Paola. My crying seemed endless and my grandmother, eighty-nine-years-old, told my parents to take me to the doctor. Although I wanted to restrain myself, I could not, so my mom phoned my uncle, who is a psychologist and, by phone, we talked. I followed his instructions, I answered what he asked me, and little by little my body and my mind relaxed until I calmed down and stopped crying.

I tried to distract myself for a while by watching TV with my siblings, but I really did not stop thinking about it. Unfortunately, around eight o'clock at night we were informed of the death of our childhood schoolmate and friend, Ana Paola; when I told my mom, again I cried with her.

I was afraid it would tremble again, so I prepared my contingency backpack. When I put on my pajamas for sleeping, I took off my sneakers and, as I expected, some rocks came out, they were tiny, but I felt them like those huge pieces of my school in ruins. However, they had few dust, I just shook them and I put them back on. I was so scared, I did not know what to do and I just thought: if it ever trembles again, what would I do? Would I survive? The last information after the death, was the data on the wake and the reception hours.

We took down three mattresses and went to bed on the ground floor of my house. That night was the most difficult of my life, I could not sleep, and when I managed to fall asleep, the shocking images appeared. My mom had to wake me up because my breathing and my body expressed my suffering. Although she persuaded me to sleep without my shoes, I did not take them off, all the time I was on alert in case anything happened, I just wanted to survive.

After that night, I woke up and I was grateful to be alive. I was analyzing and beginning to believe what had happened to us the day before. I got into the shower and my fears returned. I became very vulnerable again, I had a lot

of anguish and I thought again: what happens if it trembles again? I am not ready to feel the movement of the earth, even if it is minimal, I do not want to feel it again.

The next day I was going to a funeral at my sixteen years, the most incredible thing was that she was the same age as me and that was difficult to process. When my mom and I arrived at the wake, the cumulus of emotions was impressive. For me it was very contrasting, on the one hand I was very happy to see my schoolmates and friends, and on the other, the reason for our encounter was the irreparable loss of Ana Paola.

Around her coffin there were many flowers and balloons, I arranged the white roses that we took there and I did not have the strength nor the courage to say goodbye to her. Among prayers and songs, the cries and laments of all of us could be heard. It was very touching to see her loved ones. Finally, there was a mass of present body and a farewell. At that moment we all fell into an inconsolable cry; it was very difficult.

Schoolmates, family, friends and teachers, we all went to bury her. When the coffin was covered by the earth, we began to arrange the flowers and, like a queen, dressed in flowers, that is how her grave was. All united by the same person, too cute in every way, with a smile and a laugh that I will never forget. She remains engraved in my heart.

The legacy of this experience is that life is beautiful and our actions are the body of our history. Today, more than three months ago, I write to make that day a transcendent experience, that is why I will love life intensely, with passion, in order to achieve my dreams.

Flow from the adversity

María del Pilar Ramírez Varela

THE EARTH MOVES...

It is the morning of September 19, 2017 and I am teaching a course of Effective Communication to the volunteers of the Civil Protection team of the Secretariat of Public Education (“Secretaría de Educación Pública”) (SEP) in Cuernavaca, Morelos. We are in the auditorium of the third floor and it is the second day of five that this course lasts for which I have been hired.

The evacuation drill has to be performed, and as the participants are in charge of it, they ask me for a recess in order to organize themselves and carry it out. They put on their yellow vests. The leader grabs the megaphone and the action begins. Almost all the staff goes down to the central courtyard following the instructions of my students. My attention is drawn to the lady in her sixties, perhaps a secretary, who stays in an office behind her desk saying that “it is just a simulacrum”. Further on, a young man goes up the stairs with a sandwich in one hand and a soda in the other... “We have to go down, not go up!”, indicates to him one of the organizers. And he, smiling: I only leave my sandwich on the desk and I go down”. All the others that I can see during my way, we went down quietly and orderly.

I calculate approximately five hundred people outside the facilities. Actually I do not know if they are five hundred, I do not have much experience in calculating number of people, but we are indeed a lot, and all under the sun. Some begin to be tired and lean on the outer wall of the building. The one with the “IEBEM” sign. One of my students says through the megaphone: “Do not lean on the wall...what if it falls?”. Laughter is heard, people take selfies.

A couple of hours later, those present would see with amazement that the wall actually falls, but for now this is a good break in the middle of the daily hustle of the offices, so full of people, desks, computers, endless bureaucracy in lines and in papers. The sun is getting more intense, and the ten minutes that we stay in the patio feel like forty. At last the order is heard: “You can go back to your offices”.

When going up again, the organizers of the drill are angry. Everyone wants to talk, they criticize how badly they did it, to know why they do not pay attention to them if they are the authority in these events. The participants interrupt one another, a wonderful opportunity to take this workshop to a

meaningful learning. The theme has to be organized to analyze what happened, how we communicate, what difficulties we had, how it can be improved. Work teams share heatedly according to the topics seen the previous day and this one, but, above all, taking them to the practice of the newly performed simulacrum.

At one o'clock in the afternoon the course concludes for this day. Today the movement was interesting, and among the participants they decide that, although the session is over, they will stay to discuss some strategies that would be carried out in following simulacrum. I say goodbye and I go down.

I am calm and satisfied, because my work, in days like today, fills me with meaning. Sometimes, small sparks of consciousness appear on the faces of those who I accompany and, then, being a psychologist, being a teacher, acquires a value beyond the titles and effort. Today I leave them excited to improve and to organize themselves.

I finish going down the stairs and go out to the central patio. The facilities are still full of people, papers and bureaucracy, but I know that in a corner of the third floor there are consciences that are communicating and that are growing.

I go out to the street almost smiling, and there I see that the blue car that my husband drives is advancing, one of those coincidences at exact moments that, sometimes, occur between him and me. I get in the car, gladly of not having to take another transport or wait a lot longer.

We turn around in the corner, I begin to tell him how well the day was and suddenly...Everything moves! "A tire?", says my husband... "Tremor!", I say. He stops the car, I grab my cell phone and we get off. I look at the time: 13:14. All the cars have stopped. The street undulates as if instead of asphalt it had waves. As if immersed in a sea without order, people shouts, they leave the houses and shops, they run... it is very strong, this is very strong...too strong to be just a tremor. The street continues with waves... "EARTHQUAKE!", I correct.

In moments like this, all you want is to be with the loved ones, and I have him there, with me, and that gives me security, but my four children are in Mexico City. "This must have been terrible in the city", says my husband. The cell phones were dead... they do not answer messages, no incoming nor outgoing calls. The radio begins to transmit alarming news: epicenter in Axochiapan, Morelos, intensity 7.1, downtown Cuernavaca with fallen

buildings. I think that is why it was felt so strong... I think there has never been an epicenter so close. I tune to different frequencies of the radio anxiously looking for more news, but of Mexico City nothing is said... nothing!

It does not make sense to go back to the SEP, so we headed home. Normally it is about fifteen minutes away, but today everything is stopped, people are in the streets, the traffic is awful. We arrived after almost forty-five minutes.

When entering the house, I step over pieces of a broken tile on the floor and the sensation of conscience that starts in my stomach rises up in me with chills... just then, I realize the magnitude of this. Yes... I step on a broken tile and my whole body shudders. I understand, then, the dimension of this earthquake. At home just fell down tiles, ornaments, mugs, clay pots, some paintings... that was all, but the tile shakes me and moves me to a huge reality. The earth moved, and with that, starts seriously to move something in me.

Hours pass by in order to be able to know that the family is well... the children frightened, but well and already moving: one, astonished about the event, but in a safe place; another, in a row of hands that remove rubble from fallen buildings; another, thinking of making sandwiches to take to the rescuers; another one, as a rescuer.

Consciousness moving, expanding. My mind is spinning when listening to the crazy news and my body is still tense, sometimes shaking, sometimes crying or moving from one side to another, thinking, feeling. The hours pass and, finally, at midnight, I lie down to rest a little. I sleep hoping that will soon pass the most moved day of my life, without having the clear conscience that there is a before and after September 19, knowing, of course, that something important has changed in me.

A NEW DAWN

On the next day, I wake up with that feeling of still being in a dream, but my whole aching body brings me back to reality. It dawns in Cuernavaca, as always, but I know and I feel that it is not any other day. My course has been suspended in the SEP in the face of infrastructure damage; I understand that the city and the entire country are in a state of true emergency.

I decide not to see news today, but when turning on the computer I read on social networks an initiative to organize between artists and volunteers to see what can be done in the most affected communities of Morelos. With a friend, we decided to see what it is about or what we can do. The interested have been cited in a coffee place downtown, but we are so many people who arrived that we can not fit. We are sitting on the street sidewalk, maybe thirty.

A young enthusiast, the one who put the message of goodwill in the networks, takes the lead and begins to coordinate. She wants us to go into the cars that are there and go to the farthest and least attended communities in Morelos.

Young people, almost all artists, they incite one another wanting to help. My friend and I, not so young, not so enthusiastic, interrupt the prevailing disorder with the idea of organizing ourselves, perhaps by communities, perhaps putting one person in charge per group, perhaps combining cultural intervention with emotional support.

The young people value the proposal and support teams begin to be formed by shelter or community: Altavista, Tlayacapan, Hueyapan, Tlaquiltenango, Jojutla, Coatetelco, Tetela del Volcan, Yautepec, Jiutepec... I realize that we are only three psychologists among so many volunteers and that it is impossible to distribute ourselves in all the communities. Our support has to be more effective, less dispersed. At that moment I make my first important decision in this process: I decide that my personal collaboration will be to share this action by organizing the emotional support group to provide accompaniment in the shelters and affected communities of Morelos.

Without delay, I write a text on social networks. I select an image of a lit candle and, over it, the message: "If you are a facilitator or therapist, and you want to support people who need accompaniment in this crisis situation, communicate by this means". The message is transmitted from the image of light hoping that it reaches those who want to share their time and experience; with the hope that the light multiplies throughout the state. Were needed: ears that would listen, eyes that would help to contact, feet that would approach to each shelter and each village, committed presences that would stand around.

I start receiving answers. Known and unknown, they call, they write, they go committing themselves. We started to organize ourselves, distributing ourselves in the places, to coordinate our work with that of the cultural brigade.

It occurs to me to put together a group on WhatsApp and I go on integrating more than sixty therapists, facilitators and psychologists that we have written our names down, one week after the earthquake. When the chat asks me for a name, without hesitation I decide: “Therapists for Morelos”.

The first week I have to meet with the teams, sending messages by chat, sharing documents and material to update ourselves on issues of crisis intervention, setting up a donation campaign of teaching materials to work with the people affected.

Are many the ones who collaborate; from the one that supports in the logistics, the one that offers its knowledge and trains us, the ones that go to the communities giving their energy and their time. I spend the day being stuck to the cell phone responding to the demands of the teams. I know that I can give much more, but I know that at this moment I have the administrative role. As a leader who had been incubating for a long time, suddenly emerges from me the ability to empathize and communicate with some and with others, the ability to plan the actions, the creativity and motivation to see this beyond the crisis. And, yet, day and night I am still stuck to the cell phone.

The days are passing. Fatigue is extreme for the whole group. Psychological first aid training is given by a specialist who is in the group, as well as an emotional restraint session for those who have gone to shelters and communities, because who helps others also requires help.

My shoulders hurt all the time. I am told that maybe it is the posture by being all day with the cell phone, I think that it is the tremendous burden that I am carrying on my back; as if I was carrying the sacks of rubble or the unnamed bodies that my rescuer son is currently removing from the ruined buildings of Mexico City.

I know that my burden is not so dramatic, but at the same time I feel the weight to be watching so that the therapists do not go alone ever, to the communities (there have already been issues of insecurity on the roads), trying that they collect the donated material and use it adequately, supervising that they investigate the needs of the population, asking them to write down their experiences to systematize them, promoting their attendance at the trainings. And yes, I am sitting down here and it is real the fatigue, sleeplessness, even high blood pressure is measurable, but I think about those who are sleeping in the open with fear, rain and uncertainty, and then I return to my work with energy... the pain of shoulders will pass.

Two weeks after the earthquake, the group has a methodological proposal to work not only on emotional support or from the intervention in crisis, but for the integral reconstruction of the communities that faced losses due to the earthquake. We started to have something that guides our work: the idea of “adopting a town” and getting involved in a commitment with the people, where the wisdom to succeed is shared.

As the days go by, the urge to help begins to decrease in the general population. Donations are getting smaller; the headlines no longer show so many news of the affected areas. Some of the group of therapists who do not have the commitment or necessary time, begin to feel that this is serious and long-term and they start retiring.

As an affirmative action that comes out from the heart, and with the confidence in this common force that we have been building, I then take my second important decision since the earthquake: personally support two communities of Morelos, going once a week to each one, to give the best way that I know how to give: accompanying, listening, learning. I feel now that I can wake up with a new light to share; that all the dispersion that was frequent in my life is finally heading with a real meaning.

JOJUTLA: FROM DESTRUCTION TO HOPE

On October 2, together with the team of therapists, I approached Jojutla. As the slogan “October 2 is not forgotten”, I feel that, definitely, like that will be the case with me, and not because today is commemorated forty-nine years of the massacre of students in Tlatelolco, but because today I can see the desolation of a town in ruins twelve days after the earthquake, with the epicenter of the tragedy barely seventy kilometers from it.

Jojutla (from Nahuatl Xoxoutla, “place where blue paint abounds”), surrounded by reed beds, spas and usually tourists, today with more than seventy rosaries to pray and crosses to raise, it is a population that begins to stand scarcely from the rubble. There are still their demolished houses, their people agglomerated in makeshift shelters with what they could rescue to continue living their lives. They are there looking to organize: the one who can the most, supports the one who needs it by bringing food, opening the doors of their land so that others can camp. Like the Camacho family, who lost

everything and now live in a borrowed land. They ripped out the cempasuchiles, beautiful yellow flowers that they had planted to celebrate the Day of the Dead, to keep vigil there for one of the sisters who was stuck under a paving stone on September 19. They put a large canvas, a couple of cots, chairs and a closet that seemed to welcome a surrealist painting, where a barefoot boy and a dog play in the quagmire left by the downpour last night.

Farther, a young woman with her one-month old baby to the breast; in an armchair, a woman in her sixties, with a morbid obesity that almost does not allow her to move herself. Another, maybe the grandma, with her walker and her four teeth that smile at us to welcome us... and the concern arises in me, that if it will be enough with what we brought of food, blankets or some flowers of Bach for the fright of the nursing mother. I observe how old pictures and papers that seem important are being dried on the improvised floor of canvas and that managed to be rescued from the rubble and from the waters to be now their only anchor to the memories and fundamentals of what they were.

Fifteen minutes and nothing more, almost like a doctor's visit... there are so many people to attend; we will be back next week, we tell them, and we take note of what they need most: "Underpants", say the ladies, because "they have given us clothes, but not underpants", "deodorant" say the other, "we do not have water to bathe", some plates or cups we can, they do not want to use disposable anymore...and one here offering emotional support!

Farther, a formal shelter in the Sports Unit of Jojutla. The Chinese have given away a number of blue canvas little houses with their Chinese signs... what does it say? It does not matter; the important thing is that seventy families without shelter have taken refuge there since yesterday. They organize themselves in the improvised kitchen and dining room, they make an inventory of the donations that have rained like the temporal itself: food, medicines, toys; now, even a playroom space for children was put together.

We go, house by house, telling them that we are here, that we are from the group Therapists for Morelos and that we will be there all morning if they want to talk or have a space of accompaniment... The children are invited to play and draw, while their moms, little by little, they are approaching an improvised office of two plastic chairs under the shade of a tree. Tears, stories, accumulated anger not only in these days, but in the entire life of poverty, violence and injustice, where, literally, it never rains but it pours. A lady tells

me that she had never felt so heard; another, that it was the first time she had told that “secret”. I feel that the value of being heard is reassuring their stay in this place a little.

And so the days pass in Jojutla. A week later, we again traveled, four therapists from Cuernavaca. Don Gabriel receives us at the door of what was his house, because he knows that we are about to arrive and, as we do not know the way well, he does not want us to pass by. The door opens with its red circle, sign that the house has been evaluated by Civil Protection and should be demolished. Don Gabriel makes us enter into a clear space in front of the house that still keeps broken glass, through which you can see the emptiness of your home, the broken staircase that no longer leads anyplace.

He sits on a garden bench, and I, in a wooden crate in front of him. I want to hear him, because I know that he has a lot to say: he is an engineer, how come are they going to tell him, who built his own house, that they are going to demolish it! That he does not move from there because he can fix it. the house seems to cry at his words, or perhaps it is what still drips from the cracks due to the rain last night. That it hurts him not being able to be a provider for his family, that he resents having to continue paying debts in the bank, old loans, when now he does not even have a place to live.

As I am listening to him he starts to calm down. I teach him how to do an exercise to get rid of tension, sadness, anger, impotence, or any hurting of the heart in times of crisis. Simple technique: perceive your body, realize where it is stuck that that you are feeling, put a name to what you feel and take it out with force from your exhalation. You expel it from your whole organism to transform it and have energy again. Normally something gray, dark, black, comes out... Don Gabriel sees it yellow.

- What color is it? – I ask him again.

- Yellow, as the traffic light.

- Let us transform it – I suggest him –. Now, what color is it?

- Green – he says to me, and he points out that he has it in his mind.

And the thing is that Don Gabriel has in his mind the possibility of seeing things yellow, as a precaution for everything that can be solved calmly, but it is not enough.

Civil Protection has said red! He has decided by himself, without knowing for sure, that he prefers to move forward: let go and move forward. “Green is good, filling myself with green gives me peace of mind; in fact, I

think it gives me health”. I suggest him to take green to his mind, to protect himself with that green, that makes to move forward. Let go... Move forward. Don Gabriel smiles now. His own inner wisdom gave him the answer. Calmer, he says good bye to us knowing that he can continue.

Jojutla gets into me seventy kilometers from the epicenter, with its seventy rosaries and its seventy little houses of blue hope. Despite so many rubble and so many red circles, I see a town that is letting go, moving forward, and that today it begins to resurrect.

“LOS HORNOS”: WAITING FOR HUMAN WARMTH

After going for about three weeks to Jojutla, we returned to hear that they no longer need help. We know that the support we provide is surely necessary, but the shelters are administered by the government, and the psychologist assigned to the place of the little blue houses denies us access if we do not have with us the authorization from the National Institute of Psychiatry. The bureaucracy in the middle of the crisis complicates things, so we decided (much to our regret) not to go over and over the issue and move a little further north, looking for another place to work.

We find a city in ruins: Tlaquiltenango. There we are welcomed by the imposing church of the former convent of Santo Domingo with serious damage that makes it to be closed. You can see the tower of the belfry fallen, the dome cracked, and a large vertical fissure that separates the historical and emblematic façade of the sixteenth century in two. At the entrance gate a cardboard sign, surely written by the parishioners, indicates in red letters that they will not allow their church to be demolished.

We headed to the mayoralty of the largest municipality of Morelos and observed the destruction on all sides. A hundred people, firmly, grab folders and papers waiting under the sun in order to heed their request for the revision of their homes. Crossing through the crowd and going up the stairs to the second floor, we managed to talk to the coordinator of the shelters, who tells us that, above all, support is needed in the towns.

In Tlaquiltenango there are eight urban colonies and twenty-two rural communities; the help, the manager tells us, has reached the colonies and

shelters in the city, but the towns are quite forgotten. He mentions several that have been affected: Santa Cruz, Valle de Vazquez, Huautla, Las Campanas... and he continues to list towns. I, in the inside, think that not all the volunteers from the “Therapists for Morelos” group, could cover so much suffering community.

We measured our strength and, also because of the time, we decided on this occasion to only approach to one of the urban shelters. A few blocks from the mayoralty is the primary school where they have sent us. As many shelters, it has people at breakfast time, lunch and dinner. Some stay for a while checking the donated clothes (piles and piles of clothing); only five families sleep in the place, and most of the victims go to their lands to take care of what remains of their houses. We announce ourselves with the manager as an emotional support group and we make a couple of cardboard signs that we post notifying that we will return the next week. He suggests that it is better to go to a community, that he provides us a guide to take us there.

The next week we returned and there are more people, because they recently served breakfast. We work with children, supporting some who begin to have symptoms of post-traumatic stress. We start with individual accompaniment and continue with a group work, games and drawings. More children are approaching and our day goes by at the shelter. We agree with the manager to go next week to a rural community, and we do so.

After about forty minutes from the city of Tlaquiltenango towards the southeast, we enter a path of cane plantations that opens the way to us to get up to Valle de Vazquez, popularly known as “Los Hornos” because of its geography (a hollow surrounded by hills) and the climate that lives up to its name. It is a community dedicated to cattle and to work the land. Along the way, our guide tells us about Los Hornos and we get to find out some of its characteristics, like that most of the young people yearn to finish their secondary school in order to go north; it is a town where adolescent pregnancies, suicides, sexual abuse, and parental abandonment abound... Where, since the earthquake, they have not received any kind of emotional support.

A little plaza shaded with a kiosk of fallen bricks in the center is the place that, despite its destruction, it remains being the meeting point of the town. And, it is that, to one side, the municipal assistantship, the health center, and the kindergarten, are disabled. A little further on, a nineteenth-century

building that used to house baccalaureate students, is now destroyed, cracked and shored up with trunks to prevent their old walls from falling over the inhabitants.

We have notified that we would go to work with women at 11:30, knowing that at that time most have finished giving lunch to their children in elementary school. In Los Hornos, the ingrained custom of taking lunch to the children's schools extends even until the baccalaureate, and as a need so that the children will not leave, the mothers nourish, provide warmth of home and protect them at all costs from the evils over which they do not necessarily have control.

When the principal of the secondary school of the town wanted to change the habit preventing them from taking their stews during recess, some parents came screaming threatening; another one even took out the machete to prevent the old traditions from being lost.

Ballsy people abound in Los Hornos, but on September 19, neither machetes nor screams could fight against the force of the earth that knocked down almost one hundred of the approximately two hundred houses. Today starts to be seen reconstruction work. In the esplanade of the basketball court that is next to the ruins of kindergarten, the inhabitants do tests of material to reassemble their houses. The assistant has managed that two large foundations partner up in order to donate seventy-two houses. Engineers and advisers wander around the town measuring, supervising, ruling, while the victims have to organize, train in construction and be the workforce.

We ask what will happen to the other affected families... "I do not know, I am still missing a few, let's see if any foundation comes to support", answers the municipal assistant.

The women take turns to make food for the day laborers, now builders, and they spend the day taking lunch to the children of the elementary school, to the teenagers of the secondary school or high school graduates, and now, also, to the husbands who make partition walls. They walk hand in hand with small children (as the kindergarten is still closed) or carrying babies, crossing from one place to another the town.

Women who investigate everything in this journey, and who devote themselves to everything, are the ones who we want to support initially. We have made an appointment with them so they come to the kiosk and, a little distrustful, they begin to arrive after twelve o'clock. The sun is in the highest

part of the sky and we try to arrange the chairs that were lent to us under the shade of some trees in order to start working.

The habit of always taking to the other what he or she needs, without the implicated person moving a finger, is something truly rooted in Los Hornos. That is why, an important part of our job is to get rid of the idea that we bring things. As whom announces what he or she sells, we begin the activity informing them: “We do not bring food, we do not give away houses, we are not doctors nor engineers. We bring emotion management techniques, we bring a little bit of distension. We come here to listen and share, to train in human development issues”.

A few of them who perhaps were only curious, leave, and thirteen women stay listening attentively to the novelty of these therapists to see, then, what is the good stuff that we are bringing. “Move the body a little”, I tell them, and we start with games that help release physical tension. “Smile and draw a little more”, it is important to express everything we keep so that we do not get sick. How long has it been since they moved? I think. How long long has it been since they played or laughed? The rusty bones creak, the delighted eyes sparkle, opening the arms as well as the minds of women who have been, for generations, giving their best without expecting anything in return, raising a town that has been used to always receive. Today, they have a space to share among all, the essential human warmth.

The day ends scarcely an hour later. They can not work much longer, since they have to run to prepare the meal, wash clothes, pick up children from school and other housework. The women who have arrived to the kiosk on this day, they learn one or another technique and then leave smiling. We will be back in a few days in order to follow up on what is being formed today as a support group in Los Hornos.

LA NOPALERA: REBUILDING IN ADVERSITY

We go four therapists, spirited to collaborate in La Nopalera, Yautepec, a town where we are told that emotional help is needed. We go through a fresh path loaded with cornflowers in flower everywhere, enjoying a pleasant chat. Suddenly the road leads into a sinister little street and we have to silence ourselves to understand the reality of a town discarded to the ground. The car

moves forward slowly and our eyes capture vacant lots with piles of stones, broken bricks and twisted irons, vestiges of what were houses.

The statistics say that La Nopalera has 262 homes... some residents say that a hundred of them collapsed, others say fifty, without counting. The truth is that I walk through its streets without giving credit to this reality of destruction that is imposed. Thirteen days after the earthquake, the school is closed, because it is disabled due to its cracks. The school is perhaps the only construction still standing downtown, and children wander around looking for entertainment until they can return to school. The kiosk of the little square is preserved intact, and as an impossible picture are hanging from it clothes that are out to be dried from the hundreds of black bags of donation that people who want to support have brought. "There are donations – we are told so –, they have brought us food and clothes, a lot of clothes". Clothes accumulate further, in piles, and above them, bunch of flies.

We seek where to install ourselves to serve people in crisis and refer us to the only public space available, the roofed court of the town... and there, more clothes, more flies, a rotten acid smell that penetrates the body. We search how to clean with a cloth the two tables that we found in the space and one corner of the cement stands. Then arrives a van that comes from DIF with breakfast for distribution, and this helps us so that the residents start to approach. We tell them that we are here for the emotional support, that we will play with the children, we will talk to the grown-ups, but only about five children stay attracted by the toys, crayons, and sheets of paper, while the adults have breakfast and leave.

We wait a long time, that between duels and flies seems eternal, as if the clock had no meaning in this forgotten town. We decide to go out looking for someone to offer our support, and in the corner we approach a young woman in front of a little table of sweets in the place where previously was situated the biggest store in town. Juliana, that is her name, tells us that she would like to talk, but that she has to go cook, because the soldiers are building for her a small room (four poles and a plate) and she wants to prepare them something to eat. That we better go with her friend, who is very sick. Juliana calls her son and tells him to guide me.

Going down four blocks, I arrive to a large piece of land, planted with pumpkins. Four tied brave dogs bark at unexpected guests taking care of a small house of blocks that can be seen in the background. I say hi to Aura, who

clinging to her two children does not want to leave her land. She tells me with terror her memory of the earth roaring and her race going up to the school breathlessly the day that everything shook. That she can not sleep, that her mind will not calm down even though she knows herself lucky, because her little house is still standing, her children are with her today, and her husband, who works on the swine farm at the edge of the town, is a good man. I listen to her, I teach her a couple of techniques to lower anxiety, to step on that roaring earth in a today that does not move, and I say good bye with the promise of returning the following week.

I return to the court waiting with my companions for a while, but the people do not come near. We decide, then, to go out again, because even though we have been informing house by house that we will be there, people do not want to leave their land, they do not want to separate from their own.

We are told that a young woman who lives on the corner, in front of the school, is very sick. Two of us therapists approach to what is left of a house that was recently two stories and that today is just rubble. Juanita is twenty-four years old, but she looks fifteen. She is the only elementary school teacher who lives in La Nopalera, and she tells us that on the day of the earthquake, as indicated by the simulation protocols that they practiced a couple of hours before, she went out to the patio with her children while they heard the earth and the walls roaring... who stayed by her children's side until the last one of them was picked up. Then she tried to cross the street where, half a block away, her house is, to discover that she could not cross it, because everything had collapsed without distinction: her neighbor's shop, her childhood home... all on the ground. That, as she could, went over the rubble to find that her family was in shock all together in the courtyard. What weighed on her the most was that she was with the children in front of her and she could not run before in order to hug her mother.

We continue walking. Finally, we contacted Mr. Justino, municipal assistant, who told us that he had personally counted one hundred and fifty-six houses with irreparable damages. Upon learning about our work, he began to list the people who needed emotional support. He counted almost thirty cases which he considered serious, and also told us that in the hill as well as in the ravine, several houses collapsed.

When seeing the amount of vacant lots with tents, we realized that we would not have enough for everything that needed to be done. I entered a field

where there was a bamboo room that was used as a kitchen, and another one of steel sheet that was used as a bedroom, like the ones that the military are building. I now listen the story of Mrs. Bere, who upon learning that I am a psychologist, begins to unburden herself and remembers that her mother did not want her since she was little. Her mother, she says, should have given love to her, but she simply did not give it to her... like Mother Earth, that she feels that today it is not giving it to her. It is the second time that her house collapses, she tells me. The first was when, next to the lot where they lived, three years ago, some men came one day in order to measure and put machines to make foundations of something big. That same night, the house broke in two, and half went to the hole that they had dug. She tells me that her things and her furniture went straight in to the hole... that she tried to stop her refrigerator and she almost went in along with it, she did not thanks to her son who held her legs. This earthquake from a few weeks ago, rather than make her see her current ruins, the only thing that it does in her is to remind her about her ghosts of yesterday accumulated in the soul.

Further on, there is a small lot with a couple of rooms whose walls are partitions blocks stacked in dangerous balance and a fabric flying with the air serving as a door. Mrs. Isabel greets us, a small, chubby woman who invites us to come in and listen; next to her, the radio at full volume transmits Christian songs and prayers. She is grateful that she is alive and that she does not lack anything, because she says she has her family safe and “even a small tree full of lemons”. She forgets for a moment that she does not have a well-settled house and gives us a bag full of lemons... “Come in a couple of weeks, the papayas then will be good enough so you can take them”.

Going down about half block through a narrow street full of rubble, I arrive at Mrs. Lupita’s house, or what was her house. She places a couple of chairs under the improvised awning that serves as a cellar, kitchen and room. She tells me that in the ravine she lives with her five daughters and their families, each one now with their collapsed little houses. That she is a widow, that she has nine grandchildren, that the sons-in-law are unemployed and that also one of her daughters, because she used to clean the municipal adjutancy and now there is no adjutancy.

Prayers and songs go up from the bottom of the ravine up to the place where we are and Mrs. Lupita starts crying. Her son’s godmother (comadre) died three days ago, and for three days they have been keeping vigil over her,

because they were waiting for the son who is up north to arrive, but the son never arrived, so in a little while they will take her to be buried. Her son-in-law and her son, the godson of the comadre, went to “scrape off” in the pantheon to get everything ready for the burial. That it was the sugar, she says, that maybe it was the pressure, they do not know well, but when they took her to Salubridad in Yautepec, she arrived giving the last breath... Mrs. Lupita knows that it was from the sheer sadness that distressed her.

The daughter-in-law arrives. “Good afternoon, mom Pita”, she says to her and hands her a pot of food. And it is because they were left without a stove and the wood is wet. “The daughter-in-law – and it is not because she is here –, she has really supported us! Her house did not collapse, and she brings us something to eat every day. And as you can see we are five families, and daily she is bringing us food”. We continue talking, and the daughter-in-law brings me a plate of papaya freshly harvested from her land. I appreciate receiving it, because after walking and listening for a time that seems eternal, I had forgotten that it was important to eat something. I appreciate and enjoy for a moment the taste of papaya that refreshes me and brings me back to a reality of hope and solidarity in the midst of so much destruction.

The next week we go back to the lot of Mrs. Lupita, now with a small room of steel sheets where she comes out to tell us that she is a little busy, but if we could wait for her. She goes back into the room and we hear a baby crying from inside. Cries and cries. Meanwhile, Mrs. Lupita brings us some chairs and tells us that she is coming right now. The crying calms down and then a young woman comes out with a baby with its head covered with a bandana and wrapped in a blanket. After her, Mrs. Lupita brings us some tasty tangerines from her harvest, and while we taste them, she tells us that her grandfather transmitted to her what is needed to be a healer. She tells us that he taught her about herbs and medicines from the earth, how to cure from fright, from eye and from all the damage that is done to people. That in babies is more noticeable, because they cry and get sick, but that adults also get it. That in case we need it, we can look for her.

The fact is that Mrs. Lupita is a woman who from the deepest crisis, resurges with a strength capable of reconstructing herself in the face of adversity. Another day, we visit her and she brings us, as always, a couple of plastic chairs. Even though the rains have stopped, the smell of wet earth is felt in the air.

Mrs. Lupita complains a little that her hands hurt. As we are trained in the group to provide relaxing hand massage, I take the opportunity to practice. I take out a small bottle with lavender oil and another one with coconut oil. I mix and begin to apply it while I thank inwardly to so many donors who have approached the group of therapists to support. Among the things they gave us, a considerable amount of essential oils arrived. I confirm, when using it with Mrs. Lupita, that aromatherapy in times of crisis is a wonder, because it allows health entering through the pores and that emotions settle in their place.

I watch her thin hands, with long fingers, and I start first with the right hand. I practice the circular and going movements that were taught to me about a stained and wrinkled skin. She explains to me the reason of the pain. It is that yesterday she remembered that the Day of the Dead is approaching. “it is already a week away – she affirms –, and I always put an offering to my husband, I bake him his bread, his tlaxcales, his oven fruit. He was killed a few years ago”.

Mrs. Lupita begins to talk about her husband, about the injustices of life... I continue stroking and going through her hand with my fingers. I go to her left hand; she starts to smile. “But I have not told you why my hands hurt – her tone of voice turns proud –. Look behind you”. Without letting go of her hand, I turn around. I had not seen until that moment the clay oven which looks fresh, and then I understand where the smell of wet earth comes from.

She tells me that yesterday she built her oven, that there was no way that she would not put the offering to her husband, she has never stopped putting it. That her daughters watched her while she was mixing, paddling, assembling. That she wanted to do it alone. “Alone?!”, the question comes out from me with incredulity. And, with that proud smile that is now wider, she answers yes, that she alone built her oven, and that she has not yet built her house, but that she is already encouraging herself to do many more things. I smile infected by a woman who begins to reconstruct her environment and to reconstruct herself despite adversity.

La Nopalera is occupying a special place in my life. I prepare myself every week to give the best of myself, because I know that I am learning from those smiles and those stories. I walk along the town to check up on each visit, how losses are resolved and how life is reborn.

If at the beginning Juliana kept silent about the anguish of seeing her children homeless and sent me to her friend Aura, today she has a space to

alleviate her sorrows and tells me that she is training with the volunteers who came to town to learn how to make bricks and build again her house and her shop. Aura starts to go out her house; she is no longer clinging to her children preventing them from being able to pop out by themselves in the street; the terror of September 19 is moving away from their daily lives.

Mrs. Isabel and her lemons, Mrs. Lupita and her oven... Hope and faith; share, collaborate with others, a search of all to alleviate oneself and alleviate your people ... the reality today in La Nopalera.

THE MOVEMENT CONTINUES: FLOW WITH COMMITMENT

Three months after the movement of the earth, the asphalt waves are still engraved on my being. They remain in my memory like a sudden flow of the reality in which I am standing and, along with so many other experiences that I have had to listen to, I know that mine has to do with a permanent flow.

Become aware of here and now, rescuing what I have lived, what I have learned, as well as what I have heard and I have taught, make me come to my third important decision today since September 19, 2017: continue supporting communities of Morelos from an accompaniment towards integral human development.

I know that Mrs. Lupita, Juliana, Mrs. Isabel, Juanita, Aura, Mrs. Bere and so many mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, healers, female construction workers, teachers and experts in life, have in themselves (the same as me) the ability to be reborn from the rubble. I bet on them, because I am one with them. I approach to the women of this land and I know that they can reconstruct themselves from a balanced being; there is strength in their decisions and actions, and I know that they can be responsible and conscious pillars of the new communities that are beginning to emerge in Morelos. Today I confirm that I have grown and that the labor continues to flow with commitment and action. The new dawn is already here.

Several Destinies, Mexico City
September 19, 2017
by
Silvia Reyes Maya

For Diego and Samantha.
I'll bring this story and you the ice creams and the chocolates.

TLALPAN, MEXICO CITY

Tuesday, September 19, 2017

It's three or five o'clock in the morning. I don't remember at what time the alarm-clock rang because at a night-guard job in a veterinarian hospital hours are just numbers with instructions from the doctors to take care of the 'patients'. They both rely on the "guardians", as the boss has named us. It dawns and the first reddish clouds due to the sun rays always look encouraging because they herald that the night shift has ended and now starts the morning shift, although we've already stolen a few hours of sleep. That's it, sleep that's worth interrupting to continue dreaming and also to drive to the next job.

At the university it's earthquake-drill day. As the class I teach started at nine in the morning, I went to drink a large mug of coffee and I told the students that we were going to finish the class fifteen minutes before eleven so they could get prepared and, at the time of the drill, they could be ready.

I went to the courtyard, close to the meeting point and, right on time, the seismic alert sounded. We were just a few steps away from the National Seismological Institute and the evacuation coordination of seven buildings by the brigade personnel was impeccable. The speakers announced the effectiveness of the exercise and expressed thanks for the cooperation, although, of course, there were also some of us who looked at our cell phones to see when we could carry on with our agenda.

My great friend is a brigade member at building 2 which has several laboratories and classrooms. For a long time we wanted to have a coffee together and, finally, that Tuesday we both could; she just told me that I would have to wait for her until the end of the drill. "Of course, pal, I'll wait for you, I'll be also there." So we did it and the promised coffee was fulfilled in her office because she had some matters pending and so she could look at them at the same time. We talked for a long time about almost everything and nothing at the same time. "What have you done? ¿How's the family? ¿And your dogs and cats? ¿And your jobs?"

Everything came out during our talk and, after several machine-coffees, and seeing that hours were passing by, I decided that I would leave at one o'clock in the afternoon. I had to go to the veterinarian clinic that I had opened four years ago to see if something urgent was needed. Considering

the traffic, I could get there at two o'clock, although I wouldn't have time enough to buy myself something to eat, but I remembered that there were some highly caloric reserves out there.

But I didn't say goodbye at one o'clock and I kept stealing a few minutes more from my friend. Her student turned on her computer near we were and started typing. She was the one who first felt the strong movement that shook the building, and said: "Is it shaking?" Yes. "Get out of here, get out," my friend began screaming loudly as we left in panic and hurry; it's difficult to describe the feeling produced by an earthquake when you swing from side to side down a seemingly endless staircase, and especially when the foundations are a lava ground.

During our student and academic years, earthquakes were not "felt" on the volcanic rock that we have under our feet, and we found out about the earthquakes when the family, desperate, tried to contact us to know if we were alright. Now it was the other way around. With terror displayed by my trembling hands, I saw that there was no telephone signal. One of my friend's students asked me: "Are you okay?" I know that my face spoke more than me, because inside of me I knew it was bad, that something very big had happened, and that, while others waited, they let us pass to continue with our activities, I was afraid.

Fortunately, social networks were still working and at home they answered quickly that they were all fine, that some glass items had broken and that the dogs had been very scared. Only my sister hadn't answer yet. She never leaves her phone, but, what if she had left in a hurry and had forgotten it? We were informed through the loudspeakers that we could only go back inside to pick up our belongings and that we should leave the premises because the activities were cancelled so the buildings could be checked. The chaos to leave was the start; helicopters and ambulances could be heard around.

I had on the radio of the car to listen to the news that little by little informed of collapsed buildings. I was startled to hear a familiar name: Rebsamen. We lived for seven years a few steps from the Rebsamen School, and every day I passed in front of it; what I didn't know was that it was such a big school with so many students and teachers. The street façade of Las Brujas Avenue was short compared to that of Pismo Ranch Street.

My sister hadn't answer yet. As I could not move forward, I left the car

parked and went to buy something to eat. The subway had been closed and people were walking around in search for another transportation option, which seemed difficult. Two or three hours went by, until I decided to move because my cell phone battery could run flat.

I don't know if it was bad or a good idea, but I had to get to my house. I didn't want to be away any longer, no matter if it took me five hours to get there. I saw how those people on foot began to mobilize with buckets and shovels on Tlalpan Avenue close to the Azteca Stadium. When I turned the corner before arriving home, the neighbors were loading water jugs in their cars.

My brother came out to meet me and told me that there was no electricity; he confirmed that my sister had not called because her little dog had escaped during the quake and they had been looking for her. She lives in the Coapa neighborhood and, as they were searching for her dog on bikes, they saw all the collapsed buildings: the Rebsamen School, Wallmart, Suburbia, Coapa Galleries, the Girasoles building and the taekwondo gymnasium. My brother had come back because they couldn't find the dog and many streets were closed. They expected that she had taken refuge somewhere or that someone had picked her up because she is docile and had her dog tag with data. At midnight, someone knocked at the door to deliver her. The young guys who had found her terrified under a car told us that they hadn't come before because there were no telephone lines. Calmness returned somewhat because pets are part of our family.

The earthquake that had shaken Mexico City at dawn a few days before was crushing because I woke up when it was already trembling, besides the fact that the seismic alert was sounding very loudly. I only managed to pick up one of the little dogs that sleeps with me and I went downstairs. When I reached the door, I tried to sit down to comfort the dogs but the movement threw me to the floor. My parents panicked because we saw lights in the sky; they shouted, they prayed and, besides, the animals kept howling for minutes. It was terrifying to wake up suddenly and realize how vulnerable we are from one moment to the next.

Back to Tuesday 19th, when we were able to watch television, the news were discouraging and confirmed why I had suffered that fear after the quake. Mexico City was in crisis: there were collapsed buildings everywhere. They mentioned another familiar place, San Gregorio Atlapulco in

Xochimilco. Seven years ago we moved the family to “the seeder of flowers”, that is, Xochimilco in Nahuatl. Far from our Coapa neighborhood, it has been difficult for us to get adapted to a town-city. Everything is far from home: the university, the jobs, the cinemas, the shopping malls. The beautiful traditions and the street closures can get exasperating.

We followed very closely what was happening at the Rebsamen School, and it was only when we were overcome by fatigue that we left on hold the rescue of Frida Sofia, hoping that in the morning it would have been achieved. It had been a very difficult day, but at that moment we hadn't yet assess it in its true dimension.

XOCHIMILCO, MEXICO CITY

Wednesday, September 20, 2017

At daybreak, we turned on the television but nothing was informed about the Rebsamen Schoolgirl. Information about the disastrous earthquake effects in Oaxaca and Morelos began to flow. There were new groups in the social networks to which I was added. “Veterinarians at the Earthquake” was the first I saw, because a brigade was being organized to be transferred to where it was needed, but they had agree to meet very early and couldn’t reach them anymore. My brother and I wanted to make a veterinary brigade to San Gregorio, but we couldn’t pass: the road was overflowing with supplies in trucks and even on bikes, and after trying a detour, we turn back. We marked the car with a sign that said “Veterinary Support Vehicle” and which in the end I found very difficult to remove due to the sentimental value it acquired later.

TLALPAN MULTIFAMILY HOUSING UNIT,
MEXICO CITY

Thursday, September 21, 2017

The group “Veterinarians at the Earthquake” requested a veterinary relay for the Tlalpan multifamily housing unit; it had to arrive early because the doctor had been there for 48 hours and she needed to go home. I knew her and I called her. She asked me, if I could, to go at that moment because she preferred to be replaced by someone she knew.

Carrying only one suitcase with medicines and a T-shirt, I took the light rail to the Azteca Stadium where they got us down, and I took a minibus that left me still far away. To get to where I was going, I asked for help to police officers who were diverting the traffic on the bridge of the North Division avenue extension, but they ignored me: they told me to walk. From the bridge hung a hand-written banner saying “collapsed building”. I asked for a ride and, fortunately, a biker stopped, because I would have never arrived on foot.

The first checkpoint was impassable, until the doctor I was going to replace came out to talk to them. They gave me a white helmet and a blue vest to enter, because there was no need for volunteers anymore and there were many guys expecting to go through. The doctor looked very tired, but she explained to me that each rescue dog had its own veterinarian and that we only provided them medical attention if they requested so. She would leave medications and two volunteers in case I needed something. A day earlier, the doctor had attended an exhausted dog that appeared on TV. Its handler would only talk to her, but she would try to tell him that she was leaving because she had to organize a brigade in the State of Morelos.

As we walked and I approached ground zero, I saw myself in reality, one that I didn’t know and that I will never forget. I had passed many times in front of the Tlalpan multifamily housing unit, of those buildings with balconies covered with tin plates that had withstood the 1985 earthquake. I didn’t even know that such was the name of that huge complex, but I remembered the building that had collapsed.

The veterinarian camp was well organized. It had tarpaulins, blankets, medicines and two rescue dogs in their pet carriers, waiting patiently. The dog Frida was already a celebrity, but hadn’t been brought to Tlalpan. It was a world of persons: rescuers, Topo rescue team members, doctors, nurses,

journalists, volunteers, marines, militaries, etc., who came and went like ants carrying things, talking on the phone, giving instructions, waiting to enter.

It was close to seven o'clock in the evening, because it was already dark, when they asked for the veterinarian who had took care of the dog Titan the day before; as my partner wasn't present and there were more doctors, we approached the barrier and the person who had called. There were Titan and his owner. The dog was impressive: brown and black, with a collar and a strong harness. His trainer held him tightly, and with a curt voice he addressed us: "I will not talk to everyone, just to one person. As yesterday's doctor is gone, give me a name so I can talk to just one person." He wrote one of my colleague's name on a piece of paper, left the dog in charge of her and went away.

After some time, we gave food and water to Titan who pulled his leash to where the collapse was. After a while we heard that my colleague was being called because they needed the dog. Both disappeared when they went into the disaster zone. As it was past nine or ten at night, the volunteers had to go and they left me the belongings of the doctor who had carried the dog, while her cell phone didn't stop receiving messages. After an hour, she came out and told me she had to leave, but that she would come back the next day. She had entered under the roof of the building next to the collapse and her face denoted a great impression.

I think that the true story begins to be written here, when for the first time I took Titan's leash, tireless soul and teacher of life. He was pulling very hard towards the collapsed building and I tried to distract him so he could rest a little. At that time I didn't know that he had been at the collapse site since the first day and that he had located more than twenty-five people, many of whom were rescued alive. The point out work that he had made together with his trainer had been recognized by the Japan and Israel brigades. While other dogs had become very tense when entering the collapse site, Titan continued to track and wanting to return to work with its owner. How could I know that he didn't have a private veterinarian, like all other animals, given his high esteem?

It didn't take long for its owner to come out and tell me that he was going to rest for a while and that the dog would stay there with us. Away from its owner, the animal began to get restless, so I asked the volunteers to get a pet carrier so I could put him to sleep. The girl at the tool store that had been

extemporized close to the light rail tracks asked me where I came from. I told her that I was a veterinarian at the camp, and her answer was: “Oh, yes. You are the Paw Patrol, that’s how we identify you,” and in less than an hour two pet carriers arrived to finally put the dog to rest and, by the way, us too. She took care of providing me with everything I needed for the dog’s care; whatever it was, she kindly obtained it. That night was very cold and, of course, we slept very little, almost nothing.

TLALPAN MULTIFAMILY HOUSING UNIT,
MEXICO CITY

Saturday, September 23, 2017

It was close to six o'clock in the morning when the cold and the jitters put an end to our scarce sleeping period. We went in pairs to the restroom and the day was already dawning. A little coffee brought us back to reality.

Collapsed building 1C displayed its worst face when, at 7:15 a.m., the seismic alarm started to sound. There were people sleeping and Titan was in his cage, although we had already taken him for a walk. Panic spread in seconds and we had just managed to awaken those still sleeping when we heard warning calls: "Stay away from the buildings."

I wanted to take the dog out, but a Civil Protection guard casted me aside: "You can't be here, go away." The minutes passed but the announced tremor wasn't noticeable for me. What was impressive was the sound of the seismic warning along with the collective psychosis. We went back to see the dog and we took him out for a walk and to feed and water him; the vet who was with him the first day had returned to see him.

Soon after, an unexpected event occurred for those of us who know nothing of a disaster situation. All rescuers were asked to leave the collapsed building because it was no longer safe after the tremor. In a few minutes, the anthill got empty. At 9:15 a.m. the rescue activities cessation was declared and the Mexican national anthem was heard, never sadder. However, nobody moved or left.

The Japanese brigade left first and we all applauded them in appreciation. But they were the only one. Shouts and claims were barely heard because the area was barricaded. "We're not leaving." "We're going to go up again." "You cannot stop us." The atmosphere began to get very tense. Law enforcement personnel arrived, but the rescue squads were already organizing themselves to go back to the building. We didn't know what to do, so we decided not to leave and wait.

In that moment, the rescue groups agreed to integrate an international community to support each other in disaster situations, such as in Mexico. They managed to return because they didn't leave the site and because the relatives of the trapped persons brought a lawyer who processed an injunction to prevent the entry of heavy machinery, which was already parked in front of the building. Only a few rescuers would enter, but they

would continue working. Some of them had experienced the earthquake inside the collapsed building, immersed in the thirty by thirty centimeters tunnels that they had dug. One of their phrases was recorded in my mind: “At the time of the tremor inside the collapse, nobody is an atheist.” Although many hours had passed, hope was still present. At the end of the day, the owner of the dog came back and with a firm voice he said: “I’m moving to another place.” At that moment and without much thought, I told him: “I am going with you.” I didn’t know where, how, or how many days. I took a few things from the camp for the dog and we left. Once on our way, the guy told me that we were going to San Gregorio in Xochimilco. A volunteer who provided transportation service took us in his van, together with the dog’s pet carrier and the small group of rescuers that had been formed in Tlalpan. They had been together since the first day of the collapse; they had shared many hours, working shoulder to shoulder all the time.

It was long drive and it was already night. We went through the Coapa collapse area, on the Canal de Miramontes avenue, where we were all impressed to see the buildings that we knew and had once visited, such as the Coapa Galleries and the taekwondo gym, ruined. I have practiced taekwondo for more than ten years, and when I went to that doyang (school), that had very nice facilities, to ask about their monthly fee, it was out of my budget. It was my brother who told me that, when he was looking for the lost little dog, he saw that the gym had collapsed. Next to it was a hardware store that provided all their material to rescue the persons trapped in the Girasoles building that was behind.

SAN GREGORIO, XOCHIMILCO, MEXICO CITY

Saturday, September 23, 2017

We arrived at the village late at night. The road was in very bad conditions, but the stories of the rescuers made the trip more bearable. San Gregorio was a pitch black due to the prevailing darkness; the only light was that of the cars headlights. There was no more light than that of a big power generator plant that made a lot of noise and provided intermittent electricity to the houses. The rescuers got down the van and people offered us food or hot drinks. I used the opportunity to rest while I waited with the dog. The car doors opened and, when I thought we were going to go down, it wasn't that way. The brigade was denied the access because the area was under the army command and no help was required. Faced with that situation, we went back to our homes, without a plan for the next day.

It was Sunday and everything was quiet. There was no water in our neighborhood. On television there were fewer news broadcasts and more regular programs. In the daily practice of veterinary medicine there is an expression among the doctors: "the following patient syndrome", that is, when you have a complicated patient and you are already waiting for the next one.

The need to keep doing something, or whatever it was, didn't let me stay at home to see the reports. I started looking in the social networks where I could go or who to contact to join a brigade, a collecting center, to carry food, whatever. In some places, many more than I would have liked, they said that volunteers were no longer required. Fortunately, I managed to contact the doctor who had been with Titan and who was about to go to the State of Morelos. She told me that they needed watch relief in Tlalpan, but that it would be for the night because nobody wanted to stay. Of course I could and I wanted to go. I went back to the multifamily housing unit that already exhibited another face. We arrived at night and the checkpoints had almost disappeared, so we went in without problems. There were no rescue dogs anymore, only one person remained at the veterinary camp in case of finding a pet among the debris, as had happened with a Schnauzer dog that afternoon. My colleagues could not take care of it, because it was taken by another brigade that wasn't a vet one. The image of two Japanese rescuers carrying the puppy quickly went around the Internet.

TLALPAN MULTIFAMILY HOUSING UNIT,
MEXICO CITY

Sunday, September 24, 2017

I waited for daylight to appear and I spotted fewer people. A girl was carrying breakfasts and we helped her to distribute them among the uniformed personnel who was the most numerous. The day shift replacements arrived, but I decided to stay. At one point a voice was heard shouting through the gate: "Do you have kibbles for Titan?". I filled a bag and handed it asking him, "Is he here?" "No", he told me. "He's at the shelter," and he disappeared. I thought: "Well, what a luck to find them again," because I didn't have any contact phone number or anything of them. I could have lost track of them.

We kept distributing breakfast and, in a matter of minutes, I saw the dog pass by with his rescue trainer. I went after them. The only thing I managed to say when I reached them was, "Hello!" controlling the excitement of finding them. With a softer voice than the one I knew from the previous days, his answer was: "Oh, you came back too!" From that moment on I became Titan's shadow. I filled a bucket with bottles of water and his plates with kibbles. I followed him while they were waiting outside, I would walk him if his owner asked me so and, in a few words, I was behind them all the time.

Ground zero, the collapsed building, was a few meters away. The rescuer talked to the soldiers and they made plans while I was holding the dog, which kept calm if he was near or in sight to his owner. They were making the shelter in a church their operations center; there they rested and ate and, of course, I went with them too. The persons rescued or who had lost their homes already recognized them and thanked them for their help. That night they rested as they had not been able for days; the two of them slept together until they recovered some of the strength they needed for what was to come.

SHELTER AT THE SAINT JOSEPH PATRONAGE CHURCH, TALPAN, MEXICO CITY

Monday, September 25, 2017

Spend the night in the multipurpose room of the church, set up as a collection center and shelter, was a revitalizing balm. Feeling the protection of a great Christ visible from all sides of the gallery was like a sign that we are always in His hands, no matter what happens.

The earthquake had already been a week before. Since the university had restarted its activities, I had to go to work and so I did. I woke up very early and walked in the dark for a while towards the transportation. I counted the minutes to return. At noon I returned and I heard there were plans for a place to move the binomial. At that time, the owner of Titan was directing everyone's activities, as he had done in the collapse zone. "We are going to the Rome neighborhood, to Alvaro Obregon Avenue. We are waiting for transportation."

We gathered all our things to store them away and we climbed into a van that arrived quickly to a zone quite different from the Tlalpan Avenue.

286 ALVARO OBREGON AVE., ROMA NORTE NEIBORHOOD,
MEXICO CITY

Monday, September 25, 2017

There were many damaged buildings, fallen walls, windows without glasses, signs of 'Do not take pictures out of respect'; it looked like a ghost town. The damaged building was at 286 Alvaro Obregon Avenue. The camp looked like an inner city. Everything was organized, there were carpentry, doctors, journalists in one single area and many, but many militaries. The access was totally restricted; there was no way to approach the collapsed building. And I don't say it for us, the volunteers: the search brigade was denied the access.

The collapse was huge: a monster fully lit at night. It was impressive to see the magnitude of the collapsed building and how it had affected those adjacent. It seemed that a giant finger had compressed the construction from above, like a cake, because you could see the thick layers of concrete, one on top of the other. It was impossible to enter or approach it. At the express request of the relatives of the persons trapped inside to carry out a search with the dog, the answer was always no.

The camp was set up in a tent to be there during the night and let the rescuers and the dog rest a little. It rained like never before, and all the things we carried with us got wet. Cold and uncertainty: we would wait until dawn to make a new attempt.

286 ALVARO OBREGON AVE. ROMA NORTE NEIBORHOOD,
MEXICO CITY

Tuesday, September 26, 2017

Early again, at about six o'clock in the morning, because no one sleeps or, rather, because no one can sleep, I heard a warm voice that offered me a delicious Oaxacan tamal with atole. "Miss, tell the cops to let us pass also tomorrow." I asked him where they came from and he told me that he was from Tlalnepantla. And I who considered that I was away from home!

The day and the wait began. I was still impressed by the level of organization of the camp. Everything tidy, clean, at hand.

We saw pass rescue brigades, mainly those foreign, some with dogs, and we kept waiting. I don't remember the time, but the order was: "Get your things ready because we're going in," and we did it quickly. Only one veterinarian was allowed to enter with a rescue dog, but in the end we entered two of us. There was no room to set up the tent again and the instruction was that the dog could not be near the food area. It was complicated, until they allowed us to enter with all the equipment to a bar that was set up as a command post, just in front of the building with number 286.

The hours passed and the uncertainty grew, because although we were there, so close, it was still far, long before we could access the collapse. The night was complicated because the light couldn't be turned off and we shared the shelter with many people.

286 ALVARO OBREGON AVE. ROMA NORTE NEIBORHOOD,
MEXICO CITY

Wednesday, September 27, 2017

I got up at six in the morning and, jumping over sleeping people, I left early to work. I didn't want to go through the checkpoint because I thought: "What if they don't let me in when I come back?" But it was obligatory. Just as I was dressed, I went to give my class; I think I had been wearing those same clothes for days.

I counted the minutes to return and I did it. To go out, with a marker they had writing on my hand a code with which I was allowed to enter again. When I returned, I arrived at the meeting room and I heard for the first time the identification name I would have within the group: "Maya, where were you?" asked me the voice of the leader and owner of Titan. "I went to the university," I replied. "Well, next time notify me, because I didn't see at what time you left." Although my colleagues knew where I had been and they informed him, I later realized that this was his way of taking care of each member of his team; that behind that authority figure was a person who valued everyone.

286 ALVARO OBREGON AVE. ROMA NORTE NEIBORHOOD,
MEXICO CITY

Thursday, September 28, 2017

The whole day waiting. A large image of the Virgin of Guadalupe had been placed just above the number 286 of the building; it could be seen from afar. It seemed like an entrance to the collapse. There were also wreaths of flowers. Another image of the Virgin of the Tepeyac was inside the tent improvised to hear mass, a few steps from where we were. At five in the afternoon, a priest with a foreign accent officiated.

The relatives looking for their children, brothers, husbands and wives arrived. It was impossible not to feel their pain and understand somehow what they were enduring. Being so close and not being able to do something, knowing that a very important person for us is trapped there. What a great desire to hug him again after work, to dine together, to talk, to tell him how much we miss him! He left in the morning to work and hasn't return; he doesn't answer his phone, he's not visiting someone.

During the mass, it started to rain and my tears got mixed with the raindrops. How great a desire to tightly hug he who already takes care of us from heaven; to kiss he who didn't want to say goodbye because he knew we wouldn't let him go; to remember the star that went to shine in the highest; to miss the angel that God called back so soon and with whom a few days before I had talked to and asked him for help so I could find the meaning of my life!

That afternoon, to confirm that everything was in order, we took the rescue dog to be checked by a specialist in veterinarian orthopedics, a big-hearted good friend who took care of him in his hospital, free of charge.

Back in the operations center, there was more movement and enthusiasm. Members of the topos groups arrived and organized themselves for the next day. Apparently, the chance of entering the building was improving and they wanted to be prepared.

286 ALVARO OBREGON AVE. ROMA NORTE NEIBORHOOD,
MEXICO CITY

Friday, September 29, 2017

The day started very early, before dawn. We took the dog for a walk and went to have breakfast. An important brigade had already been integrated: they had sound and tracking equipment, and everything ready to go in. A small group went in, and when it came back, the next one followed.

I remember how Titan got excited when he noticed how his working tools were prepared, except that at that moment his owner didn't want to enter with the dog, because first he had to enter alone to make a diagnosis. They kept for themselves many impressions, but their faces showed sadness and frustration. "There's little that can be done," they explained. It was already many days later.

THE SHELTER AT THE SAINT JOSEPH PATRONAGE CHURCH, TLALPAN, MEXICO CITY

Friday, September 29, 2017

At two o'clock in the afternoon, the leader told us to break camp. We collected everything and stored it. We had to go to the Tlalpan shelter and, from there, everyone could go home. I offered my car, after all it had moved dogs and cats of all sizes and colors and would gladly take Titan anywhere.

I took several pictures of him in the car because it was transporting the hero while he was calm, as if he knew that he had achieved a great job. We crossed the city towards the south and went to the shelter of the church. There were the donations that people had kindly made for the rescue dog: there were small boots, kibbles and food cans showing his name and the word "donation".

During dinner outside the shelter, Titan's owner told me that he needed to check his dog's vaccinations, because just as he had lost his cell phone and some other things during those days, he was sure that the vaccination card was also strayed, as it no longer was in his backpack. I put at his disposal my veterinary office and whatever the dog might require; he could know our facilities and we would open a file to keep Titan's immunization and deworming record. I had already carried out the task of making sure that my cell phone number was in his directory, because I was not willing to lose track of them again; that way I was certain that the register "Maya" matched my phone number.

It was already past eleven o'clock at night when we headed south again, bounded to Xochimilco. During an informal chat, we found out that Titan's owner and I were neighbors in the area. After many days, they finally were back at home. His family was waiting for him anxiously because they only had news about them through the TV. They had left home just after the earthquake. The binomial had headed for San Gregorio before going to Tlalpan. He arrived quickly, which allowed him to coordinate the first rescues. Later they went to the Rebsamen School, but there were already many rescuers, so they went to the Tlalpan multifamily housing unit where they were able to work more than in the other places. They took control of the collapse and, for whole days, they helped without resting and without considering the time. There are very few records of their activities, only an

interview and two reports that I have located on the Internet. The answer to why is that so is as simple as both are: because they were atop the wreckage all the time, working in the building; they brought them water and food because they couldn't waste a minute.

Titan's owner is an anonymous hero, volunteer, rescuer. Man of small size and old soul. Tireless. With a strong and clear voice. With military training, but friendly and protector. Nobody would believe his age when looking him at work and leading in the disaster areas. He walked a lot with his dog to go and help in what he could, according to his story; however, it was his time to help. Some of us could carry things, others remove debris, make food and bring water, go buy groceries, but he had the knowledge and the courage to deal with tragedy face to face.

The talent of the binomial can be described with just one word: "impressive". They arrived without search equipment, without technology, with no other tools but his hands and Titan's sense of smell. In the dark, at the Tlalpan collapsed building, he organized the people to light up the debris and proceed to do the search and marking of places where the dog detected life. Once the spot was identified, concrete and slabs had to be broken to gain access through narrow tunnels; to brace fallen columns and beams and rescue those who once were its residents. At all times he recognized his newly formed team; he assigned a name to all of them, as he did with me. A thin and tall boy was his guide because he lived in the nearby building and knew them perfectly, he called him "Map".

When the rescue brigades from abroad arrived, they put themselves at their disposal, because that's how they began to work together, complementing each other with all the help they brought. On their arrival, the Japanese experts noticed the markings and asked who had made them. Titan's owner answer was: "We did", pointing to the dog as well. They gave a respectful greeting to the animal, bowing their head, and if the story is moving, seeing it personally must have been unforgettable. At each mark point made by the two, a life signal was pinpointed with the modern devices. It was their destiny.

TLALPAN MULTIFAMILY HOUSING UNIT,
MEXICO CITY

Thursday, October 19, 2017

Memorial Day. It was only thirty days later, but it seemed that more time had passed. People was summoned to meet at the multifamily housing unit at 13:15 p.m. to attend a mass for the deceased and a recognition ceremony for the rescuers. There were many white shirts, hands holding balloons of that same color, and wreaths of flowers. The names now had faces in pictures that were placed on the wooden wall covering the collapse on Tlalpan Avenue. With paint on their hands, the victims left many handprints on that provisional wall, they lit candles and placed objects, such as toys and flowers. With the feeling of not having said goodbye, men, women, children, and a kitten were recalled with many tears and sadness. Rescuers met again, greeted and hugged each other. Those who were always there and those who only they know if they deserved such recognition. I took pictures with the camera of Titan's owner, and since it was hot, I had small bottles of water for the puppy

MEXICO CITY

Sometime after September 19, 2017

Trying to return to our customary lives, we went back to work, school, home. Titan's owner brought him to my office for his vaccines and deworming. Much to my surprise, he told me that they both have phobia of injections! And how strong he was that, when he felt the prick, several things went flying! "I told you," I heard, as we recovered ourselves from the tremendous shove.

Thus began the second part of the story. Our leader was considering me as a potential member of the search and rescue brigade he was barely integrating. I had been thinking of forming a non-for-profit association that would financially support the rescue work and that could transport the binomial to any part of the world. When I told him about it, he thought it was excellent.

What really made my heart happy was when he asked me about my dog, Gustavo, a one-year-old, large-sized, crossbred German shepherd, rescued from the street a few weeks after he was born. Would I accept to do some tests to see if he is a potential candidate for a search and rescue training? I couldn't believe it. One of those days of long wait in Alvaro Obregon 286, I had shown him the picture of my dog that I have as wallpaper on my cell phone. I accepted immediately and I promised to take him wherever he asked me. However, I was a little concerned about the dominant character of Titan, but since conflicts are almost always between humans, the dogs got along wonderfully.

The initial tests consisted of going to a nearby hill to see how my dog behaved in landslide areas. I think the one that needed training was me, because I came back with a twisted ankle.

The few bricks that have been placed to form the rescue team and the association seem to have a strong foundation. Maybe we are few, only a handful, because the rest of the Tlalpan brigade decided to form their own association taking the name that our leader had defined for the group. Everyone will be where they want to be.

Now we have something to do with a goal to move forward: Take the September 19, 2017 lesson, integrate it and make the most of it. As it stands on the faults of tectonic plates, Mexico is a country at seismic risk. We should have already learned how to deal with earthquakes, but sometimes the lesson

must be repeated twice to learn it. For example, in countries where each year it snows and the temperature drops to – 40 degrees, people know how to deal with those conditions and are adapted to them. In our country, although every year there are natural disasters, people keep building houses in bed of rivers, and in areas of high risk of earthquakes there are many tall buildings devoid of anti-seismic technology.

No one knows when another tragedy will occur that requires a rescue brigade and the mobilization of the entire country. Our team has already started to buy helmets, backpacks, boots, ropes and lamps, among other devices, to be somehow prepared in case we need to go out and accompany the binomial.

To carry on with his follow-up task, Titan's owner used to go to the Tlalpan multifamily unit shelter, and on one occasion I accompanied him because some dogs of the victims had to be checked. They had rescued a stray boxer that they had called Terremoto, that is, 'earthquake', who had health problems, and the leader asked me to go see him because the dog worried him. He was right, his condition was very bad, bony and with skin wounds. We began to give him treatment, but we noticed that he was improving very little. We agree to go for him some days to bathe and vaccinate him, and it was easier; it's a very noble animal that is now sterilized. The other dogs have a bad time due to the lack of space and the cold of nights. Although we have tried to give them up for adoption, I am not quite sure that their owners will agree to let them go; after all, they are part of their families and that is respectable. I can't imagine the misfortune of losing my house and having to get separated from my dogs and cats. As I said above—when my sister's dog escaped due to the earthquake—they are family and, without the intention of considering them as children, they have earned a place in our hearts and deserve a good life as long as we have them borrowed.

That has been my job, but the leader has in mind other tasks for me that I didn't even imagine. During that time I had to strengthen my will and challenge what I had almost chiseled in stone: that my only function would be to take care of the dogs' health. I have to respect the indications, because just as our leader values my work as a veterinarian, I will fulfill his orders. For me, who have been such an independent person, it was odd to have to tell him where I was going or at what time I was coming back. My role in the

brigade has been multifaceted, from handling the social networks, look for budgets, get advice for the formation of the association, finance priorities, buy groceries and be the hand behind the new rescue dog, mine. We must go out to practices to which, definitely, I was not used to, because the burning sun and the wild territory are not what I endure every day. We have to reinvent ourselves to keep moving forward. I had forgotten the sweet smell of a forest, of wet earth, and the peace of nature. I have learned to light a fire, to cut wood, to make knots, to see in the dark, to ration water, to fill a backpack with what's necessary; to follow, to listen, to observe; to avoid complaining, to adapt myself, to share, to take a hand, to hear a story. Thus a new world opened before my eyes.

I designed a logo for the brigade with a Mexican flag, the silhouette of a German shepherd, of a rescuer, a stethoscope and a dove of peace. It will be for the uniforms, along with the veterinary office logo and our embroidered names: not the real ones, but those of the group.

Before the end of 2017, an opportunity to conduct a search in a forest popped up. As the best recommendation is the word of mouth, so came the call by a friend who had been at the Tlalpan multifamily housing unit and who asked me if the binomial could join a search service for a missing person. When we were already in the mountain, and before a complete lack of organization, dog and man began to work on a trail. With that same natural talent that amazes, they managed to find information in a few hours. However, time ran out and we had to return to the city at the request of the applicants. We already looked as a real rescue team and we remained at their service in case they needed our support again.

NEXT DESTINY: PLANET EARTH

2018 onwards

As the days go by and we remember what happened on September 19, 2017 in our capital city, new details always come up; the same stories, but with different tones, moments that remain photographed in everyone's mind. They're like a warehouse that's taking shape but that sometimes becomes disordered again just like pieces of a puzzle that in the end fit together perfectly. We have cried and laughed, both of fear and of happiness. We have rebuilt ourselves. Endless talks in sleepless nights that we could link with post-traumatic stress. Many plans and dreams; scarce cents, as grandparents used to say. We went back together, even with Titan, to the shelters of the church and the sports fields, to the median strip of Tlalpan Avenue, to the zone of building 1C, on Christmas and New Year, so as they neither forget us nor they feel forgotten.

The dynamic is different, because the situation is tough. There's no reconstruction solution yet, but in the end we believe that some part of Titan, one of his binomial and one of mine stayed there, atop of the collapsed building, near where the Mexican flag still waves, in the space that we occupied for a few days.

A bit of our heart, as a seed, will have to overcome the darkness in the midst of the debris and break itself to germinate like a plant. Maybe it will need a lot of sunlight, fresh air and fresh water to get stronger and, one beautiful day, to bloom. It might face huge stones desirous to stop or divert it, to darken its surroundings, and then it will have to display the strength of its roots. It will hear voices of discouragement from weeds that have only crawled in the dust and that, for not having succeeded, will shout at it that it won't either. Strong winds will come, endless rains, persistent hail, burning sun and a lot of cold. It may think that it has already given everything and that it's time to say goodbye, to give up. How does it occur to it to bloom amid debris? "That's right," your inner voice will say, "you were given a single opportunity to occupy a fragment of this planet and to overcome your own fears and paradigms to grow, evolve, and leave a better environment for other seeds that, with your example, will want to bloom as well and that will see you, proudly, follow the sunlight as sunflowers do."

It will be our inner voice that shows us the way to where destiny wishes to take us, because we know that, deep down, life will grant us again the great

opportunity of helping and of feeling blessed in doing so.

May our hands serve peace as well as our fellow travelers in this Universe. The seismic alarm will notify us when it is time to leave home, without knowing when we will be back; to organize ourselves and meet up; to hold a hand to touch a soul; to follow the teachings of our animal teachers on Earth and of those who have already transcended; to know the true meaning of the word solidarity; to convert our fear into adrenaline and our doubts into faith; to erase borders and draw new maps; to fly with new wings and thus honor those who, from the sky, observe us so that they can be proud of us, and confident that one day we will tell them our stories while we eat ice cream and chocolates; to know that we are in the hands of God and that we are only an instrument, and that of all the gifts that He gave us at birth, He will call us for accounts with interest.

We must have the conviction that we can grab a pick, a shovel, a bucket, put on a helmet, a vest and boots. To be in eternal debt to those who came into our lives to give us an opportunity, like the owner of Titan and his dog. Learn to illuminate the most challenging darkness. Expect the brightest and most beautiful dawn.

We must ask for help when our forces have exceeded what is humanly possible. Remember and cry to feel better afterwards. That just as other houses collapsed, they could be ours. Be sure that our Mexico is going to rise. Let's continue writing the story, with new pens and many colored sheets, because the best chapters are yet to come.

So be it.

My Sweet Company

Lucía Isabel Zamora Rivera

INSTANTS

I have heard many stories about September 19; I could almost summarize all of them in one single word: apocalypse: the city covered by a gray cloud to the sound of ambulances and firetrucks. People screaming, bleeding, running; smell of gas and panic, a lot of panic. Memory was shaken before the body: “Not again, not again”, thousands of voices cried out in unison.

I went out without shoes; I thought about my children; I couldn't communicate; we couldn't leave the building. We should have rehearsed the drill appropriately; it was felt even in this area; I went out walking; the windows broke; we went out to the streets; I prayed; I filmed a video; there was no signal, thousands of stories... The first reactions, certainly common but unique, describe an endless and visible movement in different angles: the streets waving, the power cables stretching, the cars rocking. From one place to another it was easy to see tall buildings in constant movement while people went pouring out of offices or houses, all awkward reactions due to that damn memory awoken again.

I lived the other face of the catastrophe, inside a building that collapsed in seconds, in fifteen seconds... They say that the seism lasted an average of three minutes.

13:14:40

I felt that untimely and confusing movement; I didn't related it to any memory, but in seconds adrenaline lifted me off my chair with my cell phone in hand. My apocalypse came about in the dark; the only image that I recall is the roof collapsing over me after a constant and sudden oscillation that didn't let me react. The windows shook. I walked between obstacles and holding myself to whatever I could find on my way, until a complete gloominess shrouded me; the rest I had to sense it through touch and hearing. I lived inside there the panic of the streets, together with those who, like me, couldn't escape, scream or run. “This cannot be happening,” I thought.

13:14:56

I felt out of breath and a strong tightness in my chest. It wasn't only the dust that covered me and quickly entered my throat; it was a new sensation for my body and my soul; a gray tinted total emptiness.

The texture of my skin had changed: it was coarse, sticky, dry, rigid. I made a mental tour of my body, trying to get an image of it, and when I could light with the flashlight of my cell phone, I noticed that everything had lost its color: pink was no longer pink, black was neither black, and the brown of my hair and my skin were completely hidden. There were also stones of different sizes stick to me. I didn't doubt that my organs were the same or worse: my palate, my tongue, my throat, my trachea and my lungs wrapped in that cloud, maybe grayish, maybe whitish. It was as if I had inhaled a breath of cold air that erroneously went astray. I tried to breathe while my cough was raging. "If this keeps up, I'm going to die."

How ironic to feel a void despite being surrounded, almost covered, with heavy concrete slabs.

13:14:58

—¡Isaac, Isaac! ¿Are you alright?

Hail, Mary, full you are of grace...

13:14:60

My legs were flabby and trembling, my mind was confused; my clumsy hands trying to use the cell phone, the adrenaline invading me. Bump, bump, bump! Take your cell phone and call for help. Bump, bump, bump! My breast exploded while my mind screamed: Try again! Bump, bump, bump! Write a message. Bump, bump, bump!

Bump, bump, bump! Bump, bump, bump! Bump, bump, bump! Bump, bump, bump! "My sister!" I thought.

13:15:00

My hope came back when I felt my cell phone tightly held in my left hand, the same one with which I had protected my head. I almost instinctively tried to regularize my breathing. I listened to my body wrapped in panic; however, it was determined to survive.

13:15:10

Having my eyes open or closed was practically the same, as the

darkness was absolute. The sensation in my eyes was strange, they hurt me, so I closed them; I felt that I strained my eyesight. I had never seen such a darkness and the cell phone light was my means to counteract it. What I saw, I had never seen it before either: maybe it would have been better not to see it: a concrete slab at only centimeters from my face and all kinds of rubble around me; the back of a chair supporting part of the slab; a hole open on one side of the ceiling where I was able to see a pipe; maybe that saved my life.

My hands were the freest thing I had and I was able to explore that place. Maybe we can get out of here, suggested Isaac. Every time I looked at the apocalyptic panorama, it was as if a new element appeared. My neck had no support and I soon lost the sense of location. During that quick exploration I found my glasses. How ironic! I couldn't see. But there they were, almost intact, as if a building had not just collapsed over me; useful, then, to handle the cell phone. Perhaps it was a hint. Turn on, turn off, call. Call, call, call, call. Turn on, turn off, call. Call, call, call, call. Turn on, turn off, call. Call, call, call, call.

I saw Isaac, shoulder to shoulder

13:15:13

My guardian angel, my sweet company, don't abandon me, neither at night nor during the day; if you abandon me, what will happen to me? My guardian angel, pray God for me. We held hands after they found each other in the dark; we prayed again and again.

CONVERSATIONS

I decided to spend the whole weekend at my sister's with my nephew and my brother-in-law. The alleged reason was to celebrate September 15, Mexico's Independence Day, get along with them for a while and eat pozole. I didn't usually stay to sleep: between two big dogs and the snoring of my nephew I never have a good sleep. But they had just arrived from a long trip to Peru and I had missed them

a lot. During their previous trips, I used to take care of my grandmother, but in this occasion, without her, I felt a lot of nostalgia. I confess that there was a day when I felt a tightness in my chest and I thought: What would happen to me if something happened to my sister? We drank pisco, we talked; she gave me a gift from Peru. I had a great time; I felt my heart glad to be among family.

On Monday I barely made up the time; I had a couple of appointments away from home. I closed a business that had me worried. Although I hadn't attend my yoga classes with the frequency I used to, I decided to attend class and start the week with my right foot. I made a handstand; that's a position that I don't like to do during the whole class, but inevitably the instructor requests it. The substitute instructor of that night began with a gentle rhythm that she kept accelerating and, before the mid-time of the class, she was suggesting us that dreaded position. Once standing on my head, I always appreciate being there and seeing the world upside down, even for a moment. I enjoy thinking what happens inside my body: blood running in the opposite direction by the mere ruse of the body to the sound of the mind's will. I left happy, with hunger and hurry, because I still had to make a couple of phone calls.

Tuesday is the day I come back home at the end of the day and find it like new, all thanks to Mary. That Tuesday I got up to open her the door and to get ready. I put on my new pink blouse to combine with those flower leggings of the same color that I could barely wear once before. My sister had just returned it to me saying in a tone of mockery: "Now that you're skinny it will fit you. I hope you don't tear them as the last one." I also put on the tennis shoes she half gave me. She insisted on buying them because they were from Don King Kong, but they ended being too big for her: "We have to share them; if I put them on with an insole, they'll fit me." I felt beautiful with that color and, despite having to endure a tedious process at the bank, I was in a good mood.

—Good morning, Mary, I'm going to the bank. I left you the usual and my white tennis shoes. They recommended me to wash

them with toothpaste to remove the yellow stain. Don't leave them in the sun, better near the window or in the bathroom. I'll be back and I'll surely find you here.

I left the branch after undergoing the cumbersome process that complicated my day unexpectedly. I went to the ATM for money, because I remembered that that evening I would have to pay for my writing course.

Seismic alarm...

—It's the drill, isn't it? I commented to the lady next to me.

—Yes, she said with a puzzled expression on her face, the same that I probably had, as we recalled that the date was September 19. We both expressed some relief.

—They already have us skittish, right?

I walked home through closed streets where cops were guiding the persons who had left their offices. The cars, a little more awkward than usual, travelled among people or through more accessible routes.

—I'm back, Mary. Did the alarm scared you?

—No, ma'am, I was upstairs washing clothes and I recalled that it was drill-day.

—Very well, Mary, we don't want any more shocks.

—I called you the day it trembled at night, but I couldn't contact you.

—Did you feel it at your place?

—Yes. I was about to fall asleep and I felt the bed moving. Did you feel it?

—Yes. Luckily, I wasn't alone. My family from Chihuahua had come and we were having dinner at La Condesa.

I realized that I was late and I still had to print the writing project that I would present that evening. I recalled that I had cooked chicken brochettes with beef and I packed them up to take away; I made my coffee and prepared everything to go to the coworking. I wondered if it wouldn't be better to stay at home to work so as not to carry so much things. The truth is that everything was ready. I thought about a way to lighten my load and I decided to leave the

book we used as a guide at the workshop. I hesitated to bring coffee, I hesitated to print the project; I hesitated if I would have time to finish the work. It was a day with many pending matters.

Awkwardly, as when I leave in a hurry, I took my things.

—Mary, I’m almost gone. I think I won’t see you tonight, I’ll be back late. Your money is on the table.

—Good bye, ma’am.

13:15:23

A woman was screaming inconsolably, perhaps in shock. “Keep calm lady!” She screamed again. I even thought that it could be more than one. I told her to take a deep breath, which was what I was trying to do, even though the cloud of the building had already penetrated my system. I heard sighs and other sounds from at least two other persons struggling. A ragged breath made me shudder. It was a chaos of moans of pain.

13:15:40

My legs couldn’t get at ease, nor my trunk. I got rid of some obstacles in quest of comfort; it was difficult to find it for my legs; I touched something that kept me from moving. Isaac avoided to tell me, until I asked him. It was a soul that had transcended to eternity; that had been extinguished untimely (at least I wanted to think so). The light was already needless; why seeing that: feeling it was already enough. That kept my body contracted for hours and disturbed my heart constantly.

13:15:45

I was hunched over and I feared to keep breathing with difficulty. I told Isaac and he helped me remove debris from my back so I could straighten up. I felt relief and then I realized that I was not in danger; air flowed better. We both felt the same sensation in the throat and we only had to wait. He was face down. Groping we did what we could and in that attempt he managed to free his leg although he lost his shoe.

13:15:55

What might have happened in Mexico? I imagined my house collapsed, the Angel of Independence fallen, chaos everywhere. With

my mind, I ran over every place of the Roma neighborhood that I frequent and every person who lives there. I feared for my family. I knew that their house was not in a danger zone; even so, I assumed that my nephew was at school, Joaquin at his job in Coyoacan, my sister at the school. My suffering increased when I realized that every second that I spent there, was a second of agony for them. The vacuum in my chest increased.

13:15:58

I obsessively looked over my reaction after the quake. The awkward reaction, the fear I felt when I saw the stairs of the building, the woman with her computer in hand, when I found Isaac. Thousands of “What if...”

13:16:00

My dear sister, my dear sister. I can't do this to her; I have to get out of here; she cannot be living this.

Deep silence, deafening.

SHE

Cristina, my sister, is the kind of person who's hard to understand at first. I've known her for thirty-six years and I still have to ask her things about her way of being that I don't understand. She doesn't usually express her emotions and rather shows a harsh part of her. She smokes, smokes, smokes, and perhaps in that same way she's stubborn, both family hallmarks. I tell her that every day she looks more like Mom and she doesn't accept it. Mom left more than fifteen years ago, but Cristina is her living portrait. Then she gets angry and she highlights my Zamora inheritance, and she tells me that I'm just like dad. He left fourteen years ago and I make sure that my sister doesn't forget him either.

Since we were little girls we were accomplices, she very much in her role as elder sister and I in that of the youngest, with a need for protection to which she always responded, although without exaggerating her emotions. She hated that Mom would buy us the

same clothes and she used to get angry, but if I came to her classroom asking for help with a problem, she would solve it without thinking. When leaving the school, she reassumed her role as a high school girl and, with her friend Hector, she mocked me for my way of eating bananas. She says that I took it with both hands, sitting in the shade and devouring it. "At that time in the afternoon, the banana was already brown and even so you ate it very funny," she remembers jokingly.

We always played together and I followed her instructions: she was the leader. She decided the games, its rules and my role. I was never the leading doll, nor the leading singer; I was assigned the yellow color instead of the pink one; I was the one who counted to ten while the other kids ran to hide.

She called the shots, and for me that was admirable; it was hard work that I couldn't have done. When she wasn't present, I didn't feel right.

Like any other couple of sisters, we quarreled, we accused each other and we reconciled. We had a word of honor to not betray each other. After one of our strongest fights, with blows and shoves, we kept silent despite Mom's interrogation. We shared a room for a long time and, at night, we secreted ourselves to sleep. Always accomplices of all that is not told to parents or of what we didn't like about them. Mom always said: "Be good sisters, you only have each other."

Once our parents left us, things changed, each of us understanding their departure in her own way, living alone and taking care of our lives: Chris already graduated, and I in my first year of college; she, working, and I with an orphan's grant (Mom was a doctor).

When my mother died, I even reproached her for not telling me the seriousness. "You never wanted to see reality." "Maybe, but I didn't know the details either." The night before her death, she and Dad stayed awake watching her. The next day I had a breakfast at the school and they didn't tell me anything; I received the bad news before I even had coffee. "I should have been with you that night," I

reproached her.

Camila (our dog) arrived the same year dad left us. She was our doggy angel for thirteen years. When Cami died, she called me at five in the morning and told me without further ado while she cried inconsolably (I rarely heard her like that). Later she confessed: “I wondered if I should call you at that time, but I did it so you wouldn’t say that I hide things from you.”

She never agreed with my engagement, nor with my departure to Chihuahua, and even less when I got married. At my divorce, she was about to tell me, “I told you,” but very much in her style, instead she said: “I will always be there for you, but look for your own way.” We had to make mature decisions without being adults, and that brought us problems; it was a difficult period. The passage of time and the union with my grandparents brought us back some kind of normality. We rearrange things and we accepted that others might not be the same.

But she is my little sister, despite all the things I have problems to understand about her. She, accepting my freedom, I her forms, her decisions.

Many more things unite us: those jokes that only she and I understand, anecdotes, stories of the four of us. She gave me the best gift that can be given to a sister: be the aunt of Jose Manuel.

13:17

I took my cell phone and I tried to communicate in other ways. I started sending messages, first to Jonathan, director of the company, and then to colleagues who were always on the first floor, but I had no luck. Then it was the turn to write to my sister. I asked myself what I could tell her, because I didn’t want to alarm her or to sound catastrophic: “How are you all after the tremor? I am under rubble, but well, I think. I hope help is on the way. Answer me.”

I was hoping that the message would be transmitted and so she would be at ease knowing I was well; my search would start on time and it would not be long to get out of there.

13:20

I reviewed with Isaac who was on the third floor. For me, he was the

one who knew everything and perhaps I took advantage of it. “So, Martha wasn’t there, right?” He barely answered when I insisted with another question. “Are you sure? How far is Jon’s office? It’s close, right? Did you see if someone managed to get down?” I listened to him, but soon I interrupted him saying: “You’ll see that Jonathan is striving to find us.” Maybe I said all that more for me than for him.

13:28

I thought about those guys on the first floor and in the course I had just given them a few days before. Would they have managed to get out?

13:40

I felt comforted thinking that if I was there it was because maybe my house was worse. What if I had lost everything? I’ll be fine; at least for a while I will not have to deal with a rent and the complications of living alone.

13:59

Damn! Mary! I recalled that she was at home.

14:06

Isaac, do you think we’re near the staircase we were going?

14:22

Why am I here? What drove me to spend more and more time in this building? Why did I return to an office when I had already created my own at home and at such a high cost? I experienced more than a collapse: I felt that my whole life was crumbling down.

14:40

God, I don’t understand you. Why me? This is the last straw. I’m going to leave Mexico!

Commiseration, anger, hope, will to live ... everything.

14:46

That first light came and made me feel something magical, a whisper, a feeling, I don’t know. If you are alive and, despite of being buried between concrete slabs, you are OK, it must be due to something.

Buried, surrounded by broken glass, stones, dust, pipes and metal

plates; I noticed how little I still had and that was enough: my voice, my will, my faith and Isaac.

AN ORDINARY TUESDAY

I arrived at the office and sat down in my usual place. Although it was not a long walk, I arrived panting and needed a few minutes before I could start working. Martha (Jonathan's partner) wasn't there but I noticed that her belongings were there. It was becoming more and more common for me to work there, even though I also used to work at home or even in a coffee shop: I liked the idea of seeing more people and I felt welcomed by the owners who were already my friends. When I went to the kitchen to store my food, I heard Isaac say that his boss—Martha—would arrive later. I sat down and, coffee in hand, I started to address a long list of pending issues.

It was one of those days when you work a lot but feel that you don't progress; I still felt the frustration of having started late to work on my pending issues due to the obligatory visit to the bank. I saw Isaac coming in and carrying some bags of groceries along with a woman. "What did you bring me?" I asked him jokingly. I knew that soon the work center would be open to the public (coworking) and would offer some food that she was going to prepare. I saw him pass by a couple of times more, which was not unusual, because he was always everywhere.

Jose Manuel was always between the lobby and the area where I sat; he was the jack-of-all-trades of coworking. He's one of the few guys who, even though he's studying, he also works hard, and part of my job was to work with him on content development. We reviewed some pending issues and I asked him to go down to the first floor to request some changes to the website. Restless as always, I saw that he got up and came back asking: "What did you ask me to do?"

Diana, one of the few enterprising co-workers who inhabited the place, approached me. When I got up to greet her, we both noticed

the difference in height, especially because of her high heels, which also exposed that I had choose to wear tennis shoes that day. We joked and she went on her way. Alex came up and, as he greeted me, we commented once more that Martha wasn't there. I always told him that he should be more time in the third floor and not so on the first one; he was in charge of the operation of the place. He went on his way and I noticed that he also greeted Diana and told her that she looked very pretty. I thought to myself: 'He didn't tell me that.'

Alex and Jose Manuel were talking about work. Many times I stopped at their workplace to review pending issues: the inauguration would be soon. They went down to the lobby, but I decided to keep working. I lost sight of them. I opened Facebook trying not to distract myself and I wrote: 'Can someone recommend me a page where to sell the tickets for my Storytelling course?' It was 13:13, a minute and a fraction later I got up suddenly without any apparent reason. My session stayed open, showing that I was still there. "Lucy, Lucy, answer. We're looking for you. Are you okay?"

15:16

I noticed that lunchtime had already passed. I felt resigned and I preferred not to listen to my stomachs rumbling. I felt some kind of tranquility, compared to the first minutes.

"I don't hear ambulances," said Isaac. "What's going to happen? Will they come for us?"

Now I had to give him answers and I only suggested vaguely that maybe they were already looking for us. At least we could hear helicopters.

15:37

The presumed comfort quickly became a pain, or a cramp or discomfort for the body. Countless times I changed position. I thought it was more painful for him, as he was face down. "Are you OK?" we asked each other from time to time.

15:40

Inhale during seven seconds, hold your breath, exhale during seven seconds, rest and start again; feel how air goes through your whole body. I loose count and I started again.

16:00

I wrote Joaquin, my brother-law, in a moment of despair:

‘I’m at 286 Alvaro Obregon Avenue. The building fell down, I’m under rubble, but without injuries. We’ve been here three hours and we don’t hear help coming.’

16:32

The little toes of my left foot had gone to sleep: I felt how my tennis shoe was oppressing them. At times I leaned against Isaac, but soon my body noticed that it wasn’t him. Whatever I gained in comfort, I sacrificed it due to the indescribable feeling of knowing that she, who had just returned from the market and was getting ready to work, now was laying at my feet, lifeless.

‘You are alive; something great expects you; you’re strong, accept it, accept it.’

17:00

We evaluated once more if there was an exit. Somehow, that hole that seemed distant was closer to me. Now my whole arm fitted in it. For me it was a distant possibility, but in the face of doubt, silence and the fear of dying there, I watched at it again and explored it with my arms. Neither a ray of light came through it, no matter how much I tried to stretch myself and explore it a little more, it was impossible.

17:25

I was wearing my pink agate bracelet; it invoked the power of nature by rubbing it. It was the ‘sisters bracelet’: she had one identical.

17:40

I felt a pain in my right side, more and more unbearable. Between the containment of my body and a metal that hindered me, it was difficult to ensconce myself. My pants got stuck and I was afraid to cut myself if I made a strong movement; moreover, my hip was almost immobile, thus complicating everything. If I could move it, I might get enough rest from that pain. With my hand I passed a piece of rubble from one place to another, and at times I turned on my cell phone light to better discern my progress. I barely had moved and rested, when one new obstruction sent me back to total discomfort.

I felt something bigger and I pulled it out; it was a piece of cardboard quite firm and, when I removed it, it gave me mobility: finally I freed my hip. I felt a great relief; Isaac asked me if I was fine. I enjoyed that space and I felt like a small battle won. I realized that no matter how long my stay there might last, it would be a matter of small achievements.

17:48

‘You never imagined this, right? Well, here you are, buried. At least acknowledge that you have company; that you’re not alone as you always claim to be. Nevertheless, you look at yourself, isolated from the world, in a destroyed city you may never know for sure what happened to it, how is your sister, your family, your home. Maybe you already have nothing left and that’s why it may not be worth going out of here.

Remember those voices and sighs, listen now, nothing remains anymore. At your feet came Death; one more step and it would be you. If you had been cleverer, you wouldn’t be here. You should have run down the stairs or, better yet, you shouldn’t have come today. Dumb, dumb. By this time, you would be at home watching the news and working in your studio, the one in which you invested so much. You were here because you say you have friends and because you were bored of working so lonely; but, once again, nothing turned out as expected. Come on, talk to the only person you have left, you’ll see if you find comfort.

Breathe, Lucy, breath. Believe in yourself.’

17:56

When she was twenty years old, my mother was diagnosed with cancer. Despite a long illness, I didn’t believe that she would die, I thought that if that happened, I would die too. It didn’t happen that way and I had to keep going. The university granted me a scholarship, and my dad, my sister and I began looking to start over. When everything was taking shape, my dad left with her.

I began to relate to Isaac the hardest part of my life, the one that has cost me so much to overcome. He listened attentively and nodded without commenting much. I wanted him to know a little

more about me, to share my story with him, to open a new channel of trust after a communication that had only happened in a survival mode. I was more tranquil and saw everything with a little more perspective, unlike him, who I felt already exhausted.

I had the good fortune of having two dads and two moms. Although my sister and I lived alone, my grandparents always looked out for us. Since we were little girls we were very close to them and, in the absence of my parents, even more.

Then came the part where I confessed, still in pain, the recent death of my grandmother and of Camila. “I had to learn to bring them to my present, instead of living in the past,” I said to my attentive listener. “It has been a difficult and constant path. You know, Isaac? I’m sure they’re looking after us.”

18:09

I felt that voice of love once more; I struggled to feel if it was my grandmother or dad or mom. I concentrated on just feeling. Something changed in me and I remembered the words that Isaac had just pronounced after I told him my story: “You’re very strong, dear friend.”

18:18

Silence prevailed, as well as the total lack of evidence of help. But then we heard a voice asking for help.

“Who are you?” we shouted together.

“Paulina.”

“Where do you work?”

“Human Resources.”

I confirmed with Isaac that we didn’t know any Paulina, and least in that department. We told her our names and that we were from the third floor.

“Third floor? Are you sure?”

“Yes, from the co-working. How are you?”

“More calm now, but I hurt a foot. So, on what floor are we?”

We didn’t understand very well her question and shouting she explained us:

“I’m from the fourth floor. I fell. Pee.”

TALK TO THEM

Why believe that our dead relatives listen to us? Why not? I devised my own method for bringing them to my present when I got frustrated by my constant visits to the past, always laden with longing, with ‘what ifs’, with reproaches to a God that I wanted to believe He was bad. I distorted the truth in whatever way convenient for me and I reinforced my role as victim in life. That way I alleviated momentarily the heavy trace of death in which neither them, the doctor, or destiny were the culprits, but God.

I began to talk to them, to tell them things about my life; to remember them with gladness and acceptance, rather than with anger and denial. “They are in another plane and you can believe whatever you want,” whispered me that wise voice that surges from time to time. Maybe it’s them or perhaps a higher voice, or perhaps only me who can hear those messages when I’m in peace. I decided that they would always be with me.

I came to this conclusion after thousands of therapies; after I stopped blaming the world; after accepting that my parents’ death was some part of my story that I couldn’t get rid of. For the first time in years, I took control of my life, of my own emotions, even of my thoughts. Enough codependence on a man, my sister or my grandparents! I started to fly by myself. I had to forgive myself and reconfigure those false ideas backed by the world but put into practice by me.

It took me time to get acquainted with my new ego, to accept myself as a good employee, to see myself autonomous in life, and I realized that it was an endless effort followed by a wonderful time of self-knowledge and reconfiguration of my beliefs and my values.

I had found the path to freedom.

19:34

- The girl we talked to, Paulina, was she the one who shouted so loud?
- I’m not sure.
- I think she was.

- But each time fewer voices are heard.
- Maybe we're just the three of us still alive.

20:06

“Do you really think they could still come for you? You don't want to accept it and you've turned off your cell phone, but it is already night. Even if you pretend to lose track of time, you know it's running, and that scares you. Accept that days or weeks may pass. How long can a person live in these conditions? Take a look, you foul, take a look at the minimum space you are in: it is as if you were buried alive; what you have seen in a movie can become reality; besides, you share the space with this man. You're grateful for having him, but maybe it's not so good, unless you expect to survive. Maybe sleep will help you forget, although you've never been good at that, and the insomnia you had been enduring may appear today as well. If he falls asleep you'll remain completely alone and in silence.”

21:38

I heard clearer noises. Machinery and voices. We shouted in unison and we recovered hope. I shouted to Paulina what I was hearing and I wanted her confirmation. At close range I said to Isaac: “Listen, listen, it's as if they were giving instructions to someone.” Convinced of it, we shouted as loud as we could. I started crying like someone who finds something very precious, like when an athlete reaches the finish line and explodes with emotion. Little sister, little sister, I'm fine, and there's less time before we see each other again. Little sister, I want to see you now, I'm fine, I'm fine, be patient. God help us! I broke down in tears and anxiety until I noticed that I was getting flustered. I thought I could become dehydrated and that if I was so close I had to calm down, control myself. Isaac reassured me with his solidary hand and we continued to scream.

23:00

The noise gradually receded, but hope didn't. I corroborated that Paulina was fine and we continued shouting louder: Help!

Help! Help! Help! Help!

23:16

Complete silence!

00:00

I heard Isaac snoring and I envied him.

00:56

I suggested that we should be vigilant if someone came back for us. I didn't have much response and, instead, Isaac commented that there would hardly be people at night. I remembered those rescue groups called Moles or Topos that come from all over the world in these events. He nodded, but soon went back to sleep.

1:48

I felt angry at that false alarm and I wanted to keep screaming, to stay active, not to give up. Everything achieved so far was diluted. I had trouble keeping positive thoughts, a deep breathing, my spirits up, conviction.

Why God? Why does this happen to me? I don't understand you anymore. What must I do? I don't understand anything since my grandmother died. I was barely recovering and I had found a place that today is destroyed. I don't understand you, God.

3:00

My body was not so contracted anymore, but that didn't mean comfort at all. My glasses and my cell phone became my precious objects that I dedicated myself to care for, although they occasionally disturbed me. Wearing the glasses was absurd and, besides, they weighed on my nasal septum. That hole with the crossed pipe that I believed was part of my salvation became the little cave where I stored my belongings. I put my glasses and my cell phone in a place that was accessible and close at hand in case I needed them.

3:26

I made a new attempt to make a call: maybe the network had already been re-established. I turned on the cell phone and its intense light hurt my eyes. I searched blindly my glasses in my little cave and avoided see the time; I focused on checking if there was a signal. I tried all the options: calls, messages, WhatsApp, emergency number, social networks.

Nothing. I checked the battery and although I had it in saving mode, it was running out. I made more attempts and ended up desperate. I repeated my sister's number again and again to memorize it: it was plan B in case the battery ran out.

4:00

“Accept your strength, Lucy. What else do you need! This proves your physical and mental strength; look at what you've achieved. Don't negate it anymore. People don't say it as a compliment, they say it because you convey that and because your emotional strength—after so many losses—has shaped you as you are: a great woman who, even in this circumstance, brings out her best and keeps fighting, remains optimistic, gives her hand to the guy next to her. Hug yourself, love yourself, acknowledge yourself.”

I felt a hug and I smiled.

4:39

I opened my eyes somewhat alarmed: it was Pau asking if everything was the same. I probably dozed for a moment. I had visualized the encounter with my sister. Everything happened in a foggy environment where I went out and nothing had been so serious: there were no other collapses, or ambulances, or marines. I just went out and my only concern was to call her. I did it with the naturalness of who calls to report in.

5:28

—Isaac, I haven't been able to pee.

—My friend, you must make an attempt; you might get sick.

I regretted that, despite having swallowed my shame, my attempts had been unsuccessful. I had been holding it in for so long, that now I couldn't pee. The position of my body didn't help either: I had to make a great effort. I didn't want to throw away my achievements and that, because I couldn't pee, the situation got more complicated. His brief words encouraged me to try again.

6:00

—Isaac, you do know that my name is Lucy, right?

I felt a light smile, but he didn't answer.

—It's because you always call me friend, and when we finally

leave this place you will not know my name. What if the rescuers ask us?

—Yes. You're Lucy.

6:15

I dozed again and I felt myself shrugging my arms, trying to cover myself. It wasn't an unbearable cold, but I felt a stream of air.

7:33

“Of course I miss you! You know it. I've always missed you! For years I wanted to be with you, but don't you think that it will be now. That was years ago and it cost me a lot of therapy. I am sure that God has other plans for me, He told me so: I felt it. My life here is not coming to an end and I don't want to see you soon. So much learning to bring you to my life, for what? So that suddenly now I may see you again and leave Cristina alone? No! I'm not leaving; rather, you come here and help me. Grandmother, where are you? Why I don't feel you? I've been needing you for hours and I don't feel you. Come, please, come!”

8:05

My mouth was much drier; swallowing saliva was getting harder and harder. My lips still had dust and I had that strange feeling of being covered, dry. I touched my face and I recall that that morning I had made up as usual. My eyelashes felt quite firm; my mascara withstands anything, I thought. But, rather, the dust had settled between this and each of my eyelashes. It felt like a kind of mud. It wasn't annoying, but I thought it was not healthy to leave it that way. I kept myself entertained quite a long time removing that mixture and dissolving it with my fingers until I left my eyelashes as if I had not made up.

9:06

Migraine.

TIME TO PRAY

Since I was a child, my mother instilled Catholicism in us. Every

Sunday, after several shouts and arguments, we arrived at the 2:00 o'clock mass. My dad managed to escape a few times. The priest was quite modern compared to many others we had heard before; Mom adored him. The small church was at the end of a group of houses and parks, very close to my beloved house of San Joaquin No. 8

Every night there was a voice that said: "Let's pray." Together we recited a long prayer composed by Mom, from Our Father and Hail Mary, to prayers to the saints, to the angels and to the child Jesus. The four of us blessed each other and they sent us to bed.

In my adolescence I was a missionary and member of a prayer and social action group. The mission part didn't please Dad at all; he said that I shouldn't do that because it was hazardous for his daughter, while Mom recalled that in her youth she did it more than once. It was not easy to get his permission, but Dad had to give in. The year that Mom got sick, I left during the Holy Week and it was hard, very challenging and spiritually difficult. She was not yet critically ill and she encouraged me to leave. It was until November of that year when she relapsed. She died on December 6. My relationship with God began to weaken; I began to doubt, to ask myself questions and to blame Him. "I gave you a week of my life that, instead, I could have spent with Mom," I reproached Him more than once.

Perhaps my grandmother was more believing than my mother, more traditional too. I always admired her unswerving faith. She knew all the saints, she recited the whole rosary and she always had small prayer books. Each Christmas we lulled the Child before midnight and she led a small ceremony. She asked me to reflect on my position towards God; she urged me on going back to church and pray.

I had to get rid of so much anger, rebuild my faith and not just stay with what they had instilled in me. I went in depth into the world of the angels and I realized that I was not far from what I already practiced. I studied the subject more in depth and I found it fascinating: it connected me again. I also approached meditation and Buddhism thanks to yoga. Everything began to make sense and

I understood that every being could be summed up in a pair of words: love and compassion.

I devised my own conception of God and I realized that the word religion is one more label; my belief is in me and in those two magical words.

9:55

I had already questioned Isaac about his life and, curious, I inquired more details: “Tell me something else, I’m getting bored.” We talked about those things we already had in common, such as the workplace and the owner of the company. He told me how he got there and I told him why I did it. We remembered some events at the office, such as when it was lunch time and he said: “Fatty is hungry.” While Martha, with her peculiar Colombian accent, said: “That’s serious, Fatty. You better go eat.”

10:23

“God, God, God, I don’t understand your language. I’ve discovered so many things here, but I still find difficult to understand this hard test. I can’t stand anymore: I want to see my sister. Please help me. Listen, as soon as I get out of here I’ll stop having sugar.” At once I realized the banality of my promise and, besides, it’s not my style. But I felt that He was listening to me, I felt peace and I kept talking. “God, when I get out of here, tell me clearly what you want from me, and I say clearly, because in fact I strive to understand your signals. Give me an answer, Lord, and I’ll answer you as you guide me.”

I told Him, I trusted Him.

11:19

Noise, a lot of noise. Uproar. Very distant voices, but machines constantly. Suddenly it was deafening, but I preferred that instead of the deep silence of the previous hours. Will they be close? Will they come for us? And if they leave again?

12:06

We spent more than an hour yelling every time there was a chance. When the machine causing that terrifying sound stopped, the ‘help’ screams started again.

12:46

Help! Help! Help! Help! Help! Help! Help! Help! Help! Help!

13:14

I don't have an iron will either, and the passing of hours was somewhat remarkable. I took my cell phone and I registered that 24 hours had passed. I took a deep breath and focused on how good it was to keep hearing the machines. "It's a good sign," I repeated to myself.

14:10

I noticed that my head no longer hurt; I was amazed. The breathing exercises had been useful and I had more strength to keep screaming.

14:29

The voice gave of itself, the weariness, the darkness irritated; the body bothered. Isaac suggested to make noise with whatever we could find around us. Paulina had a flower pot nearby, I had a pipe and he had a piece of metal. He handed me a large stone and we hit with all our strength.

15:16

Help! Help! Help! Help! Help! Help! Help! Help! Help! Help!

15:36

We were losing strength as a team. I orchestrated our pleas saying to Isaac and Paulina that it would be better to yell together, so we added our voices. I started and they followed me. Isaac started with the noise and we followed him too. Pau encouraged us and we started again.

15:59

Complete silence.

I noticed that it was wet: my bladder had given way to so much effort. Even so, I felt pain and I wanted to continue peeing. Now I really felt weak and few minutes later I felt my head explode. The deep darkness began to get painted with yellow and white little lights, like spots I saw with my eyes open or closed. I began to despair and I feared to faint. I cried again. I prayed silently, now without saliva, without strength.

16:30

Outside, fists were raised. Alvaro Obregon Avenue painted itself with silence to perceive the least murmur. Anonymous heroes succeeded in silencing a city vibrant of solidarity, hordes of volunteers, relatives, youngsters, children, foreigners, with just that: the firm fist raised on top of a collapsed building. The silence I came to hate was the outside hope for listening to any life inside. It was the certainty of one more rescue. Fists up. The confidence of hundreds of families revived. The illusion of three brave young people was reborn. Raised fists. The absence of noise allowed us to hear that voice: “How many are you there? What are your names?” The absence of noise allowed our choked, exhausted, desperate voices to be heard. “We are three: Paulina Gomez, Isaac Ayala, Lucia Zamora.” Raised fists. “We’ll start the rescue work in a moment. Be patient.”

16:45

“Thank you, God,” we shouted, excited. “It’s almost over,” we encouraged each other. “I knew it,” I repeated, as I grabbed Isaac’s arm to celebrate. “We made it.”

16:50

I felt a hint of triumph, as if I was about to reach the finish line after a strenuous race; a kind of prize or reward that you’ve been expecting for a long time. I felt that I was closer to my sister while the voices from outside were getting nearer and nearer. I couldn’t figure out what they were saying, but I felt calmness. No more distressing silence!

17:35

The noisiness of the machines became deafening. The rescuers told us to shout loudly if we felt these too close. I started to feel afraid.

18:24

They told us that they would first try to reach Paulina. They worked for a long period of time with that objective. We noticed that the noise was moving away and we had to imagine what they were doing for rescuing us.

19:00

“Don’t claim victory. How do you think you’re going to get out of here? They may take days to achieve it. Any false move and you die. There’s tons of concrete around you. How are they supposed to get to you? Besides, remember that you are three, and it seems that you’ll not be the first one. Certainly, your sister has already lost hope; they think you're dead.”

19:30

Eventually, they reached Paulina; they talked a lot with each other and it was not easy to understand what they said. They talked about the position of her body, what was around her; if she could see the light. There was much coming and going.

19:31

“It’s raining,” I heard in the distance.

19:32

—Put yourself in a fetal position and cover your head; we’re going to bring in machinery again.

My hands started to sweat and my heart began to throb. The headache appeared again and I felt myself with less strength. Isaac told me to cover myself with the cardboard that had cost me so much to remove from my side. It was very helpful.

—Cover yourself, my friend; I’m alright.

19:43

My rebelliousness against the clock was mounting. I didn’t want to confirm the passage of minutes. Everything was the same, except my calmness. I recalled my moments of impatience and imagined that perhaps this was my litmus test. How much more? How much more? I found it hard to calm down Isaac who was losing hope and shouted the rescuers to come for us too. The rescue team was concentrated in Paulina’s area and it was increasingly difficult to understand what was happening.

20:00

—Paulina, we must leave the building for a moment. Be patient.

—Tell them not to leave, —I pleaded to Paulina. But it was too late. They were gone. Absolute silence.

20:10

“You see? It’s not so easy. Maybe it’s even impossible and they won’t come back.”

20:15

Uselessly, Isaac screamed, more and more desperate and angry. I tried not to listen to him. I was sick and tired of behaving strong and hopeful. The pain of my body had intensified. I could no longer stand having my head on stones or leaning on a pipe, I didn’t find a comfortable support.

20:18

—They had to evict us: there was an aftershock threat.

20:22

I shivered. What kind of joke was that! I couldn’t believe it! Between prayers that were diluted in my mouth for no longer having vigor, I called my sister back. I cried with despair because it seemed that instead of approaching the finishing line I was moving away of it. Because everything remained unchanged. Because I feared another aftershock, to die slowly; they could leave us again; to end up wounded. Because the people outside came and went, and their only advice for us was to have patience. Because Isaac had already lost it. Because the noise was unbearable, but the silence too. Because neither my body nor my mind resisted anymore: My will was weak, my body uncomfortable and my hope scarce.

20:30

They took pictures of the inside, still trying to decipher how to take Paulina out. They evaluated them, they returned and gave some indications, but without progresses. The three of us were still inside. A doctor had to enter to check her foot and avoid hurting it more when they took her out. She cried out in pain, though they tried to calm her down.

20:40

As a chain, they passed the word asking for a tool. The shout started inside and went away. I managed to understand that such a tool passed from hand to hand in both directions. They connected one of them with a very annoying noise.

—Short circuit, disconnect! All we need is for this to catch fire.

21:25

—We've got you, Pau; just resist a little more, resist.

She screamed again due to the pain in her foot as the rescuer told her that it was almost over.

—It's better to take you out with your foot injured than not to take you out.

The first great moment of celebration was lived.

—Well done, well done, Pau, you're a warrior.

21:30

—Isaac, Lucia, you'll be next.

We held hands, prayed again and celebrated too. They told us that they would bring in the machines once again, and that they would do it with care. I had to cover my ears and let go of his hand. I tried not to think and sink in, feel my body and only listen to my interior, as when you cover your ears very hard. All of me was vibrating.

21:35

—We are going to throw a small stone; be attentive because I need you to tell me how close you hear it fall.

Almost interrupting him, Isaac said he had heard it very close and he began to move as trying to get out. They tried to calm him down without much success.

—I help you, I am already moving rubble.

—Keep calm and don't move. We are very close.

21:43

—Do you see the light?

I couldn't turn around, but Isaac saw it very near and celebrated it.

—My friend, I'm not going to leave you alone. You go out first.

—Calm down Isaac. Don't worry, let's wait for their instructions.

21:45

—Isaac, Lucia, I already pull you companion Paulina out, but I'm very tired. I'll start removing debris, but if it's necessary I'll be relieved.

He barely had said that when I could see the light of his flashlight

very close. I heard how that human chain now was carrying buckets of concrete, glass and stones.

21:48

I heard them closer and closer. Their talk was one of encouragement and triumph; for a moment I forgot where I was.

—Lucia, you have a very nice smile, we found your I.D.

I remembered that it is not my best picture and we laugh.

21:55

Isaac moved his body forward while the rescuer gave him instructions. There was a lot of broken glass, but it was the only way out. They told me that after he came out, I would have to turn on my stomach and proceed the same as him.

—Do you think I can?

—Hey, of course my friend. I'm fatty and if I fit, you'll get ahead more easily. We're already out.

They handed us a bottle of water. Isaac and I shared it, as we had already shared time, space, moment and emotion. After the first swig, I said: "Thank you, God."

WELCOME

I crawled as hard as I could until I grabbed the hand of an angel wearing a helmet and a harness. "My hair's a mess," I replied when he asked me about my condition, while he pulled me up with strength. "You look very well, Lucia; you're a warrior, you're already out. You're out!" He helped me, giving me a push through the first stretch they had dug: it was like an L. While he was pushing me up by my legs, I tried to reach his partner's hand. With a troubled heart, I approached him until he grabbed my hand and, with a pull, I was moved forward to the second opening: the upper part of the deep pit they had made to rescue us. I saw the light at the top; there were many faces anxiously waiting for me and encouraging me. "I did it, now I did it." They put a harness on me and, among shouts and instructions, they made movements to pull

me out. “Easy, Lucia, you’re almost out.” I had to climb while they pulled me up. I repeated that my hair was a mess; they said that I looked very well. “Thank you for helping me; may God bless you.” “Welcome, Lucia,” they called out.

I walked confused; there was a lot of light, a lot of people. I drank more water. I gave my name I don’t know how many times; they wrapped me. I asked thousands of questions: “Did the whole building collapsed? Was there any damage in the State of Mexico? Where’s Isaac?”

I went out to the street through a building next to Alvaro Obregon 286, the place I had already felt like mine and of which nothing remained standing. Then I heard my name; it was not the first time, because it was called out constantly, but that voice, that shout, were different: they came from a great heart. I reacted immediately. We hugged each other with all our strength. I cried outside for the first time. “Your sister is going to the Red Cross hospital,” said my brother-in-law.

SURREAL

What’s your name? Do you know where you are? Do you know what happened in Mexico? Oxygen. Fix her neck. Cover her well. Check her arms, her hands. Something hurts you? Let's go, let's go! Check levels, pressure, saturation, oxygenation. Do you feel the oxygen, Lucia?

The light of the ambulance penetrated my pupils and hurt me. I had spent thirty-six hours in total darkness. I felt hundreds of hands trying to take care of me awkwardly, placing strange gadgets on my body. I could intuit the traffic chaos due to the way the ambulance was travelling, which made me fear for my integrity again. I remembered that I had never been there; it seemed like a dream, a movie, unreal. I corroborated that they were taking me to the Red Cross hospital, and I realized that I would have to be even more patient before I could see my sister, but I felt light and confident as I

had struggled so hard just for that. I was going towards that awaited encounter, but now without slabs, without demons; now with peace.

MY SMILE

They say it was around ten o'clock at night; they say that I came out smiling; they say that I brought back hope to many other people...

I gave all the credit to the anonymous heroes who encouraged me, who called out my name, and who welcomed me with joy. But I started accepting the credit of that smile when I opened my arms to receive, to deserve that and many other compliments; when I noticed again and again the viral smile and my smile in private; when I recognized that that gesture reflected my craving to live. In thirty-six hours I understood the lessons of a lifetime and I fought like never before and I cried like never before and my soul vibrated, also like never before, to come out like this, triumphant, smiling, full of light, full of love, full of life.

I emerged from Earth, she brought me back to life, she led me to transmute my pain and to accept my strength; in her core I understood life at last. She orchestrated her earthly and celestial warriors to meet again with mine, to see the light, to feel sparks of rain falling from an immense blue sky. I was born again; my arrival was celebrated as who waits nine months.

Darkness does not exist, it is only absence of light.

Einstein

ALWAYS TOGETHER

“I moved heaven, sea and earth to find you; I didn't stop; I did everything that was in my power. I called everyone, I went to look for you, I phoned all the hospitals. Oh, Lucy! I thought I would never see you again.” Her cold, thin hands roamed my body and my face with strength. She touched me, she looked at me, she hugged me. She sighed and sobbed with tears. “Oh, Lucy, little sister! Ow,

ow, ow!”

We recognized each other after more than forty long hours of anxiety. I didn't understand why she was wearing a phosphorescent orange vest and I wanted to ask her a thousand questions. I rather hugged her. I threw the water they had just brought me and I removed the bed rail. There was my sister who, although she is almost three years older than me, is very small, very tender, very fragile: my little sister; the one I visualized so much, for whom I cried, for whom I feared, for whom I prayed, for whom I fought, for whom I came out. I didn't shed tears either, but I cried from my heart, from my whole being, of joy, I don't know, of everything, for everything. “Little sister, little sister,” I told her on and on.

Her expression always harsh was only of love, of relief. Both of us, still incredulous, we talked about everything and nothing. As if it was normal to say that she had carried debris; that she had shouted at me from outside the building so that I could know that she was waiting for me; that she made a trending topic of me; that she thought she would be left alone. She shuddered when knowing that I had passed all that time in total darkness, and I showed her my hands full of bumps and scratches. We laughed because I told her that the biggest wound was in my butt.

It seemed like we were narrating a movie, but it was our life: always loaded down with surrealism, now we were falling into the ridiculous of the raw and utter reality.

She gave me a handkerchief, she took out wet towels and she wet my lips. She grabbed me by my head, I curled up.

—I thought you wanted to go with dad and mom, but I didn't want to stay alone. I wouldn't have stand it, but I know you've always wanted to be with them. I lit a candle for you; you say that it works, it was a yellow one.

—Do you know what tennis shoes I was wearing? The Don King Kong ones. And the earrings that you brought me from Peru, I took care of them, and that's how I recalled you; also our sisters' bracelet, the one with a pink agate that Joaquin bought us. You see? The stones do have power: I'm here.

We said a thousand things

—Sister, never, I never thought about going with dad and mom.

The nurse and a couple of doctors came in. They gave me more serum, they checked the medicines. They brought me dinner: jelly, bread and a banana.

I lived through the earthquake behind bars

María Enriqueta Hernández Hawk

In seclusion things look different, are lived different than how are lived by the rest of the population who are not deprived of their freedom. How we, inmates of the female prison of Tepepan, lived through the earthquakes of September 7 and 19, 2017? The answer is complex.

The first earthquake, the one on the dawn of Tuesday, September 7, took us completely off guard. In the dormitory where I live, at twelve o'clock at night, most of us were watching television and a few others were already asleep. Laying on the wall, I was sitting on the bed, relaxed, disheveled, drinking hot coffee with milk, nibbling on a sweet bread with pineapple jam, wearing the blue butterfly pajamas that I like so much, with the light off, I do not remember what I was watching, because I was already more asleep than awake, when, suddenly, I began to feel that everything was spinning.

The first thing I thought was that my pressure was up, reason why I felt dizzy, but the movement became more intense and almost immediately I began to hear how my mates left their cells, running, scared, confused, only to crouch against the bars of the dormitory and shouting to the guard who was shaking, so she would open us up in order to get out towards the green areas, a place that, incidentally, was indicated as a meeting point after the rehearsals of evacuation by earthquake, but the authority did not respond.

It was then when I left the room, in bathing slippers, altered by the increasingly strong and desperate voices of my mates. I locked the door and went to the entrance along with the others to insistently call to the guard assigned to our dormitory. I started to get very nervous, my hands were freezing cold. I noticed that a friend who was by my side, grabbed strongly to the bars of the fence, did not speak, did not shout, did not move. She was in a panic crisis and was paralyzed.

With strength I managed to detach her fingers from the bars and I hugged her. She watched me with empty eyes, as if lost. Seeing her so bad, that instinct of survival, so basic, so animal, sprouted uncontrollably from the bowels of my being, and I started screaming at the guard with all my strength. I screamed scared, I screamed in anger because the door did not open in order to go out, I screamed feeling how my vocal cords were tearing, and I did not care if the

others saw me as crazy. I did not want to die. That was the only permanent thought in my head: I did not want to die.

When they realized my desperation, the others joined with much more strength. From “please, boss, open the door for us”, we went to the “daughter of a motherfucker, asshole, open us the door, bitch, let us out, can not you see that she is shaking?”. It was until then, when the spirits were already more than aroused, that the guard finally came up to see us, also scared by the earthquake, and said she had to go to headquarters to ask the commander if she could open us the door. It took maybe a minute, but for us were hours. Between screaming and terming, we insisted on seeing the commander and demanded that they open us the bedroom door. Finally, the guard ran up the stairs to tell us that the gate was going to be opened for us and that the order was to vacate the dormitories and go to the courts. However, by that time the tremor had passed.

Anyway, we had to leave the dormitories. In the corridor towards the courts, several of us were telling to the guards who crossed our way, that in vain had been so much commotion with the rehearsals of evacuation, filming us coming out of the dormitories, recording the time that it took us to reach the green areas, because when a real earthquake happened, they did not even open the doors for us. A guard dared to answer that the order they had was not to open the dormitories at all during an earthquake, even if the walls and ceilings were falling on us. That if now they had made an exception, it had been only by order of the commander, nothing more.

What a thing! Now, it turned out that they had even done a favor to us, that in Mexico, safeguarding life observes an exception when it comes to people deprived from their liberty inside prisons. In other words, it means that the obligation of the State to protect the lives of people does not apply to the lives of prisoners? Does not everyone’s life have the same value?

Watch out! This type of unwritten orders that govern the life of our Mexican prison system on a daily basis, such as not opening the bars of the dormitories inside prisons when an earthquake occurs, could imply the intellectual authorship of the State and the sharing of

the elements that they integrate it in the crime of genocide. It is about something very delicate with serious consequences.

Finally, they opened the gates and we, the inmates, went out to the courts, some angry, others still scared, but all more relaxed seeing that nothing had happened. Some even began making jokes about how we were dressed: some in pajamas, others with a shirt and boxer with a blanket around, others in their underwear, wrapped up in a bath towel, and a few others fully dressed. Those who were wearing few clothes were shivering with cold, they looked very funny shivering like jellies, and that made us laugh, softening the desperate and angry animus that were seizing us a while ago.

We stayed outside, in the green areas, approximately ten minutes. We returned to our respective dormitories, where we were able to call our relatives in order to know how they were and watch the news to find out how intense the tremor had been and the damage it had caused to houses and buildings outside. It was then when I got to know that it had happened at midnight and that it was 8.2 ° Richter. No wonder it was felt that ugly! Thank God, everything was over and no damage was reported in Mexico City.

Despite the sixteen years that I have been deprived from my freedom, it causes me a rather strange feeling to think about “the outside”, this is, of what exists outside the four walls of this prison, as if it was a distant place and oblivious to me, as if that “outside” was another planet or another galaxy that I must know through television reports, as the news about the investigations that the NASA performs on Mars. At some point I was also part of the “outside”, but it was so long ago that it seems a distant story of my youth.

Throughout all dawn, reports on the earthquake were transmitted in the news. I listened to the information until three in the morning and then I fell asleep. My family was safe and sound, here everything was fine and outside there were no mishaps, so, slowly, I started to succumb to the warm call of that bed which asked me to curl up in its sheets to rest, until I could not take it anymore and I fell asleep.

The following days the only thing that was heard were comments that said that a stronger tremor was coming, that the past earthquake had only been a warning from nature to warn us of what was to come. Many said that those were fatalistic news that should be ignored, while others practically announced the end of the world through high mathematical calculations and prophecies. Nobody was at peace. Inside all of us throbbed the uncertainty of “and if...”, until it finally arrived. With twelve days away, that force that for a long time was absent from our lives, the one that made us shake in 1985 (thirty-two years ago), presented itself again with an unimaginable intensity.

I will never forget that Tuesday, September 19, 2017, when early in the morning, and with an intensity of 7.1 Richter, the female jail of Tepepan, began to shake us from one side to another of its walls, like rag dolls. It was a family visit day in the prisons of Mexico City. There were people from the outside who came to see their inmates. I was in the room watching television. I had already bathed and dressed. However, from one moment to another I began to feel that the floor was moving. I sat very quietly on my bed and the movement intensified greatly. Without thinking, I left the room, I closed with padlock and went to the courts almost running.

While I was going down the stairs, because the dormitory where I live is on the first floor, I listened to the walls and the glass thundered. I was filled with panic. On my way out from the dormitory I bumped into an inmate who had fainted. Other mates approached to help her, and I was about to do the same when, almost immediately, I thought: “No, I am sorry mate, I am not going to stay”, and I continued straight ahead, leaving them behind. Selfishness? I do not really think so, rather, and despite everything and everyone, I owe my action to the instinct of survival that shouted like never “run for your life”. And it was what I did, without thinking about anything else: I ran for my life.

While I was crossing the corridor to reach the green areas, I could not walk nor run in a straight line. The movement of the earth pushed me strongly from one place to another. It seemed as if I was drunk, and if that was not enough, small pieces fell from the ceiling and the visibility was difficult due to the amount of dust that invaded

my path. While I was crossing that corridor, which seemed infinite, I only had the strength to pray, to ask God not to allow me to die crushed that day. I walked, in small stretches I ran, then I walked again, praying all the time. I was really scared. I came to think that I was living the last moments of my life. It was something frightening. There are no words to describe the fear you feel when you face something that comes out of all human control.

Finally, I arrived to the courts. There I met with the other mates who were also leaving frightened their dormitories, many of them crying, most of them trembling without stopping. The earthquake was over and that was when I began to observe the people I had around me. Some were standing, but most were sitting on the floor, practically in shock. They had opened the door of the visiting room which overlooks the prison and the people who were in it were evacuated. A half hour later, the commander issued the order that the visitors should leave the prison to begin assessing the damage. Little by little people said good bye to their inmates and withdrew with great mortification in their faces.

A few minutes later, they got the employees out of the center through the back door, the one where the groceries from the two stores of the prison are introduced. When we saw this action, we got scared again. We thought that the prison was in such bad conditions that not even the employees wanted to stay. They had us concentrated in the courts and we were not allowed to get out of there, not even to go to the toilet in the visiting room, which was only a few steps away. We were also uncommunicated. They kept us in the green areas for about three hours. Little by little we were reassured seeing that we were well and that the prison had not collapsed... on what we could appreciate from where we were.

Several mates got together in groups for praying. We also approached to others who were praying the rosary. At that moment it did not matter who was Catholic, Jewish, devotee of Santa Muerte or who believed in the devil. We were all together. Watching for each other. Some praying and praying for the others, for everyone's families, for the people from outside. It was something beautiful,

really. I remember it and my eyes fill with tears, because it was at that moment when we realized that we can coexist without fighting, without arguing, without facing each other. We were all united, taking care of each other, giving us encouragement, sharing, even if it was a piece of bread for several of us to lower the fright. It was something that I do not know if we will live again as inmates, but the moment will remain engraved in my mind forever.

After three hours, and because several of us wanted to go to the bathroom, finally they opened the door of the courts and we entered the dormitories. We were fearful, reluctant to enter. We had heard the windows and the walls thundering. We asked the authorities the approval from Civil Protection to be certain that the penitentiary was not going to collapse in the middle of the night, and some elements of that organization inspected room by room, the common areas and each corner. We were informed that there was minor damage, but no structural damage. In short, the prison was habitable and, already more trustful, we returned to the rooms. We asked the commander to, please, not to close the gate of the dormitory, in case there were replicas throughout the night. We were still so scared, inmates, guards and the administrative staff, that they had no problem leaving open the dormitory.

Once inside, the first thing I did was call my family to make sure they were all right. I was able to call without problem and they were calm. Some mates also were able to call. After, the lines collapsed and we were cut off from the outside. It was when we started watching the news, and then we learned about the enormous devastation that existed throughout Mexico City. We could hardly believe it. The images said everything, words were not necessary. Houses and buildings collapsed, people gobbled by rubble, cars crushed by billboards in the middle of the streets, people crying and trying to get their trapped relatives out, dogs barking when identifying their badly wounded owner... it was hell on earth.

I was shocked, tears came down when seeing the pain of so many people, I wanted to get out running to help, do something, but I was imprisoned, behind bars. Ironically, safer than any of the people who

were in the middle of the streets or inside houses and buildings on the outside. God had mercy on us, the prisoners. Having nowhere to run, he covered us with his mantle and protected us from disaster. I still can not believe the great blessing that came to us, since there was not even one prisoner dead, nor a collapsed prison in Mexico City. Thank you, blessed Jehovah, for your infinite mercy.

However, knowing that my family and we in the prison were well, and watching the disaster that overshadowed so many people outside, I prayed, I prayed for all of them, I prayed for those who had died and so that their relatives would soon find peace in their souls, I prayed for those who were beginning to send help to this or that collection center, I prayed so that would not lack hands to find those who were still fighting for their lives inside the destroyed buildings and houses, I prayed so that we would realize that Mexico is one and that the differences are what make us strong, not the ones that destroy us, because in the end, Mexico has always proved to be one, despite that misfortunes tear us in the inside.

After this day, many others of pain and anguish followed, but also of strength, of hands that did not stop helping their fellows, of faces that saw in the others that of a brother, of legs that served as support for those who could no longer support themselves, of words of encouragement for the one who was disconsolate, of a hug and a smile for the one who was crying for those whom he lost and why he lost.

I would not change my country for any other in the world. We are one big family, despite the differences between us in terms of skin color, creed, social stratum or any other. Mexico is great and its strength lies in its people.

Mexico is still standing!

Before it is forgotten . . .

Veronica Maldonado

The light is made in a sky still stunned by the dawn. Electric power had not returned yet, and only half an hour ago that, since two in the afternoon of the previous day, I set foot inside my building. I am full of dust from head to toe, with a tousled face mask and sleepy dead... but, anyway, I do not fall asleep. I sit on the edge of my bed afraid to let myself fall on it.

It seems like a dream that, seventeen hours ago, shortly before I headed to my classes, the worst fear of my life would have materialized. But that is how it was. I heard the earthquake. I did not feel it immediately, first I heard it. It was like the tremor of the feet of a rabid giant jumping on top of the roof; for a hundredth of a second I thought that my neighbors were moving an impossible piece of furniture, but the terror that inhabits in me since 1985 made me go down the stairs in huge strides while I listened how some things fell apart and broke inside my apartment. I did not turn to look at anything, afraid that, the same as to the wife of Lot, terror would turn me to stone.

Again, as in other tremors, I was the first of all the neighbors to leave the apartment and go down the two floors agitated. Yes, I have been daunted by earthquakes for thirty-two years. But this time, as I was going down the stairs, I thought about beating it and, yet, the underground reptile, already freed, climbed quickly up the stairs... I jumped on its back, I do not know how, and I reached the floor below. The door was open. An employee of the dry cleaners which is in the ground floor opened the door to the street and was hardly holding himself on to the lintel. I walked to him, like someone who follows the light at the end of the tunnel.

THE ENDLESS SECONDS

There it was again, like a mockery, like a nightmare that wakes up just on the fateful date of its birthday, a beast called earthquake. As I

could, I reached the doorframe of the door and my hand clung to the worker's arm; I almost crossed his face with an accidental slap, I apologized to him, but I did not let go of his arm. On the street, silence. Nobody ran nor shouted. A lady, retracted against the wall, remained serious throughout the quake, with her eyes downcast, as if attending the funeral of a stranger. The seconds became endless, but once the underground serpent was still, we realized that there was a lot of dust around us. Unlike the now close 85, in which half the city never imagined the magnitude of the disaster, this time we had no doubt: something very serious had happened to the city, for sure. The memory of Tlatelolco... downtown... San Antonio Abad became present.

Endless seconds, as those of the previous week, the late seismic alert that sounded light years later, finally the earth stopped. After exchanging awkward comments, I go up to the apartment... bookshelves and shelves collapsed, fallen paintings, things on the floor, I wanted to accommodate them, but my mind was elsewhere. I did not try to go to school, being sure that the classes would be suspended while the building was inspected. I decided to wait for the electric power to return. The cell phone almost with no battery, with no credit, unusable at that time for an emergency. It was already four in the afternoon and the electricity was not back...minutes for calling... I needed minutes for my cell phone ... air time.... time and air. I decided then to go out and see how the world was beyond my small apartment.

THE WORLD BEYOND

A few houses away, a palm on the point of vomiting is leaning on the windows of a building; on the other side of the street, the remains of a fence have collapsed on the sidewalk. I walk aimlessly and, two streets away, I have to see an unusual picture, the most surreal of that day: in a building full of cracks, bricks all over, already leaning on its neighbor, a woman, as if the earthquake had only been an annoying

pause, she mops her house and her terrace, on the sixth floor, all calmly. I am not the only one who has been stunned, several look at her from below without giving credit.

I am still walking, drunker of grief than that palm. On the other side of Tlalpan there are several buildings with monumental cracks. I do not know what else to do... without telephone, without electric power, I do not know in what conditions the rest of the city is... My family, my friends... a policeman who remains guarding a dental depot tries to help me and he dials from his cell phone, but nothing... there is no way.

I return to the apartment; I go upstairs with fear. The dry cleaner is closed and the rest of the neighbors have started the escape. I am alone. And suddenly I remember that on that night it is my turn to accompany my mother... and yes, I want to be with her, to embrace to the root that she is.

I put some things in a backpack and go out to the street. Tlalpan has turned itself in a torrent of people walking, cars and minibuses do not circulate, the metro moves with great slowness. I join the river of pilgrims calculating the hours it will take me to reach the east of the city. I start listening to the rumors of people who come walking in the opposite direction, some from Metro Mixhuca, others from San Antonio Abad. Everyone agrees that the picture is horrible: cars stranded in big streets, the metro stopped further ahead. The city almost immobile... and the assaults have begun in all the points of the city, taking advantage of the bewilderment. I can not believe it. Was it like that in 85? I repeat myself that no, that the humanitarian gesture preponderated, that those who stole were the delegates, the politicians of all times, that even the thieves helped... or I do not know if I want to convince myself that it was like this.

Disoriented, not knowing what to do, I go back over my steps, I return... I walk again towards my mother's house. Finally, I stop in front of a miraculous oasis: a small company that opened its doors to support the walkers. You can use the bathrooms, the internet connection, charge cell phones, drink water, communicate by phone, rest... and all are offered with infinite kindness and sensitivity. Not

even a bad manner, not even a gesture of boredom despite of being overwhelmed by the number of people. They lend cables, search for electric outlets, they help dial the most nervous. At last, my family finds out that I am well and that it is a little less than impossible to get there. A little later, the small and generous company runs out of energy too, and with no line. At that moment the first rumors arrive that there, in Bretaña, two streets behind my house, a building collapsed and people are trapped. I come back on my steps...

THE OLD GHOST

I think... “Should I go to see what is needed or should I go home to prepare myself in order to help?” I know how it is, I also did a brigade in '85... better to prepare myself. But I change direction to where the rumors take me. A street away the bites of the beast start to be seen, before arriving to Bretaña 90: cracked walls, broken glass canopies on the floor and, when turning around, the vision filled me with terror... it was as if a time machine full of sadism was returning me thirty-two years back. The old ghost, the collapsed building with the same agonizing beast appearance as those which fell years ago, and – I would then know – the same miserable history shared with those buildings that, in a row, collapsed in San Antonio Abad.

Bretaña became a sad metonymy of that city that was no longer there, that did not belong to today, that could not be, that could not be...but it was.

The neighbors had already organized themselves. On two plastic tables, several people were frantically preparing sandwiches. In front of the building, men and women formed rows in order to be passing the buckets with which the rubble was removed.

I approached quickly to ask what was needed, what was missing, in order to go and get it. a small woman with enormous eyes and raspy ways, screamed to organize the neighbors, shouts that were too much, but which, for her, were a way of asserting a newly founded and imposed authority. The truth is that the situation was not such as to

discuss horizontalities, so I restrained myself and followed her instructions. I ran out with the task of getting plastic bags and ropes.

I climb again the dreaded stairs to the lonely apartment. I look for a jacket, some tennis shoes, the bags... As I prepare myself, comes from the street, the melancholy, unexpected sound of an organ-player. I look out the window. The organ-player, in the middle of the street, moves the crank and from the soul of the apparatus springs an old waltz, a waltz that seems to caress the wounded streets, a waltz that does not wait for the little coin that nobody spares, but only, to sound...to sound and to accompany. I cry without more, just that, right at that moment, it is of no use to cry. I go out.

BRETAÑA 90

I arrive with the bags and some money before Esmeralda, that is the name of the person who has taken the task of organizing. She is a seller of the pedestrian crossing that crosses Tlalpan and lives four blocks from misfortune. She is the one who, in less than three hours, has managed to raise one thousand seven hundred pesos to buy the first roll of sandwiches and water for those who participated in the rescue crews.

Nothing was left out of her sight, she decided what movement had to be done, almost always shouting, shouting that was beginning to undermine the energy and desire of many of those present. It soon became evident that she was failing in her decisions, but finding her mode, and making her see a solution with subtlety, she became smooth like silk. To those of us who were beginning to integrate, she looked at us with distrust, thinking about everyone, without exception, that we were only going to peek out, to eat something and flee. After three hours, she began to trust and show respect.

I remember that, at a certain time of night, someone approached to ask about how the brigade had been formed. "I made an effort organizing it", and with a smile I corrected her: "We all made an effort and we all organized everything" ... and she, finally, with a

smile, assumed the plural fully. Five hours later, I was so completely of her reliability, that she even gave me for safe keeping seventy pesos that were left from collecting money.

Through the afternoon, I learned about the situation of the building, how and why it fell down. With scraps of rumors and talks from the neighbors who come by for a sandwich or a bottle of water, I go building a story that, I will later find out, it was not entirely true.

A tall, bearded neighbor, who devours a sandwich with three bites, tells how the rumble of the building was heard as it collapsed before the seismic alert sounded (so those were the footsteps of the giant and the dust that rose up to streets beyond), and how, a week before, he had been in that building to find out about the apartments that were for rent. And so, while we serve coffee cups and distribute food to our dusty heroes, we learn about the history of the building. It was an old house to which they added three more floors, but they did not bother to reinforce the structure, they just put nice coverings, and ready! For renting in twelve thousand pesos each apartment.

One of the people who got stuck was the cleaning woman who, exactly that day, she went to work with her baby. Another neighbor clarifies that they were two towers, the first one, the one built over the old house, was the one that collapsed. The new one, behind it, is the one we could still see standing, except for the metal stairs that were a twisted mess. Another neighbor, later, will tell us that, just a week before, a group of bricklayers were putting the finishing details to the building, and that only one apartment had been rented, at the back, in the new tower. Of the people trapped, in addition to the cleaning lady and her baby, there were two more who were in the front apartment, of demonstration, receiving potential customers. Long silence and low eyes in which we listened, especially when the baby was mentioned.

While a group of the Food Commission circulates among the lines of people who take out buckets of rubble, the fists held high start to happen, and the long silences that keep us with a knot in the throat... and the applause each time the sonar locates someone.

That afternoon they managed to take out alive a person who was in the apartment of demonstration, the applause resounds. The afternoon goes on its course, it does not take long to appear the second and even third-class politicians, waving their hands and trying to boss people around. Some only arrive at the food area, gobble something up, pat some backs and leave.

Several military vehicles surround the area, they are full of sleeping soldiers who only get up to the bathroom or for coffee and hot food, very few were into the removing of rubble that day. Less were those who ventured to enter through the tiny tunnels, caring themselves, dosing themselves, their slogan seemed to be: “Let the civilians get tired”. A deputy arrived breaking through. He claims to Esmeralda for having asked people for money, to not do it anymore, that he “would bring a spinning top of pastor-meat”, a real mockery.

After ten o'clock at night, I see a familiar face and I run to embrace Francisco, alumnus of the school where I work and whose huge heart will make him go there for more than ten days, from one zone zero to another, dispensing his help without rest, from Bretaña to Ermita, from Ermita to Zapata, from Zapata to Edimburgo, and from there to the block of flats of Taxqueña, from which he will not leave for several days, until we asked him to stop, to rest. A necessary hug, warm and full of comfort.

About five o'clock in the morning, my legs cramp me for a break, to go back to the building. I resist, still with fear gripping my ribs and crouching over my kidneys, but I can not stand it anymore, I have to rest. Almost everyone has gone to sleep, except those who take out rubble. I have to rest, although the sort of hysteria that embraced almost all of us the members of the Brigade, is resistant that I do it. I take a freezing sandwich and a bottle of water and I leave.

INSOMNIAC

At least I will not have to bath in the dark. I am still terrified and the fear reaches the paroxysm once I am under the shower, I breathe with

difficulty, inhaling the air loudly, with an anxiety that surpasses me. My ears betray me, imaginary seismic alerts sound every five seconds that make me open the inner door, run off to the living room, naked, ready to run like this down the stairs. I go back under the water with the desire that someone, whoever, would be with me, hugging me under the water, comforting our mutual grief. I am filled with anger the feeling of helplessness and vulnerability, and about something that I had not felt before despite living without company for decades... the overwhelming sense of loneliness. I crouch in a corner of the bathroom, like a helpless girl, and I break to mourn with a disconsolate crying that did not shake me long ago.

I get into bed, but sleep does not come. Just a soft sleep that goes away at the slightest noise. I get into the social networks and I post about the events of the day, I revive the 85 without trying to set comparisons, but trying to invite to join the action to those who have not come out yet. I remember with special clarity what happened in San Antonio Abad thirty-two years ago: the dressmakers trapped in a locked room, with no possibility of escape because, as they were exploited in the night shift, the boss feared that they would escape with his fabrics on the back while he was sleeping in his warm apartment of Polanco. I eat with rage the freezing sandwich and now chewy by the humidity. Finally, fatigue overcomes me and I sleep deeply.

Day two

On Wednesday we no longer had to prepare food. Buckets of stews by kilos, huge bags full of sandwiches, some even with labels encouraging lovingly those who were collaborating, started to arrive. The misfortune, indeed, highlights the best, the worst and even the most regular thing that inhabits us: the same we got several bags of baguettes prepared in a very expensive restaurant as well as leftover food that someone had left long ago in a refrigerator and now saw the opportunity to get rid of it. In the afternoon I began to stumble, and one of my neighbors with whom I shared a shift, sent me out... "You have to sleep". Yes, it was necessary, I knew that it was not going to

last long assigning me strenuous days, but anyway I ignored myself. now I know it was wrong, that things do not work that way.

At about three in the morning, overtaken by the food, we decided to take it to other nearby points. The family of Tultitlan lent their van and we went to Balsas, a little street near Plutarco and Ermita, behind Sanborns. There, leaning forward, was a building that its first floor had collapsed... the roof was against the floor and a chill ran through us. The building next door was about to collapse, there is almost a meter between the walls that before were kissing. A knot of anguish is made every time the rescue workers bring stretchers over, but nothing. Nobody comes out. We took food to them, but the sad reality is that they needed fretsaws, shovels, picks... and many hands, because at that time they began to be scarce. The small journey in nearby areas astonished me, I realized that in all those days I had not left the small quadrant that surrounded Bretaña, and until that moment I could see other monsters in front of me... an intense light illuminated, near the subway Ermita, the building next to the Holiday Inn, a shell where before there were flats, windows, furniture, desires, looks, laughter, dreams, pending payments, a beer, children playing.

We returned to Bretaña. I had left my cell phone in a neighboring house that generously lent the toilet and donated energy. A military man decided that he had priority and disconnected mine, but in addition, he had hidden my cell phone under his and, when I asked where my device was, he said that he did not know, that a lady had taken it. I lifted his cell phone and said to him: “No, here it is, thanks”. I better not express the contempt that inhabited me at that moment...

In the summary of the day, Esmeralda had been erased as a leader, but the generous woman organized one of the most beautiful actions in the entire camp: she sent the children – her children the first –, in small groups, with the instruction to recover the water bottles that were abandoned and half consumed. Once recovered, the water was emptied in buckets in order to utilize for the bath, since the water had not been reconnected and was scarce. Once the bottles were empty, the children crushed them and separated the lids to recover

the pet. When that task was over, the children set about sweeping and picking up the pieces of uncel and other debris which did not put them at risk. It seemed to me a brave and intelligent way to integrate children into social action and to reduce their anguish, making them participants and not putting them in the bubble of “nothing happens”.

The other news was that they had managed to take out the second person and a “topo” out that had been trapped during one of the replicas. About three in the morning I retired, telling to myself that a person is not indispensable, but it may be necessary if he or she is in a position to be. I walk down the cold street because of the drizzle that has not forgiven the moment. The home phone already works. My younger sister listens to me, she contains me, she gives me her words. Listening to her calms me down. To sleep. Hopefully.

IN FRONT OF THE BEAST

At five in the morning the phone wakes me up. It was Christian, dear alumnus and now friend, who had approached to Bretaña to give his hands and his heart for that day. He was since dawn, he had dialed me, but I, who had fallen into a dream like stone, I did not hear him. I tell him that I would try to sleep a little.

My youngest sister arrives very early with food, naturopathic remedies, her love and her hugs. I sleep a little.

Almost at nine o'clock in the morning I am heading to Bretaña, passing a first filter, “the food girls”, that we already recognize each other and we salute. They are with the hot breakfast ready, but they look at me with a face of “there is no place here anymore”. After a call, Christian arrives in order to pick me up and I say goodbye to my neighbors. We continue to the second checkpoint, which, to my surprise, is no longer controlled by civilians, but by the military.

We walked until we reached the infamous building of Bretaña 90, to which up to this moment I had not managed to see straight ahead not even in daytime. Christian gives me a helmet and an orange vest. Now I belong to a brigade to which I never imagined belonging:

Tools, right in front of the collapsed building, facing the monster, the beast that still had at least one life between its teeth.

In a few hours, Christian had organized the tooling place with remarkable efficiency, and from that hour until three o'clock in the morning on Thursday, the words I heard the most were: marro, pick, picoleta, harness, emery disks, wrenches, shovels, gloves, mouth masks, pry-bar, jack ... The rigor, the order with which Christian carries on things and controls the flow of material, how he recovers the picks and the shovels when going after them among the debris, never ceases to amaze me. Raul, Pablo and Natalia, who are with him, do not rest even a minute. Little will last me the pleasure of order and efficiency.

Christian points me to a group of people, two men and two women who, sitting on some buckets, do not take their eyes off the building. "they are the parents of Rubi", he says to me, but he had heard wrong, then we would know that her name was actually Alitzy, and she was the girl trapped in the rubble. The cleaning lady with a baby did not exist, who was fighting to survive was Alitzy Judith, a nineteen-year-old girl.

After separating buckets and moving them closer to collect debris, pull pieces of roof, sweep the brutal snow from the unicef which formed the roofs of that building, we gave ourselves a break. Christian has to leave, it is too much the time he has been here and the stress that is generated by administering the tooling and firmly stopping those who claim, those who want to take shovels to pretend they are working, having to tell those who are working that the material that is needed does not exist, to tolerate a horrible little man who was walking around giving himself airs of influential and that, with great arrogance, he told Raul, an extraordinarily simple and cooperative man, to arrange a helmet for him, which would allow him to walk through the food area in order to stick the food in his throat, go by the tool area and shake a cardboard, talk with his hands and demand an inventory (really?) and try to treat us as if we were staff at his service.

Where do these characters come from? Could it be that the tremor removed the stones that covered the entrance to a low frequency dimension full of succubus and incubi?

Christian has to rest, it is necessary. As soon as he does, Osvaldo joins the group. Raul, who is a worker of an oil platform, all smiles and good humor, but also hard work and disposition, introduces him to me:

-He is the doctor – he says to me very smiling.

-What is your name? – I tell him.

Raul is surprised.

-And if you better call him “doctor”? because he is a doctor.

-I do not like titles, the truth, I prefer names. My name is Veronica.

I prove, with sorrow, that in Mexico we have total reverence towards titles, and that, as I will discover later, is a problem. Raul, the good and simple man, honest and hardworking man, had a problem: he was very easy imposed by anyone who came forward as “coordinator”, “organizer”, “graduate”, “wife of the president of all the scouts of the world and surrounding areas” ... He was left utterly perplexed by them, he gave them full authority, he did not hesitate to obey the owner of these titles in whatever order he was given.

When someone came asking who was in charge, and I answered that everyone – Osvaldo, Raul, a quiet but efficient man who never said his name, and another who arranged the shovels and prepared the ropes –, the person looked at me up and down and said: “No, a boss”, I thought: “Really? Do we really need bosses?” Now I do not know the answer, because Osvaldo, who was very nice and affable, turned out to be very inefficient as responsible: he changed places of things arbitrarily, he placed boxes of gloves on material that was necessary to have at hand. As soon as I protested because we had located the boxes and their contents, he said that it was fine, but that the order could be improved and, without waiting for consensus, he began to rearrange... As it happens when a new leader arrives every six years. And when looking up, that mass of concrete, half collapsed, becomes a symbol of the homeland.

Ten minutes later we seemed like peas in boxes. We did not respond efficiently to what was requested, we did not find what was urgent. I decided better to ask what was needed and not fight, because it was a silly and unnecessary exercise. Raul looked at me giving me the reason, but overwhelmed by years of learning that those who have a title are more important and have more capabilities than the rest of the mortals in whatever they have in front of them, he did not say anything either.

At our side, in their little corner, remains the family of Alitzy Judith, her parents, her uncles... waiting, immutable. Looking with suspicion (and they were doing right) to those who approached to comfort them. Her uncle helped us unclog buckets to get rid of debris. After a while, I approached, very ashamed, and I told them that maybe it was not the time, but that if later they needed help, I was in a position to appeal to the generosity of my acquaintances to send them to them. I scrawled them my phone number on a piece of cardboard, almost sure that they were going to throw it away. I tried to tell them that I was sorry about what was happening, but, how do you comfort some parents who have spent three days staring at a concrete beast that is sitting on their daughter?

A lady, armed with a basket full of sandwiches, insists that we accept her food. She introduces herself as the wife of the president of I do not know what, and she swears that, as soon as I give her the list of things that are needed, her influential husband will bring them in half an hour. She gives me a piece of cardboard, a marker, and urges me to make the list. I, truthfully, do it reluctantly, knowing that it was a useless task, trying not to listen the little voice that was telling me “do not waste time, he will not bring anything”, because, from personal experience, those who boast the most about their titles and power of response are the most useless at the time of action. And so it was. The lady only got a place in the first row in order to star in her own soap-opera: she ran towards the parents of Alitzy to embrace them with uncontrollable tears, who visibly uncomfortable, had to receive that hug. After, she ran amidst the building and the tools,

shouting for a mallet or a pry bar, all of a sudden installing herself as the head of all the volunteers.

The response in social media to the minimum and maximum requests was surprising, I was very proud to know that I have generous and prompt friendships, that the networks are useful for more than uploading photos of unusual Milanese or beach vacations. Odet, with the nails that were needed, and Mane, Juan and Vero, arrived quickly with boxes full of helmets, marros and bands, and several more, even strangers, communicated and brought help. With discretion they arrived and with discretion they left after leaving what was necessary. My respect always to them and to the many who thus contributed.

The battery from the cell phone has run out and I return home to recharge it. The apartment is still dusty, with things stacked on the floor waiting to return to their routine. Christian communicates in order to know if something is needed, “your presence” I tell him. When I return to the place, he is already there, back, rearranging the chaos.

Wednesday of debris and dust, of long silences and raised fists. Some topos arrive to meet with the parents of Alitzy and help them climb the mountain of rubble. “Posi, make an effort, daughter, we are waiting for you!” “Alitzy, do not give up”, their tremulous screams vibrate over the silent crowd. Then, the pry-bars and the shovels, the voices hurrying the work. Finally, a few soldiers join the line of work.

A few hours later, sleepless and tired, I accept that I am no longer needed there and, again, through networks, I ask for a replacement. Claudia Yolanda arrives with the phrase: “I am ready” shining on her forehead. When I am telling her where the ropes are and how to put on the gloves, there is a rumor running that the rescue squad was already close to Alitzy. A wave of joy gives us new energy. Her father, a gentle and simple man, with flat eyes, approaches to thank us, he embraces us, he tells us that he has seen the effort of all to rescue his daughter, he breaks into tears when he tells us that if God had decided to take his daughter, he would have to accept it, but what he had seen in those days filled him with gratitude to everyone. He

gave us another hug and I was not able anymore to move from there, I could not.

Until the end, I told myself, until the end.

With the passing of the hours, the rumor of the location of Alitzy went off as well as our enthusiasm. A fine, but stubborn rain dropped, crying from the sky anticipating the end of the story.

While we were struggling to improvise a canvas to protect the tools from the rain, the impertinent little man appears again, now accompanied by a young man who dazzled cleaning in the middle of our dirt. The little man gestures with his hands demanding gloves and a helmet, “of the greens”, he says with arrogance (that is, of the new ones, of those that are still shimmering).

Noble Raul passes it to him and, before being able to protest, I see how the gleaming boy puts it on, after which, both go towards the food place, an area to which many of the volunteers have not been able to get close to all day. Again, I can not help but think of this country, operating like this on other levels, that small abuse that represents others of monstrous dimensions.

A little later the Japanese brigade becomes present, that surprisingly, rather than gratitude, it aroused resentful comments from the subway brigadiers (who, we must say, they smoked near diesel and gasoline, even though we asked them not to do so).

The Japanese showed an example of discipline, willingness and total respect: they knew when to act, when to leave, how to help, when it was not feasible to do so. While they were maneuvering, there were signs of collapse, but they, nevertheless, entered into the tunnel. Long hours, the rain finally stops.

With the passage of time, dogs stop searching, soldiers with sonars come down from the concrete mountain. The black clouds advance slowly, like omens.

An older man approaches and asks us, in a muffled voice, for gloves. We give them a pair, he looks at them, he tries them on, he leaves them: “Let’s see if you have ones that go tighter”. We searched, but there were none. The man mutters: “it is that the blood...”.

And moves away, leaving a trail of uncertainty that is about to cease being it.

A woman, organizer and soul of that area, approaches to us asking for raincoats for those from Semefo, and the doubts dissipate. An immense frustration falls along with the second rain of the dawn. There is nothing left to do. The body of Alitzy Judith Carrillo Quintero comes out before the silence and impotence of all. We still have to witness a painful contrast: on the one hand, some soldiers and volunteers climb through the poles, they stretch their arms to see if the cameras of their cell phones can capture something of the terrible moment; on the other, the Japanese brigadiers, with the helmets placed on their chests, their eyes low and their eyes closed, full of respect, they murmur prayers.

As soon as the ambulance of the Semefo departs, we take on the task of collecting the scattered tools in order to send them to other areas where they were needed. Done the task, I embrace my brigade companions and I leave. When passing through the food place, one of my neighbors, a companion of the first day, comes to hug me. And for the first time I am thinking that five days ago we were a couple of strangers living in adjoining streets and now we were there, hurt by the death of someone we did not know either. We hugged and said good bye. I walk towards my house, it is almost four in the morning and I discover that, although the fast-paced beast had just won another round, for the first time in a long time, I do not feel afraid to walk alone at dawn.

The lessons

On Thursday I am surprised again by sleeplessness, crossed by many emotions, by fatigue, by fury, by sadness. I think I am going to have to face that something is not right and find a solution. For now, I decide that in a few hours I will go to embrace my roots (that I really need to), and try to sleep, finally, in another place, because I know that, in one or two weeks, when the affected victims begin to be

abandoned to their fate – because it will happen, as it happened with ABC, as happened with Ayotzinapa –, hands and energy will be needed to continue supporting them. Unless this shaking has served to dust off our consciences. For now, a long struggle will come that will surely last for months or years.

And also, at that time, I think that it is necessary to reflect on 85 and review what happened in 2017, with its remarkable similarities and its abysmal differences. Almost everyone knows or intuits what to do during the earthquake, but few know the instructions on how to prepare before and, more delicate still, nobody knows how to act later.

The story does not end here. Christian calls me, a few hours later, to find out about the sad, shameful climax: once the tools were organized, the most rested stayed to make delivery brigades. Was urgently needed to take them, above all, to Taxqueña and Edinburgo. There were already three trucks loaded and ready to go; while the people still were present, the military helped us to concentrate and accommodate them, but once all of them left and the brigadiers were the only ones left to distribute them, the “lieutenant” in charge (like that, anonymous), without the numerous presence of neighbors and volunteers (who probably would have lynched them), he said that nothing could be taken away, that they would protect the material. There were no possible pleas nor urgency that would affect him, he did not want to let anything go. Finally, at six in the morning, after shouting, crying and getting angry, they had to leave the diesel, the gasoline and three power plants that the military did not allow to move it for anything in the world.

I get furious, I want to cry out of anger. The military were chatting on their cell phones and talking to their families while the civilians did all the work, they were not necessary. The deputy offering the taco al pastor top, was not necessary. Arriving and surrounding every building they saw with yellow tape, but without entering to them and verifying anything, is not responsive, it is rancid bureaucracy. And it was not necessary. Again, incompetent, clumsy, arbitrary, they were not necessary.

Surpassed, surpassed again as thirty-two years ago, again demonstrating that they are not of use to us at all, only to abuse, to steal, to control.

THE CALL

The following days I tried to join the brigade from Taxqueña, but 85 is not the same as thirty-two years later, and the fatigue forced me to work from the computer and the telephone, requesting for volunteers, materials, tools, place for shelter, clothes, consolation. Every morning, all week, as a ritual, I passed in front of Bretaña 90, now cordoned.

“Posi”, I think, and I keep on walking.

A week later, a call wakes me up. I am surprised to hear the father of Alitz; ashamed, he confesses that his family is in need of financial help, he tells me how a television station has offered him help in exchange of him crying live broadcast, and he, a brave man who remained almost four days sat on a bucket, without being able to take his eyes off the concrete mass in front of him, has a greater dignity than that collapse, which the whole Bretaña and Portales did not admit. “My girl was a warrior and she does not deserve it”, I hear him say, struggling to contain the crying and the fury. The government did not give him any support and he has debts emanated from his daughter’s funeral. He is an itinerant merchant who, in addition, with the burden of his pain on him, he still encouraged himself to go out to the streets to help others.

I tell him not to worry, that I will organize the promised collect and we agreed that I would communicate with him as soon as I had some money for them.

This earthquake has been the same movie with other miserable. During the week, thanks to the communication with the volunteers of Taxqueña, Edimburgo, Chimalpopoca, I am finding out about the coincidences, about the worst, the best, the nauseating ones. How many times will we have to repeat this story? Is it necessary to do it? What to do so that, in the next earthquake, will not happen as in these.

BEFORE IT IS FORGOTTEN

Because yes, even if it seems a lie, this is going to be forgotten. The city will return to its routine and its “normality” very soon and, for the immense majority of its inhabitants, nothing will have happened. For others, sadly everything happened.

The earthquake placed me in front of the reality of a solitary building that filled me with fear, in freezing streets that I had to walk in solitude and at dawn. It revealed to me that, faced with the danger, there will be neighbors who will leave looking for a better port, but there are others who will remain without hesitation. The earthquake took away the peace for a long time: trying to sleep or having something similar to the sleep came to be an unattainable longing, especially every time a horn sounded or the apartment swayed at the passing of a truck. I still have to turn to see the things that hang, the curtains, a necklace, an ornament, to convince myself that everything is fine. For weeks, moving from my bedroom to the bathroom returned me to childhood, those days when going to pee at night put you at risk of falling into the hands of a monster that lurked in the darkness of the corridor or under the bed... and yes, this monster, from which I have been terrorized by for thirty-two-years, lives under the bed, far below.

But the earthquake also allowed me to realize the love that surrounds me, to receive so many messages from dear friends, from the family. The solidarity of distant people, the spirit, the cuddling. Love, as always, sprouting among the ruins.

With the collect, the anonymous love arrived for the family of Alitzy, generously. I speak with Don Fermin to arrange to meet and hand him over the money.

STARES

I do not know if it is a privilege or a curse. I want to think that it is the first thing, that life, for some reason, gave me those stares in order to do something with them, with their memory.

Stares from mother.

I remember, for example, the stare of the mother of Atzin, the student of La Esmeralda who one day decided to go to a march in support of the missing normal-school students and woke up in a high security prison treated as a high caliber criminal. His mother had a resolute look, of a combative lion, that Saturday in which we met with the representative of the INBA to ask him what were they going to do about it.

Another, a glazed stare, the stare of Estela, a mother that one dawn, a commando disappeared her son. A green stare that was made of water only to show the metal of her conviction: they were not going to make her sign for a corpse that was not of her son, to whom she would keep on looking for, no matter what the cost.

And the stare of the mothers of the normal-school students of Ayotzinapa, just a week after the events; those stares are the ones that have deeply embedded me. The most loaded stares of pain and dignity that I have seen. They no longer had tears; they were a bottomless pit. They held our hands and we were unable to say anything. They even apologized, to our shame, for not having anymore tears to cry.

I arrive to Xola subway. Christian and Pablo wait for me in the turnstiles: “they are already down – Christian tells me –, but we did not want to arrive alone”. We hugged and went down to the platform. Under the clock, the mother and aunt of Alitzy Judith await us. Don Fermin is not there. Later we will know the cause of his absence.

We entered a nearby café. I am in front of her. And again, the stare of another mother assails me.

Those women, a month ago were strangers, living on the other side of the city. We did not know about our mutual existences, and there we are, Chris, Pablo, the mother, the aunt, me. That is what I think while I look at her. Two weeks ago we did not care about each

other, we never guessed that that day we were going to have coffee, and to talk and to remember and to get angry and to cry together. But that's how it was.

Hopefully it had not been. Hopefully her baby, as she affectionately invokes her, would still be alive and that our paths would have never crossed.

But they crossed.

There we are, in that little Chinese café. One in front of the other, trying to start a conversation.

And her motherly stare, touches me, it is a stare that looks like a hummingbird, elusive, shy, modest. She blinks, her eyes tighten constantly trying to catch the tears, she lowers her eyes, still unable to resist the unbearable light of the day that dared to be made by itself, to exist without the presence of her daughter...

It has been only eighteen days after the departure of Judith. We started talking, we asked about her husband. We found out that he is her father by adoption, but that, for her, "he was more of a father than the biological father of Judith". He was a dad for her, his beloved daughter, since she was four years old. He is devastated, still unable to face the threshold to join the world. After helping in other collapses for a week, he collapsed himself in an endless depression. Her husband, that man, all love and kindness, will call us later and listening to his voice, his words... I can not even describe it.

We ask him if he needs anything, if he needs more help, and little by little the conversation begins, the construction of Alitzy Judith over the rubble of pain: pretty, coquettish, innocent. She did not want to continue studying preparatory school and told her parents not to spend, that definitely she did not like to go to school. But she knew that the education was important, so she decided to start working to help her parents, to save and be able to send her younger siblings to private schools. "I am not going to get married nor have children", she said constantly.

And her words had an oracular echo that afternoon in Breña 90.

Judith, the one who got excited listening to band music and convinced to her dad to accompany her and dance with her as soon as she located some party. And there they went with her, her dad and her little sister, happy accomplices of the dazzling teenager.

Alitzy Judith... “Posi”, as she was called fondly, who fantasized about the world of drug dealing, and made her parents move their heads when she expressed that she was going to become a mafia woman. “You are crazy!” they commented to her. Judith, who lost her biological father five years ago in a violent kidnapping and who now, finally, was buried next to him. Alitzy, the girl from the Texcoco who also had panic that one day, like happened to other girls and young women from the state of Mexico, destiny would reach her one night in the form of a van with tinted windows.

“Posi”, the one who already had a job thanks to her neighbor, the engineer, who made an appointment with her in Portales, in the brand new apartment that he had just rented as an office, because the building site where he was working in was on the other side of Tlalpan. Judith, who arrived with fear, because she had never traveled before by subway and was afraid of getting lost in her labyrinthine transfers, but she managed to reach Portales and entered in the office of Bretaña 90 that September 19; Alitzy, who received instructions from the engineer, who left at eleven o’clock from Bretaña after leaving her so she could arrange some things with the indication to reach him at one-thirty in the building site.

But half past one did not arrive for “Posi”.

Before that time, a superhuman force flipped over the brand new building to let everyone see its rotten heart from the root, as rotten as the real estate that rented tombstones, not apartments; as their representatives, who fluttered like vultures in the middle of the novena trying to convince them to sign a monetary agreement; to intimidate them saying that later would be less, taking advantage of the moment of greater emotional vulnerability that a mother can have: the funeral of her daughter. Disgust and rage invade us.

Judith’s mother sighs to the verge of the crying.

Her sister is next to me, who has been the strong tree that has supported her, who was with her those endless days and nights in Breña and she, whose name is Consuelo – never better named someone –, tells us in a low voice that her family is also being defeated under the pressure, that they suspect that two relatives, an uncle and another brother, have sold themselves to the real estate agency as mediators and harass them to sign the agreement, repeating to them that they will not give them more, trying to undermine their dignity.

The mother jumps, “it is not the money, I do not sell my daughter’s death, I will not sign anything, I do not want their money, what I want is to see the owner and ask her: if it had been her daughter, would she accept the six hundred thousand pesos? No, I will not sign anything, because it is like giving them permission to continue constructing buildings like that and letting more people die”.

Christian, eloquent, clear, generous, speaks. And his words are light and fill the two warriors with peace and comfort. I am dazzled by this kind man who was my student and I can only be proud of him, again.

We continue talking. At one point, the aunt of “Posi” tells me in a low voice: “I concentrated on the feet”. I do not understand. “I focused on the feet to recognize her, from the rest...” She stays silent. She moves her head; she closes her eyes. Silence.

She did not let the sister to see her, she preferred to sacrifice herself to that vision, to that last moment, to be the one that had to live forever with the nightmare of her beloved niece annihilated by the subsoil of negligence. But not the sister, not the mother.

Dealing with the acquaintances who on the day of the funeral questioned the color of the coffin and the size of the floral arrangements, confronting the vultures of the real estate agency who made themselves present in the middle of the prayers, with the family that worried her with the question of whether she was sure that she was really her daughter, because maybe they had given her another body. The sister controlling her when she was about to open the coffin to be sure: “It is your daughter, believe me. Do not open. Trust me”.

The sister that holds, who is the strong tree who can be hugged when the memory of “Posi” is unbearable. Her room still remains as she left it, and she, her mother, has not been able to transpose that threshold either.

“Posi”, the one who was always willing to help everyone, the generous, the one who never kept a peso for herself. Her grandparents had a miscellany, and whenever they needed her, she would go there to assist. “My little warrior left”, sighs a distressed grandmother, surrounded by the photos of Alitzy.

The river of memories and indignation stops after almost three hours, after the call of Don Fermin that leaves our heart in suspense. Then, we hug and leave the café, we say goodbye. Pablo, Christian and I stay without knowing what to say to each other. We talk a little, almost in monosyllables, we cross the road, we speak again, we hug each other hard, we say goodbye.

Stares of mothers that stay sown in my soul, and how good! I will try to irrigate them daily, so they do not get lost, so that they are not forgotten.

Dedication

And so as the mother of Judith has in her sister a strong tree that holds and supports her, so do I. Someone who came to see me after the earthquake, who tried to convince me to move to her house, who held me emotionally, who ran to buy me naturopathic remedies, who searched for help for me, who embraced me and cried with me, but, above all, she encouraged me and helped me to get out of the distress. To her, my kind sister Ana Grisel, I dedicate this chronicle.

Thanks for so much, dear sister.

ZERO ZONE: 286

Carmen Nozal

In memory of those who could not get out.
In memory of all those who helped.

For those who helped, eternal gratitude, tribute.
How to forget—unknown young girl, anonymous guy,
retired elder, mother of all, nameless heroes—
that you went, from the first minute of fright,
to stop death with the blood
of your hands and your tears;
with the consciousness
that the other one is me, I am the other one;
and your pain, my distant neighbor,
is my deepest suffering.
For all of you, perennial thanksgiving
because if the world did not collapsed
in its entirety over Mexico
it was because you took over
on your back you
all of you, men and women, plural heroes,
honor of the human race, unique pride
of what is still standing just for you.
José Emilio Pacheco

UNDERGROUND SNAKE

To sleep or not to sleep: that's the dilemma I had after the September 7 earthquake that shook Mexico City. I had just hang up after receiving a call from my son Rumi telling me that the dinner with karaoke at an Insurgentes Avenue restaurant was over and that he was on his way back with his classmates from the second year of high school at the Universidad Londres, when the seismic warning alarm sounded. As the previous night it had also sounded but had been a false alarm, unlike other times I didn't shout, "It's trembling!", but I simply opened the door of my son Jassin room, who calmly told me: "Let's go, ma", while I was putting the leash on Ozzy, our dog.

Barefoot and with my cell phone in hand, we went down three floors of stairs. Convinced that in five minutes we would be going up again, I leaned against the building façade to watch how Lucio flipped a gordita¹ at his garnachas² stand. "It's shaking really hard. Let's go to the ridge, mom," said Jassin, while I, feeling nothing, was still enraptured in the art of kneading a tortilla.

We were three steps away from reaching the other side of the street when some kind of underground serpent shook us. Literally, we saw the pavement swirling. I looked back and saw our building swinging; we hurried, while we heard the music of the restaurants and watched the residents of the Roma neighborhood leave their houses in terror. Ozzy howled uneasy when we heard the explosions of the electric transformers. My phone rang again. "I'm walking through Tonalá Street, but I see very strange lights in the sky and a high-voltage cable is falling down. What do I do, mom?" "Run! Run!" I managed to scream when, after an intense explosion, the neighborhood was left in completely darkness and the communication was cut off.

My mouth went dry instantly and my heart began beating like a knocker on my chest. "Your brother! Your brother!" I repeated like a

¹ Thick corn *tortilla* stuffed with meat, cheese and/or other ingredients.

² According to Mexico City inhabitants, it is any food that is sold on the streets, *tacos* and *gorditas* included.

mantra. “Take it easy, mom. I’m going to meet him now,” said Jassin, hugging me. “You have a real fast tachycardia. I’ll go look for my brother and then I’ll take you to the hospital.” My mind split. I froze. I wanted my son to go meet his brother and, at the same time, I didn’t want him to take any risks.

A piece of glass got embedded in the sole of my left foot and the pain made me react. “No, please, don’t go,” I was merely able to say, while, limping, I managed to sit on a bench. While Jassin holded the cell phone with the flashlight on, I succeeded to take out the glass sliver. Today I know that there are practical pains and useless pains. That one, no doubt, was among the former because it helped me out of the panic crisis, forcing me to pay attention, suddenly and fully, to my foot.

After the operation, the mantra returned like a train in the middle of the night: “Your brother, your brother!” Desperately, I tried to contact him on the phone when I saw him walking in front of the Banamex bank branch in Alvaro Obregon Street, and my saliva came back, as an incipient rain. “Rumi, we’re here,” I shouted him, while Ozzy, by my side, wagged his tail.

We stayed on the ridge until three o’clock in the morning and, after going up home and turn on the computer, on the Internet we found a message from President Peña Nieto where he instructed the population to be attentive for possible aftershocks and where he mentioned that they expected another seven-degree earthquake to come. From that moment on I couldn’t fall asleep as usual. I was very worried about falling asleep and not listening to the alert.

On the night of September 18, a patient asked me for an emergency therapy. I received him. When he was saying goodbye, he told me that I looked tired. After explaining why, he looked at me with great compassion. “Take it easy. As a survivor of the 85 earthquake, I can tell you with certainty that if on September 7 we had an 8.2 degrees earthquake, it will not tremble again in thirty years, because earth released its energy with no devastation. So relax, doctor, and sleep soundly. I can tell you: I was left homeless in 85.” As I had not experienced that one, I believed him as if it were the word of God.

So, on September 19, after writing, peacefully, all night long, I took a shower and with a cup of hot lime tea I went to bed at five in the morning. As if I was counting sheep, I fell asleep while repeating: “It will not shake in thirty years. It will not shake in thirty years. It will not shake in thirty years. It will not shake in thirty...”

I had in mind the issue of the drill. And I had also very clear that I wouldn't do it, since in the twenty-five years that I have lived on Alvaro Obregon Avenue, if I have become an expert in anything it's in the art of running down the stairs and overtaking any of my neighbors that I find, telling them: “Sorry, sorry, sorry.” So I considered reasonable to have the right to avoid myself that annoyance, and, when the alert sounded, I comfortably turned around and cuddled up hugging one of my pillows.

I was dreaming about a meadow full of flowers, where redheaded cows grazed happily. Yellow butterflies with large wings fluttered around their ears. Sublime haystacks looked at me, while I breathed the pure air. I had my eyes set on the immense blue sky, which was spreading a mighty peace. It was one of those times I was so totally relaxed that drool came out of the corner of my mouth and at that very moment the shaking of my bed, abruptly, took me out of my dream.

I heard a sound similar to that of a machine gun. “They're drilling in the street,” I thought, as the redheaded cows of my dream got mixed up with the workers I had seen on the avenue the day before.

“Seismic alert, seismic alert,” I heard suddenly. I jumped out of bed and, finally, I had no doubts: it was a trepidatory earthquake that barely allowed me to be standing up. As I could, I reached the kitchen door frame that is in the middle of my apartment. I stayed there and tried to make a decision: should I leave or stay. When I realized that, far from running, I couldn't even keep my balance, I realized that the best was to stay there. I lost my peripheral vision right away, but I heard the sound of objects falling to the floor of my apartment.

I thought that my building was going to collapse. “I'll get close to the windows so they can find me sooner,” I told myself. And I placed myself next to a column that separated the large windows, in a fetal

position in a desperate attempt to find the famous ‘triangle of life’ that I had seen so many times in Internet videos. So, at one meter from the column, between an armchair and a table that held a large pot with an avocado plant, I cuddled while listening to the creaking of the wooden floor. The noises were increasingly loud. “What follows is the roof,” I told myself. I was sure I was going to die. The only thing I thought was: “My God, may your will be done. I love you all. How good it is that my children are not here.” My mind was at peace.

Completely devoted to death, I realized that I was well prepared to die, but not to live with this trauma. Instead of the roof collapsing, earth stopped its movement for a second, and before the oscillatory movement could start, my body rose and I strode out. Ozzy appeared in the hall looking at me with eyes of horror; I kicked him and he ran away before me down the stairs that were rolling as a boat on high seas. When I reached the last step, I heard a several cracks. “You should have stayed at home,” I scolded myself as if what I had just done was wrong. I didn’t thought I could reach the door, but once again reality surpassed my beliefs. Upon seeing me at the main entry, two men ran towards me. One of them picked up Ozzy and the two of them pulled me by the arms until we reached the ridge, which was already crowded.

Wearing a pink summer pajama pants with white polka dots and a gray winter pajama shirt with dogs, barefoot and with my hair disheveled, I showed up at one twenty in the afternoon in the middle of the avenue to look, together with my neighbors, at the building, as if it were television.

Today I know that when terror seizes me I cannot think of anyone else. Each sound is perceptible; each movement acquires a meaning, and my attention gets only focused on my own survival. At the moment of the tremor it seemed that only I had feel it, as if earth had only moved under my feet. My mind was unable to recognize that the earthquake was being experienced by thousands of people at that same moment. It’s obvious that my mind has a lot of work to do.

THE SCRUNCHIE

Jassin arrived immediately. Gobsmacked, he looked at me from top to bottom and asked: “You are okay, right?” We hugged each other and, without saying a word, he ran up to pick up my sneakers, the emergency backpack that was hanging on the exit door and that I never saw, my black leather bag and Ozzy’s strap.

While he was coming back, my mind split up again: on the one hand, I realized that it could tremble again with my son inside the building and, on the other, I thought about my other son of whom I didn’t know his whereabouts. I started to suffocate and two young fellows sat me on a bench. They repeated: “Take it easy, ma’am, breathe. Take it easy, ma’am, breathe.” And I relaxed when I saw Jassin in front of me.

I put on my sneakers, and already with his leash on, we ran with Ozzy down the Tonalá Street looking for Rumi. We stopped when we saw the cornice of a building collapse on four cars parked in a row that, fortunately, were empty.

Although the earthquake was over, windowpanes continued to explode and stones from the cracked buildings fell in our path. While we walked, our friends who lived there came to my mind. Sandra’s house, my hairdresser; Julian’s business, the orthopedist; Francesca’s apartment, the Italian teacher. I wanted to know how they were, but my priority was to look for my son.

As we could, we reached San Luis Potosí Avenue. Jassin left me with Ozzy at the corner of Yucatán Avenue. I felt safe: there were no buildings around.

While I was waiting, a small and modest monument caught my attention. As I came close to it, I read a commemorative plaque to those killed during the 1985 earthquake: “In recognition of the tenacious struggle of women and men who, with their worthy effort, made possible the reconstruction of our city devastated by the September 19 and 20 earthquakes. We do not forget.” I learned that the place was called Edith Sánchez square in honor of the act of solidarity that this woman accomplished to obtain a dignified dwelling

for the benefit of the victims of the 1985 earthquakes.

Although I've been living in Mexico City for thirty-two years, until that moment I truly understood that I was living in a highly seismic ground, where at any moment anything could disappear without warning. "No wonder there's no construction here," I told myself.

In the distance I could see the Universidad Londres and, in front of it, many students inside a fenced area. Jassin was running down the street in search of his brother. I caught sight of him in the crowd. The two of them came back to my side and we hugged each other while Ozzy ran around our legs. Rumi insisted on going into the university building to pick up his schoolbag, because the next day he would have an exam. As none of us had any notion of the magnitude of what happened, he went to the school.

Meanwhile, I asked a woman passing by on the street: "Please, could you help me?" "Whatever you need, ma'am. What can I do for you?" she replied, eager to do whatever I asked her. "Do you have, by chance, a scrunchie so I can wear a little bun?" While she was taking it out of her purse to hand it over to me, her face looked disappointed. Eager to carry out a great action, instead she was requested something she considered irrelevant. "Thank you very much," I told her. And she left with her head down. I imagine she'll never know how important that scrunchie was for me at that moment. It was not a banal matter: for me it was essential to lessen the terrible feeling of dispossession and indigence I had. I felt much more respectable after putting on my scrunchie, and I was able to keep on walking, but with my head held high.

With my two sons and Ozzy, I looked for a restaurant after seeing Jassin's face without any blood. "I feel really bad, mom. I must eat something," he said, amid the noise of helicopters and ambulance sirens. Once again, when we were walking down the avenue, we were dragged by a crowd that ran disoriented, shouting: "Gas leak, don't light a fire, don't light cigarettes. Let's get out of here." Stunned, we tried to move forward while listening to anonymous voices talking about the Rebsamen school: "There are children buried." "So there are buildings collapsed," I thought, stopping automatically, as if the

pavement was nailed to my feet, to listen with total attention to the pounding of my heart.

Among the chaos, my neighbor Carmen appeared. Pale and out of her wits, she told us that she had just witnessed the collapse of the laboratories on Puebla Street; that the Roma neighborhood had not exploded thanks to a survivor who, before jumping out of a window and cling to a tree branch, had managed to close the gas valve; that her stress was in the rise and she still didn't have any news about her daughter. I lent her my cell phone but there was no signal. "I feel very bad, Mom," said Jassin who was soaked in cold sweat, we hurry to reach Jalapa Street.

I approached the owner of the tamales restaurant: "Please, could you feed my children? I don't have money, but I'll leave you a passport and tomorrow I'll pay you." "Don't worry, ma'am. What's important is for your kids to eat," she replied with a smile and, without hesitation, she brought them the menu.

Sitting at the table, my children watched Ozzy lick the water that this kind woman poured him on a bowl, while the smell of mole with chicken brought back some color to their cheeks.

I went immediately to look for my companions at the House of the Poet 'Ramon Lopez Velarde'. As I walked, I wondered if the construction would have resisted. In my wake I saw numerous doctors and nurses from the Alvaro Obregon Hospital who were evacuating the patients. The avenue middle ridge got filled with stretchers, serums, medicines, blankets, relatives and, amid the chaos, I saw Cantinflas crying, trying to get out of his statue. In the background, I recognized my friends... distorted but alive!

It was really nice to know that after the earthquake they ran to my house to make sure my building was still standing. Maricarmen, the director, commented how well they had performed the drill hours before. "We all left in order, in a short time, without losing our composure. But when it started to tremble for real, ¿what can I say? Nothing similar to the drill. Nothing even close... We closed the House that, fortunately, endured another earthquake and we said goodbye each other.

My friends, Claudia and Rafa, came to the restaurant where my children, already fed, now were carrying pots with stew that the owners had decided to donate to the patients of the hospital, who had been evacuated to the avenue ridge, as well as to their relatives and the medical personnel. While this was going on, some neighbors told us that we had to evacuate: “Civil Protection must come to inspect the building.” All of a sudden I understood that what we were living would be a while and that it was just beginning.

Amazingly, my cell phone received a call: my aunt Isabel, from Barcelona, was confirming that we were all alive. Right away, a whats said: “Earthquake in Mexico.” From Spain, my brother wrote desperately: “Please, tell me you’re fine.” I was about to answer him when we saw a wall collapse. To our side came a family of Venezuelans; through them we learned that both the Tlalpan apartment complex and the Chimalpopoca Avenue building had collapsed, while we were eating a fish that seemed tasteless for us.

Before evacuating, my children went up to the building to pick out some things and to lock the house door. Across the street of Jalapa we suddenly saw a bunch of people running on the avenue. They carried picks, shovels, helmets. We didn’t understand what was happening until we heard that a building had just collapsed on Alvaro Obregon Avenue. I was only able to hear number six. I thought it was ours: 186. And my children were inside. Rafa, my friend’s husband, hold both of us by our arms. I couldn’t walk; my legs were numbed, my mouth was dry. I had tachycardia and my head resounded. When we reached the street corner I could see with my own eyes that it wasn’t ours. Then I recovered mobility and once my children came out we got lost amongst the crowd.

AN INVISIBLE DAGGER

We found Lazaro, our neighbor architect with whom Jassin worked, sitting in underwear at a fountain on the avenue. “I feel really bad. I can’t stop shivering. It was terrible,” he whispered at us as we said him goodbye and continue walking like zombies.

At the end of the ridge, neighbors of the Roma neighborhood were organizing the first aid-stand. A woman with a loudspeaker asked: “Prepared food, blankets, electrolytes, water, buckets, flashlights.”

The dust cloud of collapsed building at number 286 was settling down when we entered through Cacahuamilpa Street. At the corner of Amsterdam Avenue we saw the first bodies being removed. A very elegant woman in high heels, miniskirt and fancy jacket, bathed in dirt, was leaning at a corner with bloody knees and torn stockings. She pulled a cell phone off her bag, out of which erupted a cascade of dust. “Do you want us to take you to a hospital, ma’am?” asked her Rafa. The immobile woman managed to shake her head saying no, while trying to dial a number.

We arrived at the Citlaltépetl traffic circle while my friend Claudia mentioned me that, luckily, her daughter was abroad. “Moreover, look how well the building looks. It was built on hydraulic piles.” Rafa entered the lobby with the intention of going up to check the apartment. His screams frightened us. Claudia looked inside and when she saw that several walls had collapsed she suffered a crisis and began to cry, “just thinking that my daughter could have been here”. From the lobby came out a couple of Germans, totally dust-covered, carrying two pillows.

Rafa invited us to stay in a house where he would spend the night with Claudia. “Where do you say it is?” I asked. “In Coyoacán, but it’s uninhabited. We’ll have to buy some mats.”

I realized that since the earthquake I had lived solving the moment. There was neither future nor past, only the present. I felt totally lost and disoriented; my mind wasn’t working with its usual lucidity: it was slow and clumsy. For brief periods I noticed that I had mental lapses.

Once again, my cell phone vibrated. The signal entered and got lost unexpectedly. My aunt Isabel from Barcelona was connected to my heart. In a whats she wrote: “Go to Laura’s. She’s waiting for you.” Although I had not been able to communicate with my comadre, I never had any doubt that she was safe. “That’s impossible,” I thought. “How are we going to get there?” And again my cell phone vibrated: “Go walking slowly and very carefully,” wrote Isabel, as if reading my

thoughts. “She’s right,” I said to myself, and the mattresses issue seemed very complicated. I thanked Rafa heartily for his offer and set out on the road to the Veronica Anzures neighborhood.

When we left our friends, my helplessness expanded like a hot air balloon. There, at the Citlaltépetl Circle, I found my beloved Benjamín with no blood on his face and his eyes bulging: He was walking hurriedly. The previous night, we had dined together at the Taquitos Frontera restaurant; we had talked about culture and art. Now he told me desperately: “I cannot find Lety; I don’t know anything about her. She doesn’t turn up. I’m going to look for her.” A chill is an invisible dagger; it pierces you but you don’t bleed. I couldn’t speak. I only saw Benjamin’s black silhouette under his hat, disappearing amidst the crowd, while a tiny voice whispered inside me: “Lety, Lety, Lety.” I wanted to go find her, but my mind had an obsession of its own: to put my children in a safe place before nightfall.

Amongst the catastrophe, we walked along Amsterdam Avenue and we saw the building at number 107 that was collapsed. In those moments, my children and I didn’t exchange one single word; we only communicate with our eyes more open than ever, as if we were looking at the world for the first time.

In the middle of the shock, I noticed that all the streets were cordoned off. We had reach Insurgentes Avenue. Before going through one of the confined areas, several soldiers came to meet us. “The victims must come with us. We will lodge you in a refuge.” At that moment I realized that they were talking to me and my children. “Thanks, but we will not stay at any refuge. We’re leaving this area,” I assured him resolutely. “But you cannot pass,” said the soldier, as I lifted the tapes to go into the street that would take us to Insurgentes Avenue. “Ma’am: it’s very dangerous. Come back. You cannot pass. If there’s a collapse, it’s your responsibility.” “I’ll take care of it,” I said, and as if I was Rambo, I start running with Ozzy and my children.

Insurgentes Avenue was the apocalypse. An immobile car traffic backup shone under the harsh sun. That afternoon the sunlight didn’t have any filter: it was burning as if it had nothing else to do. Soldiers,

sailors, ambulances, policemen, firemen and helicopters occupied the stage. There were neither taxis nor buses. The only option for people was to walk amidst the cracked asphalt and broken glass. People came and went in all directions: it looked like an exodus scene.

Without thinking, and looking at building at number 286, I heard myself raise my voice and repeat: “Om tare tutare turé soha, om tare tutare turé soha, om tare tutare turé soha.” I recalled my lama saying: “The Green Tara mantra helps to overcome fear.” As I repeated it, I did it for those who were trapped under the rubble, but, somehow, those not trapped we were also buried in horror, impotence, anguish, anxiety and hysteria. “Om tare tutare turé soha” for everyone! Indeed, the quake was also internal. And under its effects, we arrived to the Angel of Independence traffic circle.

Rumi turned pale: “Wait, please. I can’t go on. I feel I’m going to faint.” I looked at him in the eyes and ordered him: “You’re not fainting here! You wait until we get to your godmother’s, ok?” And taking advantage of a military truck passing by, I stopped it and asked the soldiers for some bottles of water. Rumi was dehydrated. After replacing one backpack in front of him and the other at his back, he got a second wind and we kept on walking.

Suddenly, I realized that it was impossible to follow the route we usually took by car. I stopped without knowing how to continue. Surprisingly, Jassin said: “We’re going this way. Follow me.” From that moment on, he went in front of the group, followed by his brother, setting the pace. When I saw my two children in front of me, walking ahead, tall, firm and confident, I realized that they were perfectly capable of taking care of themselves and that, in my eagerness to protect them, I was minimizing their potential, while my mother’s ego enlarged surreptitiously. “You have to change,” I swore to myself, and as soon as I let go that control my adrenaline waned.

We went up the overpass at the Interior Circuit viaduct. For the first time I realized that, indeed, nothing is completely safe. Halfway through the bridge we saw a crack. Then I said to myself: “And if this doesn’t hold out, will we fall, included the bridge, over the cars?”

Things I used to do automatically now had taken on supernatural

importance. Each step was a miraculous act. My attention was totally focused on surviving. While I walked, I recalled dad telling me: “Take it easy. Everything will be solved.” The day he threw me to the sea when I was a child and a wave passed over me came to my mind. “You see? Nothing happened,” my father told me. And holding his hand in my mind, we arrived at Chachalacas Bay Street in the Veronica Anzures neighborhood.

My son’s godmother welcomed us as usual: with open arms. “I was waiting for you. Thank God you’ve arrived.” Although we had been in that house hundreds of times, this time it was different: my eyes scanned the construction: I checked the closets; I looked behind the curtains; I examined the load-bearing walls, the corners where ceilings and the walls meet. No crack. And I felt safe, at home, with my family, while we listened to a loudspeaker giving advices: “Don’t go out if you don’t need to. Don’t turn on the gas. Keep a radio at hand. Remain informed. Make sure you have water.”

It seemed we were in the middle of a war and there was a curfew. I remembered my family in Spain and I said to myself: “If they survived the Civil War, we can take from them the strength we need to continue in life.”

My son’s godmother told us that the Veronica Anzures neighborhood had suffered minor damages. That she hadn’t been able to locate us because her cell phone had no signal; that she had learned from her sister in Barcelona that we were fine. Meanwhile, my phone was coming back to life: messages from different places came through Facebook and Whats asking how we were doing. I was able to answer more than 450 messages from several parts of the world with two syllables: “Alive.”

I would never have thought that so many people cared so much about my children and me. And gratitude became immense.

INCONTINENCE AND FLOUNCES

While I was taking a hot bath, I felt my throat: it was full of dust. “We are light but also dirt,” I told myself, thinking of all the people who

were trapped in that very moment.

Wearing a pajama that my comadre lent me, and with my stomach all in a knot, I sat down in the living room ready to communicate with my friends and neighbors. In a natural way, I started posting on Facebook the first of more than a hundred messages, replicating the help I was receiving, putting people in contact with others and making lists of the requirements for the places having suffered collapses.

It was through social networks that I learned about my friend Lety. While Benjamin was looking for her, she was standing in front of my building shouting my name.

My comadre was crying: “I can’t stand thinking about the children of the Rebsamen School and their mothers.” I only felt my tears trapped inside my lungs. And, unable to control myself, I lighted a cigarette and I started smoking again.

My exhaustion took me by the hand to bed and, while I tried to sleep, all the images I had seen during the day came back clearly, but disorganized, without following a logical sequence: the woman with the torn stockings, the patients evacuated on the ridge, the lady of the scrunchie, the soldiers, the gas leak, the collapse of building at number 286, Lázaro in his underpants. Both the city and my mind were the same chaos.

After two hours of sleep, I got up determined to help. I took a shower and put on the clothes that my comadre was kind enough to lend me: lemon-green trousers barely reaching my ankles, a wine-colored t-shirt with silk flounces, my green tennis shoes for the gym and my black-leather bag.

Before heading to the Roma neighborhood, unknowing when we would be able to return home, I took Ozzy out for a walk. We walked a few streets and, as so many other times, my dog stopped to poop. At that moment I recalled the persons trapped under the collapsed buildings and I imagined that, indeed, they would have also relieved themselves. And, for the first time in my life, I experienced incontinence. I could differentiate terror from panic and concern from fear. I was still in the terror phase, and terror had lodged in my guts. It began to come out in the form of excrement—putrid and dark—

while I experienced some relief. Embarrassed and dirty, I went up the stairs and into the bathroom, while I heard my comadre tell my children: “Poor your mother. She doesn’t seem to be quite sane after the earthquake; she doesn’t even remember that she already took a shower some minutes ago.”

Rumi and I took a taxi that left us near Chapultepec Avenue. We saw Salamanca Street cordoned off due to the building that had collapsed there. Firemen, ambulances and hundreds of people had already organized aid stands. I was still in shock and thus unable to be helpful for anyone. Scared, I could only walk to Alvaro Obregon Avenue. We had to enter our apartment to see in what conditions it was. Frightened, I went upstairs. I opened the door of my home and when I saw for the first time what I hadn’t been able to see—but I heard—the day of the earthquake, I went crazy.

Six windowpanes were broken. Flowerpots, earth, paintings, glasses, dices, cups, bottles of sauce, clay pots, vases, souvenirs, a plasma screen, chairs, broken lamps, my Mac, the keyboard, were all shattered in different places. A photo of my children looked at me from a shattered-glass frame. The house already smelled empty. The colors were bitter. I ran to my room as if it were going to tremble again and my throat suddenly dried up. I took a dossier with documents, a bag of clothes and two umbrellas: one yellow and the other with rainbow colors that I had bought at the gay march, and I fled the building while Rumi shouted: “What happens, mom? Why are you running?” Without stopping, I went to the House of the Poet. While I walked, I met neighbors who carried suitcases and backpacks. We greeted each other with our eyes and making a small gesture with our heads.

With my heart jumping out of my chest, I arrived at my office. I went to inform my boss who immediately organized all my colleagues to help me take my things out of my apartment. My mind collapsed: “If it trembles again and my house falls down, will I stay in this world with only a pajama that doesn’t even match?”

On the way, I met a couple of friends who didn’t hesitate to join the brigade. Full of determination, all of them went up to my apartment.

They cleaned up all the mess, set upright the bookshelves, stacked the things still useful, threw away the broken things, and in a couple of minutes they left with my jewelry, my clothes and my documents all mixed up inside jumbo garbage bags to keep them at the Casa del Poeta, while the first civil engineer that one of my neighbors had contacted arrived to check the building structure. In the middle of a deathly silence and under the penetrating gaze of a dozen people who examined every single wall of my apartment, he said in a low voice: "I think it's fit to live in." "Do you think or are you sure?" I asked him, scrutinizing him to the core. "Sure, ma'am, it has nothing wrong... but let's say that if I were you, I would stay to sleep somewhere else, at least until the next earthquake," and he laughed; but as no one else joined him, he pretended to cough to erase the smile of his mouth. Paco, the concierge, suggested us that, in any case, it was better to wait until Friday to come back, taking into consideration the aftershocks and also to the lack of gas.

With a key and distrust we closed the door. On the street, Susan, a friend of Jassin, informed us that her apartment had been damaged. My son put her up in our house and, wearing their bike helmets, they left immediately to become part of one of the brigades of the Del Valle neighborhood. "I'm going to Veronica Anzures to take care of my godmother," said Rumi. And I went walking to the Casa del Poeta with the intention of putting on clothes of my own, but a message stopped me: "All your things are already locked up, so now you can relax. We closed the office and we'll meet, God willing, on Monday. Hugs, Maricarmen." I looked at my tennis shoes, the green trousers and the t-shirt with flounces, and I realized that I would have to stay dressed like that until Monday. "No way," I said to myself and, turning around, I began to walk towards building number 286, while I received messages from my Roma neighbors asking me where I was.

NO BIRDS

Not even five minutes had passed when I was given a loudspeaker and the assignment of going to Plaza de La Cibeles, along with a fleet of

twenty bikers, to collect and bring back a list of supplies. All of a sudden, I was converted into a forewoman: “Oxygen cylinders, lamps, batteries, hacksaws, ropes, and power saws to cut concrete are urgently needed. No! Not urgently: on the double!”

The Plaza de la Cibeles collection center arose spontaneously with the help of all the residents of the Roma and Condesa neighborhoods, who came out to the streets and, right away, started giving the best they had. A display of tents, trucks with food and clothes appeared out of nowhere, and in a few hours it became a perfectly organized and supplied collection center fulfilling the needs of different parts of the city. Thousands of volunteers came to help: some of them classified tools, other medicines; groups of young people carried the food packs of the trucks. Human lines carried the stews that other people had cooked. Cartons of sandwiches, fruits, water bottles, juices, serums, diapers, baby milk, safety boots, blankets and mallets appeared and multiplied among hundreds of hands that suddenly became one.

After five hours of comes and goes, I sat down on the edge of the sidewalk and questioned myself: “Let’s see, why you are doing all this? Due to genuine altruism and compassion? Due to selfless generosity? Due to your love for others? From where are you doing what you do?” Honestly, for me it was very clear that although it was true that there was a bit of all that, above all I was doing it to escape from myself, to break away from the inner terror and madness I was feeling. For me it was easier to help others than to tackle my own trauma.

Having that awareness helped me not to deem myself Mother Teresa of Calcutta at any time, but instead a terrified woman with many scarcities and character shortcomings and, above all, with zero temperance; but also with a real and deep desire that all beings would be free of suffering.

And thus, realizing that my intention wasn’t utterly pure, so to speak, but was contaminated by my own afflictions, feeling much more authentic I got up from my sidewalk seat and said to myself: “So are things! What the heck! Let’s go on.”

The requirements changed from one moment to another and initially the ways of fulfilling them became chaotic. Help requests were

conveyed through social networks, but when the brigade members arrived, they found that the information had been false or that the requirement had already been fulfilled.

Thus happened, for instance, when, in full work of debris removal at number 286, a group of youngsters came with loudspeakers asking for urgent help to remove the rubble at the Medical Center. Believing that it had really collapsed—as it had happened during the 1985 earthquake—many of the rescue team members left that site and went to a compound that had not suffered any damage at all. Due to that case, and to make the work efficient, it was decided that all Internet messages should be authenticated with name, place and time. Initially, the requests were made through loudspeakers. Less than forty-eight hours later they were transmitted through a video that was broadcast massively, or, the needs were written on cardboards and through a photo they became viral immediately. Thousands of text messages circulated on social networks with lists of the names of people rescued and transferred to hospitals in Mexico City.

Some funeral homes offered their services for free. Groups of lawyers came out as volunteers to give legal advice and services to families who had lost their homes.

The Mexico square had no birds. It was full of tents where the affected residents of the Roma and Condesa neighborhoods were staying temporarily. The urine smell mixed amidst the trees. The latrines, so necessary, stank, at that place where days before we ate corn and drank atole; where my children, when babies, met the ducks; where they learned to walk, to fall and to get up; where they wanted to return every Sunday to get on the jumpers, believing that with a jump they would be able to touch the clouds; there, between the sweetest childhood, fear had established its seat.

And there's where we also learned, through a neighbor, that the Superama market of La Condesa neighborhood had collapsed; that the Dormimundo store at Medellin Avenue, where I had bought the beds of my children last Christmas, no longer existed; that an hour after the earthquake, some kids went up to their apartment and, when they were inside, the building collapsed.

Stories and news continued to be disseminated in every corner of the neighborhood. Without having to watch television, we learned of Frida's existence and we felt anguished; then we found out that such a pet didn't exist, we got pissed and took revenge focusing our helplessness on insulting Televisa network.

LOVE IS A PORK RIND IN GREEN SAUCE

The next day, in front of building at number 286 of Alvaro Obregon Avenue, relatives of the persons still trapped under the debris made their first settlements while the rescue works were being carried out.

With her back towards the building and sitting on the curb, a woman looked at me. Her eyes seemed two endless wounds. I stopped listening to the sounds, I approached her and sat down next to her. We kept there in silence. Spontaneously, I started doing tonglen, a Buddhist practice that lying in breathing with the purpose of absorbing 'somebody else's' pain and in exhaling the desire of peace for the heart.

At one point, she spoke and only said: "My son is in there and I am out here." Without thinking it twice, as if I were a rescuer, I went inside myself and searched for a prayer, a phrase, in my throat, something with a meaning to tell her, but I couldn't find one single word to give her. And I stayed there, at her side, empty-handed, helpless, inhaling and exhaling, not knowing for sure where my shoulder ended and where hers started; without distinguishing what was inside or outside; experiencing the non-separation; just sitting and feeling the infinite, while they began to install the tents on the sidewalk.

Cameramen from different parts of the world had gathered to report on the situation of the trapped persons. Thousands of young people had literally taken the city; those who were here took turns in human lines to pass from hand to hand vests, harnesses, masks, spare parts for power saws, drill bits, leather gloves, fire extinguishers, extension cords, ropes, fluorescent lamps, power drills, head lamps, flat rope fittings and slings for rappel.

At one point, in front of the high pile of rubble, the rescuers raised their fists asking everybody to keep silence so they could listen between the cracks. All of us remain silent and filled ourselves with hope. As small bunches we clustered as close as we could to the area that was cordoned off. In the midst of that silence, one could clearly hear the same thought: "Let's hope they bring out someone alive." After a few minutes, a rescuer emerged between the stone blocks. We saw how he put his arms inside the mouth of a tunnel and how he pulled something out of it. There was hope of life. We never imagined seeing what he took out: an immense oil painting of Merlin the wizard, perfectly framed and without a single scratch. Although no one had a fist raised anymore, we all remain silent. Frozen. Without understanding anything. Because nothing had to be said nor was there anything to understand.

Atop the rubble, five workers admired the painting. My mind beat itself up thinking about the horror that had been to bring out that vivid picture instead of a human body. I talked to Jassin on the phone. I told him what we had witnessed. "Oh, mom, don't you realize that only art remains? Besides, the rescuers were really cool taking the trouble to safeguard that work, to give it value, to remember that it was made by a human being." Over my amazement, I received more amazement.

And after such revulsion, beauty appeared before my eyes. My neighbors carried trays of freshly prepared food that they offered to those who were there. The pork rind in green sauce with black beans tasted like glory. Sitting on a wooden crate, I ate the first taco while watching endless groups of bikers and cyclists carrying boxes. I, who all my life had grumbled due to the rumble of bikes when starting out, now I was grateful for their existence. But I began to feel uncomfortable due to the presence of so many soldiers. Why were they there doing nothing, I wondered, while I looked at them with disdain and annoyance.

All of a sudden, a structural engineer stopped before me and offered his services which I gladly accepted, but for my neighbor Sonia who, some hours before, had told me that her apartment had some cracks.

She invited us to enter. At that very moment I realized that I had become mentally incapable of climbing the stairs, so I preferred to stay in the street, sitting on the sidewalk edge. Then a van with nuns and priests stopped to give me a bag containing a ham sandwich, an apple and a mango juice soda. They told me they would pray for me.

I hadn't been aware of my dreadful look until the director of the Universidad Londres appeared with an architect and several students and asked me if I was Rumi's mother. As I got up, by chance I saw myself in a mirror that was inside a store: I didn't recognize myself.

We walked back to my house and I told them that if they wanted to check my apartment they could do it without restraint, but that they would have to excuse me because I wouldn't go up in any way. So I gave them the keys and, while I waited for them down in the street, the structural engineer who had checked Sonia's apartment walls came back to me. "I think it's fit to live in," he told me, and I avoided the question, "You think or you are sure?" And while the architect who had gone up with the director to my house came down, I took the engineer to Sandra's business so he could do us the favor of also checking it. When the architect finally came back, he gave me a second appraisal: "I think it's inhabitable." I felt terribly upset to hear again that "I think", because it was like listening to my patient telling me that it would tremble again, but in thirty years. Then I understood that one thing is the visual inspection of a building and another quite different is a thorough checkup of its structure. As I know my neighbors, I realized at once that we would be left without such a checkup because, except for three of them, all the rest always came up with excuses every time there was some trinket to be paid for.

Resigned to those, "I believe in God Almighty Father" and "I'd better believe that it won't tremble again," I accompanied them to Sandra's business, who said goodbye to the engineer and now led the architect and the director to her apartment so that they could examine the cracks on the ceiling.

THE POPOCATEPETL VOLCANO FUMAROLE

Night was falling. In front of the Alvaro Obregon collapsed building, people had multiplied as if they were loaves of bread. On the ridge, several modules had been installed to provide assistance to the victims. I was interested in one that said: “Vision altered by the earthquake.” There, they explained to me that when you live a ‘near-death experience’, your eyesight only focuses on those things that can save your life and you stop seeing the rest. And gratitude ran through my blood when I linked myself with that wonder that is the human body.

Sitting on the motorcycle of a tattooed driver, I returned with the loudspeaker and the fleet to the La Cibeles traffic circle. We loaded up the requirements and we carried them to number 286. We entered with the motorcycles inside the cordoned off area greeted by the applause of the companions. Six trips later, I was drained. Pancho, the tattooed biker, saw my exhaustion and told me: “Relax, doñita. I’ll take you home right now.” With the helmet on my head, I managed to nod and, embracing him, I released a lot of stress as we flew through the city. In five minutes we arrived at the Veronica Anzures neighborhood. “More tomorrow,” I said to Pancho. Inside the house, I began to charge my cell phone so I could continue posting on Facebook the requirements that came to me through friends and a chat group called, ‘Aid for the Mexico City earthquake.’

Before going to bed, my cell phone rang. A Banco Invex employee was calling me to inform me that I owed them 4,500 pesos that I had to pay the next morning. “Do you live in Mexico City?” I asked him. “Of course,” he answered me. “Aren’t you aware about the earthquake?” “Madam,” he replied, “the earthquake has nothing to do with your debt.” Like the child of The Exorcist, my head began to twirl around while I shouted at him seven times in a row to go f... himself at hell and stay there until the last corpse was removed from the rubble. After hanging the handset with a blow, I sighed.

Another call came in straightaway: My mother wanted to know about us. I was just going to explain her the situation, when she interrupted me: “Wait, wait, I’m looking at it right now in the news. Oh, my! It seems you are in Syria! Look, I’m here having dinner and watching TV, and what can I say... I’m going to send you some euros

because the truth is that I really want to help, but it will be next week because I don't want to miss the reports and now I have to leave you because they're going to show the Popo's fumarole. Take care, come on; good luck sweetheart." And when I hung the phone, to my mind came her sharp image: sitting with her blue Austro-Hungarian style robe on her sofa easily convertible into a chaise longue with its remote control, with her silver tray, eating a plate of jabugo ham, a cantimpalo hard pork sausage, a loaf of durum wheat bread and her glass of white wine, while the rescuers of the painting, the nuns, the priest, the Universidad Londres director, the collapsed building, the sandwich, Merlin, and the wounded-eyed woman on the sidewalk crossed my mind at the same time.

The next day, Rumi told me: "Mom, I also want to help." And so he went with me to number 286. He tried to enroll in one of the brigades that were created at the Parque España, but he wasn't accepted. Disheartened, he decided to look for his friends with whom he formed a brigade. From 9 a.m. until 2 a.m. next day I didn't know anything about him. When he finally contacted me, he said: "Today was the happiest day of my whole life, ma." He explained me that they had gone to collect toys; that they had asked for a lift and a van had taken them to the Tlalpan district. That they had delivered the toys. That they went to a shelter to look after disabled children. That his assignment was to describe the shape of several animals to a seven-year-old blind girl. That she, with a marker, kept drawing those animals on a piece of paper according to the indications she was listening to. That he cried. That he laughed out loud. That, when they left the shelter at dawn, they met an old man who was drunk, that they help him to walk and who on the way invited them a few shots of tequila; that they said goodbye to the old man; that they ran down the street with the tequila heat in their stomach and the fresh air on their faces. "And where are you now?" I shouted nervously, while a pair of hands closed my eyes. "Here, ma; here." Turning around to look at him, I realized that my son, whom I had always seen as a child, had suddenly become a man.

We were walking together at night, once again towards the

Veronica Anzures neighborhood, when a taxi driver stopped and offered to take us for free. Once inside the taxi, I realized that, since the earthquake, I had not only lived without money, but had not even thought about it. My feeling of indigence was enormous, but was starting to get mixed with the word gratitude, when the taxi driver said: “Poor people who didn’t make it, but we have to thank God because nothing happened to us.”

Once again, anger made my head fume mad, my eyes blaze and my bitterness turn into words: “What God are you talking to me?” I questioned him. “Come on, ma!” my son interrupted me. “We do have to thank Him because nothing happened to us. What must we give Him for everything that happened to those people who are trapped?” “Take it easy, ma!” said my son again and again, while I wanted to keep on talking as if I were Mao Tse Tung, and while the taxi driver, who was kindly driving us home, hadn’t receive a single word of thanks from me.

My mood was explosive and unstable. It didn’t enjoy the most elementary moderation. Anything maddened me. I felt totally ungovernable. I was undergoing a post-traumatic stress and I hadn’t even noticed it.

At 10 a.m. of next day, the cameramen who were recording the rescue activities at number 286 had proliferated as cockroaches. I was interviewed by several international television networks. I imagine that I told them many nonsenses, and during my last interview by a German young woman, I remember that I got upset and told her: “If you don’t come to help, don’t come to make questions.” And, after sending them also to hell, I went to look for the lady with the injured eyes. “Everything’s the same,” she told me. “Thanks for everything, but my family has already arrived.” Sitting among her relatives, next to the tent, she was still waiting for her son to be found alive.

At the nearby little store, a lady was very angry. She also had relatives trapped below the rubble. She told me that she was fed up with the journalists because, mainly at night, they approached her when nobody saw them to ask her: “How do you feel, knowing that your son and your husband are in there?” She considered unbearable

having to put up with the cameramen who wanted to film her when she hadn't had the chance to take a shower, she told me, while she continued saying that one thing was to inform and quite another to take advantage of the suffering of others to produce pathetic reports aimed at increase the television audience rating.

Messages kept coming into my phone. "They say they are going to bring and use machinery. That the military are there for that. We already have a protest march all set up. Confirm the information so we can get it under way."

I gave Rumi the megaphone, so that he took care of that day requirements list at La Cibeles square, and I proceeded to find out what else they were requesting me. I spoke to more than twenty militaries who exhibited an impeccable attitude at all times, enduring invectives—totally unjustified from my point of view—of people who suddenly, like me, lost patience for whatever reason and insulted them. They made me clear that they were there so they could hold back some despaired relatives who would want to enter the building, because any unplanned movement carried out at number 286 was highly dangerous and could even bring about a greater catastrophe, since the building next to it was also very damaged. I loved them.

I also spoke with a rescuer who had come from Israel and was cooperating in the work. With his sight full of love and pain, he told me that a slab had collapsed and was preventing the access to the lower floors; that he hadn't rescued anyone yet; that if from outside it seemed that the progress was very slow, we had to recall that everything that was done was similar to a surgical operation, because any movement not anticipated could bring about a debacle; that he was willing to work while there were some life expectancy and, of course, there was; that he had experience, because he had worked in other catastrophes and that, on one occasion, he had been able to rescue a living person after nine days buried. But that the government had the final say, and that he would comply with the instructions he would receive. And after drinking a bottle of electrolytes in one gulp, he went back to the building and disappeared amidst the stones.

I also inquired about those machines a Spanish engineer who

directed the workers with great leadership, and he gave me his word of honor that it was a rumor, and not a fact. Finally, relatives of the trapped persons requested not to divulge false rumors, because far from helping them to keep up hope, they sunk them in terror and depression.

After corroborating that, I decided to write a summary of the facts on Facebook to avoid a protest march, and I recalled the importance of the written word and the commitment that one has with it.

CIELITO LINDO

It started raining. I had never hated rain before, but that day I loathed it. When it rained, rescue work stopped and, regrettably, I went mad. But every time my mind became cloudy, someone appeared at my side and filled it with light. My friend Alvaro took my hand and said: “What worries me is the thirst of those who are buried in there. I ask God that they can drink some of this rain, even if only a little bit.”

We ran to cover ourselves under an awning that had been improvised next to the Parque España. In no time, they set up three tables and even covered them with food. With a passionflower tea cup in one hand and a plate with hot black beans in the other, we watched the downpour. And through the rain filtered the images of thousands of people helping to get harnesses, alpinists, power-tracers; dedicated to remove debris, escorting the injured, looking for clean clothes for the rescuers, preparing food, distributing medicines, and in that very moment I understood what “the precious human life” means for Buddhism. That deployment of thousands persons working tirelessly was a clear example of what one single life is worth. And I thought that, despite being in front of terror, I was living what I had always dreamed, because for a few days Mexico became a fully enlightened society, where we all help each other, where money was not necessary to live, where no one doubted that love, generosity and a spirit of solidarity also came out from the rubble to show us the heart purity of this land, to tell us that the deaths of our compatriots were not in vain, but rather that, through them, Mexicans were able to become truly

human beings.

And while the downpour intensified and the mood seemed to be waning, a little boy shouted: “Viva Mexico”, and he began to pronounce the Cry of Independence, but with some changes: “Viva the rescuers! Viva the brigade members! Viva the medics! Viva the topos! Viva the trapped ones! Viva Mexico; Viva Mexico; Viva Mexico.” And that said, we all sang the National Anthem and the Cielito lindo.

After getting a second wind, we went back to number 286, knowing that even in the midst of a tragedy life can also be beautiful.

By Friday, discontent was on the rise in the avenue. One of the relatives of number 286 told me that he had noticed irregularities; that he disliked the secrecy with which they were proceeding; that nobody had informed them of anything; that there was no transparency; that, without notifying anyone, they had pull out a body whose relatives, many hours later, had found at the Forensic Medic Service; that, in spite of not having left the place even for a moment, he hadn’t seen a corpse being pulled out; that, despite the days of work, practically no progress was perceived; that vital hours had been lost because the building had revealed irregularities in its construction; that the mass of concrete hadn’t decreased; that he didn’t understand why they had brought rescuers from Israel, Spain, the United States; that he trusted much more his fellow countrymen, the Mexicans, the topos.

In front of the families of the trapped ones, the assistance stands continued to proliferate: psychologists, therapists, masseurs, orthopedists, reiki practitioners, nurses with stethoscopes to check tachycardia, white-coated doctors offering free blood pressure screening.

I went looking for the lady with the eyes like endless wounds and I found her, now comfortably seated in a country chair, receiving a therapy, while a nurse took her pulse. Surrounded by a greater number of relatives who had come from different parts of the Republic to accompany her, she was still waiting. “Everyone has come except him,” she said, while the nurse gave her a pill and a glass of water.

Under the tents came a group of young guys who offered their services: finally you could charge your cell phone; they had cables for all kinds of phones. I was impressed to see how even the smallest need was detected and fulfilled immediately. Many of the brigade members lived in neighborhoods far from the Ro-ma one, so they stayed there overnight. Upon realizing that situation, several neighbors opened their houses to offer them bed and bathroom.

A SIXPACK

It was getting dark and the time to evacuate was over for us. I had to go upstairs to my house. Sitting on a bench, I looked at my building. "Must I go there again?" I asked myself, while I made calculations with the intention of moving to a small one-floor house in God knows what neighborhood, but my totals were never enough: the high school tuition, the Conamat, the rent, the brackets, the food, the electricity, the water, the gas, the telephone, the cell phones, the gym, the outings, the veterinarian, the credit card debt. "Don't mess up things," I told myself. Those were my thoughts when Jassin sat next to me: "Mom, you cannot go on like this. You must go up. You must cook again. You must sleep in your own bed. You must water the plants. You must understand that, if this moment you leave your apartment, people would queue up as far as to Insurgentes Avenue and beyond to rent it. Tell me at which neighborhood would you like to move to? We have lived here for the last twenty-five years. Here everyone knows you; even the criminals protect you. Do you know how difficult it is for me and my brother to be men in this city, without a father to protect us? Having a dead father has no solution; but there's a solution for you to stop being in the street and to discard your idea to move to another neighborhood: you just have to go up to your house and confirm personally that the roof didn't fall, that neither my brother, nor me, nor Ozzy are under the rubble, and that, angry or not, you have to be grateful." And, lifting me up from the bench, he grabbed my arm and took me to the Oxxo store. "Now you're going to do what I say: you buy yourself a sixpack of beers, we go up, you drink two of

them and leave me the rest.” And as if he had hypnotized me, I suddenly saw myself in my living room, having guzzled the second beer, and starting to drink a cup of seven lemon blossoms tea while I looked, absolutely devoid of energy, at the place where I had remained in a fetal position the day of the earthquake. Then I said to myself: “I’m going to get rid of all the plants I have here because the avocado pot was about to fall on my head, and dying from a flowerpot hit doesn’t seem very heroic.”

And, that matter settled, relaxed and grateful, I fell into a heavy sleep, despite the ambulance sirens that didn’t stop crossing the neighborhood.

Suddenly, I opened my eyes. Before me, Rumi was shaking me in my bed and shouting, “It’s trembling”, while, without believing it, we heard the seismic alert once again. In a hurry, we ran down wearing our pajamas and barefoot, once more, to the ridge. Looking at the buildings and expecting the worst, we met all the neighbors: the second floor lady with her head soaped and wrapped in a ripped towel; her mother kneeling, looking at the sky and praying to the Virgin of Guadalupe; the first floor tenant in underpants, with his hands clasped holding a toothbrush; Jassin taking off his T-shirt to give it to his girlfriend who was wearing a transparent T-shirt; Rumi in his blue plush pajamas, and I in a red pajama pants with exotic summer flowers and, again, the gray winter top with dogs. In the middle of that chaos, I promised myself to buy three decent pajamas and not to mix them again, while I watched a nude couple wrapped in a bedsheet leave a store.

Ten minutes later, Paco, the concierge of our building, who was just arriving from a party, brought out a bottle and disposable glasses, and told us: “Let’s guzzle up a mezcalito for the shock.” We all had a fit of laughter through which we released a good deal of stress and, without thinking it twice, we drank the famous mezcal, which, incidentally, made us feel great. We looked like characters from a Fellini movie. But after one hour and a half we decided to go back up the stairs and return to reality. We were about to take a shower, when Maria, the concierge’s wife, disposed our morning: “We’ve turn off the gas until

further notice to prevent any leak.” And resigned to smell like skunks, we got dressed in a jiffy and left to number 286.

There, they gave us oatmeal with milk and banana for breakfast. The cameramen continued to increase in number, thus avoiding pedestrians to pass. Without any right, they had taken the street. Through the neighborhood, groups of people marched displaying posters with positive slogans intended to mitigate the psychological impacts: “Mexico is standing”, “You’re not alone”, “If you need, ask”, “Sing and don’t cry”, “You did it well”. For me, reading, “You did it well”, was very helpful. Eventually, I said to myself: “Whatever happened, you’re alive, right?” “Yes,” I replied. “So, you did it well.” A hint of peace suddenly reached my heart.

That night I did a relay in Alvaro Obregon 286. In the middle of the avenue appeared Lola, a dear neighbor of mine, wearing her brigade outfit, and accompanied by her son. She said: “Are you aware that it has already started to smell of death?” She offered me a mask. I took it but without knowing what to do with it, because, in some way, for me wearing it was to be resigned to the absence of life. Once again, devastation began to parade through my guts.

In front of me, a two-meter tall man caught my attention. He was a rescue officer wearing a lamp on his helmet, safety glasses, elbow and knee pads, and boots. Knives, pistols, small bombs were hanging from his chest. He reminded me of Mazinger Zeta. I watched him with total attention, and every time I looked at him, I saw him taller and I felt smaller. I listened to the thoughts that were going through my mind; they came from a girl who said: “Please, marry me, marry me, right now, and I’ll do whatever you want. But, please, marry me now.” The man did not even look at me. And I walked slowly along the ridge towards my house while asking myself: “What’s happening to you? You’ve never been interested in militaries and it’s been over nine years that you haven’t thought about marrying anyone. And now it turns out that you look at a military who is also like a mastodon. Hello?” At that moment I understood that that size were my defenselessness and my vulnerability.

I couldn’t take it anymore and I went back thinking about the

slogan that I had seen in the morning and that said: “If you need, ask.” And I asked for psychological help at the first stand I found.

There were two male and one female psychologists. “You can choose with whom you want to take the therapy.” I opted for the young girl who looked at me with a smile and with the serenity that I didn’t have. “My name is Isa, what’s yours?” After listening to me for an hour, when I was trying to tell her the Mazinger Zeta part, I stopped dead in my tracks. “What are you feeling now?” she asked me sweetly. “I must go to a restroom. I suffer incontinence.” She, running in front of me, and I, walking with my buttocks tight, we went to the restroom of one of the restaurants located in front of the Parque España. I took off my panties and threw them in the waste paper bin. Relief returned to my guts. Talking helped me get rid of my accumulated terror. I could feel it leaving my body like a rotten fruit. Exhibiting an ecstatic face, I left the restroom. “You look much better,” the psychologist told me. “Yes,” I replied, while thinking about the truth hidden in the well-known expression, “I’m scared shitless”.

Full of courage, I went upstairs to my house. Instead of sleeping in pajamas, I put on my pants and tennis shoes. “We’ve lost her,” said my resigned children. After what I had experienced and the last warning siren, it was impossible for me to think about going to bed in any other way. I remember that I asked myself: “Shall I be the only one?” And to get rid of doubts, I posted it on Facebook. In less than half an hour, fifty people replied: “I’m even with my jacket on”; “My daughters and I dressed, and not in bed but in the living room sofa”; “I, with my dog, in a couch next to the door”; “I said goodbye to my high heels: only tennis shoes day, afternoon and evening”. And yes, I cleared things up: I wasn’t the only one who wore tennis shoes in bed and unable to sleep at three in the morning. My body was rigid. Ambulances never stop passing on the street. I wondered how I could sleep knowing that, two blocks from my house, there were forty-nine people under the rubble. But once again, exhaustion closed my eyes and, embracing Ozzy, gradually my thoughts vanished.

NO TO THE TENNIS SHOES

We were at the edge of hope. One of the rescuers told me that the human-heat test had indicated life expectancy. Without showing the dark-days accumulated tiredness, the rescue work continued with a greater determination than ever. Under the tents, food, clothes, picks, shovels, helmets, electrolytes circulated. An atmosphere of excitement reigned on the avenue. Everyone was willing to give everything.

Suddenly, a huge cloud covered the last ray of light; black, fat and merciless, it spread across the entire neighborhood, and the wind began to whistle. About us, lightning and thunder. The blizzard began. The rain became more copious, until it became a storm. The infernal wind blew out the small tents temporarily inhabited by the relatives of the persons who were trapped. And far from seeing their loved ones come out of the rubble, they saw the canvases, the paper napkins and their hope fly away. All the effort got flooded, soaking wet the clothes we had collected, spoiling the food, while the time was flying. Torrents of rain fell on us to such an extent that it didn't even allow us to see each other. Rescue work had to be stopped and, incidentally, the hope of finding life.

At that moment I was caught in a fit of fury and despair. I left without saying goodbye to anyone. While I walked in the rain, I was in a fume and howled. Soaked and leaving behind me small puddles of helplessness, I entered my house, I took off my tennis shoes and threw them into the living room.

“What’s wrong with you, Mom?” Rumi asked me. After telling him, I heard myself saying to myself: “And now, who I complain to?” “Time demands its tribute: the tribute of death”, said Rumi. I opened the shower faucet and stayed under the hot water for an hour. Then I made myself a cup of Serena-Te tea, I took the last Dalai pill and went to bed. I said to myself: “I refuse to continue living like this. I will never again put my tennis shoes to sleep. I will never stop bathing. I will never get dressed in two minutes. I will never stay rigid at night, stretching the eardrum to distinguish between noises and the possible sound of the seismic alert. I refuse to live aghast. I’m going to sleep,

and if I die that night, I'll die relaxed." And, for the first time since the earthquake, I could sleep eight hours in a row and rest.

The next day I felt splendid. I took a break and went out to walk Ozzy. Upon entering Orizaba Street, I was surprised to see a huge crenel of the Renacimiento college, a castle-shaped construction, that had fall over a white Porsche parked in the middle of the street and that was totally crushed.

Trying to find in my bag the Bach flowers of rescue remedy that my friend Eva had given me, I received a phone call from a girl who wanted to know how she could help. While I gave her options, a mastiff came out, abruptly, running through the Luis Cabrera square and threw himself at my dog's neck. Automatically, I screamed and covered my head with my hands while my body bowed as if expecting a collapse. I heard Ozzy's moans. I was getting up when the owner arrived, who left me astonished: ignoring everything, he put the chain to his dog and ran towards the avenue leaving Ozzy bloodstained. I only managed to say a weak "stupid". I took Ozzy to the vet, bought him some antibiotics, and hugged him in my bed before going out again to number 286. "The devil is on the loose," said my neighbor, when I told her what had happened on the stairs of the building.

As I came back very sweaty, I entered the shower stall and found out that we didn't have a single drop of water. I spoke to the concierge and he informed me that, after the earthquake, in many buildings of the Roma neighborhood the tenants suffered the same situation. My children and I went down to buy 5-gallon water bottles. What seemed a short-term concern, went on dramatically until November 21, when workers of Mexico City water supply system finally arrived to drill the sidewalk and remove stones embedded in the pipes.

THE SPARROW

On Sunday, September 24, number 286 was saturated with people. Help was excessive. The pork rind in green sauce with beans had been left behind. Now they offered us a choice between chicken with mole and rice, pork with purslane, broad beans soup with nopales, breaded-

steak sandwiches, chilaquiles, various fruits and juices. There were toothpicks, salt, pepper, hot sauces, napkins, wet napkins on the tables. They even had obtained ice cubes for the refreshments. The boxes with the stock of food kept arriving along with huge bags of clothes in many sizes. On the ridge, also the attention modules grew in number and services: music therapy, Gestalt therapy, Bach flowers of rescue remedy, relaxation exercises.

I approached the woman who was waiting for her son and I saw her surrounded by a choir singing the Angelus while a group of clowns played with the children who were there. The cameramen were cashing in filming the parade of people and their various offers. At the end of the Angelus, a family man approached the director and, far from congratulating him, he asked him to leave and not come back because rather than cheering them up, it took away their hope. A group of Christians came to pray and, with their palms raised, they cried out to a living God for salvation, while in the street corner a priest gave mass to Catholic relatives of the trapped persons. My friend Lunita, who practices Sufism, began to feel uncomfortable, but that didn't affect me: not caring in the least what anyone could think about me, I joined the Christians and, with all the attitude, I also raised my hands, invoked the living God –who I never understood quite well where he was and I repented. I repented even on TV that filmed me shouting: “Forgive us and save us.” And after having said that, I ran to the corner where they were giving the Catholic Mass and I even received Communion. Later, I joined the concheros and danced, discreetly, among the crowd, while the sun filtered through the cracks of number 286.

In one of the tents, another family placed between two poles a copy of the photo of a boy buried in the building, telling him how much they loved him. “We are here, in Zone Zero,” someone said suddenly.

Zone Zero was the rating given to the Roma-Condesa corridor. I asked Jassin: “Son, do you know why they call us that way?” “Come on, Ma. It's the translation of Ground Zero. It's a name used since the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. That's how the gringos call the place where the towers fell in the 11s.” “And that's why they call us

Zone Zero? That's nonsense!" "So, what do you expected? Yes, we are in the zone of the greatest devastation." "And you are going to stay in this neighborhood?" asked us a journalist for the umpteenth time. "Yes: we've lived here and here we'll stay. How about it?" Jassin told him, while staring at the Univision cameraman. "That's my champ!" I thought to myself.

Realizing that nothing was needed at the time, I went to the ridge and sat on the bench in front of my building. Three brigade members, one clown, two rescuers, one Santa Claus passed in front of me, as well as a copalera who kindly invited me to submit myself to a cleaning session. Standing in the center of the ridge, incense smelling of copal ran all over my body while her companions danced around me with rattles and drums. A neighbor came out to put on the floor a circle of flowers and candles. Several tenants gathered together to perform the activity. The exercise consisted in that the twelve members would give thanks aloud for something positive that we had lived during the days of the earthquake.

On Monday, September 25, the city tried to return to normality and we reopened the Casa del Poeta. Being in low spirits, I walked along the ridge, thinking that maybe it would be good for me to go back to work. Before starting the activities, I went to my office and, after turning on the computer and going online, I read that my dear Lorna Martinez had died during the earthquake. I rewound immediately. On September 19, before leaving the cordoned off area, we passed through Amsterdam Avenue and Laredo Street. I walked in front of her collapsed house when she was inside. And I never realized it! Later, my friend Jose Antonio called me to tell me that before she died, she had become a writer with a book she made in his workshop. They even sang the National Anthem when they found her body; that I shouldn't feel bad because Lorna had died in peace.

Before starting the activities, we asked for a minute of silence for the victims. Although the book presentation had nothing to do with the earthquake, all the comments revolved around the hecatomb, and at eight o'clock at night those present began to say goodbye. "In case it might tremble again," we heard someone say, while we went out to

the street.

The Roma neighborhood was a hunched back. It languished. The ‘street car-watchman’ came up to me: “Mistress, help me. Since the earthquake not a single car has parked around here.” And while he told me about the cracks in his house, we walked together along the ridge, missing the street musicians, the man selling hot tamales, the one who announced that he brings “at ten, at ten, at ten, at ten pesos the fig and the tangerine; at ten pesos the avocado, the tasty and delicious avocado for the taco, at ten, at ten, the woman who buys and shouts as if she is being strangled: “Maaaattresses, waaaashing machines, stoooooves, refrigeraaaators, or any old iron parts you might sell!” After saying goodbye, I sat on the bench in the ridge in front of my building. I didn’t want to go up. While I was killing time, my children came on a tricycle running on the avenue, I saw them on a skateboard, on a bike and also on roller skates. I saw them walking hand in hand with their girlfriends, carrying sixpacks of beers with their friends, smoking their first cigarettes in secret. I saw them driving cars, even ubers. And now I was looking at them with their bike helmets in their hands, arriving from the Tlalpan multifamily complex, wearing their brigade suits, looking at me inquisitively: “Here again? Go up now, Mom.” A phone call saved me. My friend Alvaro had opened his home in Amsterdam so that Alfredo Goldstein could give free trauma therapy to brigade members and to Zone Zero dwellers. “You must come now,” he told me, and without thinking it twice, I got up from the bench and started walking.

I entered again by Cacahuamilpa Street. In the midst of the darkness, I realized that the elegant lady, with her torn stockings and her knees covered with blood, was still leaning against the walls of my mind. And when I turned the corner, those walls cracked, melted, and, like a ghost, disappeared. In the Amsterdam Avenue ridge, several people offered atole, water and hot chocolate. When I took a bottle of water, I remembered that Álvaro’s place had stairs. I started to tremble and decided to go back to my house. But, when I turned around, Alvaro appeared: “I’m glad you came. We were waiting for you.” And, taking my arm, he walked with me to the door. “I’m not

going to climb those stairs, Alvarito,” I said, as Alfredo took my hand and told me: “We will climb them together, one step at a time.” And in a jiffy I was lying on the couch, answering their questions. “You’re doing it very well, but tell me: when you realized that you couldn’t leave your building, what did you feel? In which organs of your body?” The good Alfredo remained by my side for more than an hour, helping me until, at last, I could cry. And I cried while he, without departing from me, took my hand and dried my tears. And I cried without knowing that the meal I was planning to invite him to would never be carried out, without knowing that he would never follow me up, without knowing that it was the last time I would be with him, without knowing that a week later he would die due to a bronchopneumonia. And he departed, teaching me to live with the “I don’t know”.

Back at home, my cell phone rang. “Good night, Mrs. My name is Gustavo and I’m calling you from Invex Bank.” “The same refrain, again! What the heck!” I managed to say when he interrupted me. “Please, ma’am, don’t think I’m calling you to collect money. It’s not that. We know that you live in the Roma neighborhood and I just wanted to ask you how are you today, if you need anything... How can I tell you this? I was also a brigade member at number 286 all these last days, but today, Monday, I had to join up my job and, well, they instructed me that I had to call you, but, please, don’t you worry about any of this. It’s just routine matters. Anyway, ma’am, I just wanted to say hello and wish you a good start to the week.”

I don’t know if it was thanks to Gustavo or Alfredo or both of them, but at last, after the earthquake, my face has smiled again. What I do know is that Mexico is a sacred and seismic land; that impermanence exists and that impermanence still scares me; that everything is interrelated; that I’m not alone; that, if I were trapped in a building, they would not leave me abandoned; that if I had the fate to die that way, I could do it knowing that I was loved. Today I know that a raised fist is not always a sign of anger: it’s also a way of listening to life. I know that tattooed bikers are as compassionate as lamas and that the military personnel knows about dignity and respect. Today

I'm aware of the fright and the beauty that springs from the hearts when some terrible thing happens; that the millennials are very numerous and really aces; that they took the city and that nobody wants them to release it. I know there are builders who use 'any-brand' materials so they can earn more money regardless of the safety of the tenants of their buildings. I know that nobody is obligated to understand the suffering caused by a telluric movement if he has not lived it. That judging others bury us inside ourselves. That an earthquake rakes up the stones of resentment. That my mom, in her way, loves me. That the cracks open so that imprisoned love can flow out. That with my hand on my heart I bow in reverence to earth.

Today I know that we all are the rescuer, the blind, the nun, the biker, the priest, the trapped, the soldier, the cook, the drunk, the homeless, the seaman, the brigade member, the eyes with endless wounds; that we are dust and dust in love. Today I know that a little bird appeared; that I saw it perch on a stone; that it ate a few bread crumbs; that it looked at me in my eyes; that it sang, opened its wings and flew away.

The Shaking

Barbara Sandoval

No matter how hard I try, this shitty screw does not move! To whom did I lend the thing which loosens everything? No, I am fed up, I will have to call the plumber, let's see how much it will be. Henner would have solved it quickly, he knew how to do everything. Rest in peace. Meanwhile, at least I will put this little casserole so that the water gathers up.

I dry my hands and open the email to notify that Manuel, my eleven-year-old son, is not going to school today.

I stir the soup and pull out the recipe book while I ruminate the mental list of pending issues. So many! Always! Everything is urgent and my projects go to the end, there, far away. Sometimes a little bit of them escapes from oblivion and jumps straight into my heart, making me tremble with joy; a little while for me, to dream without interference, how lovely. But they are like water that escapes from my hands. I would like more, much more of that refreshing water. I need a tub to keep it and enjoy it, minimum. No, two, another one for the leak, which is getting worse every day. Geez, a massage would be phenomenal!

Cakes, page 287: "The secret of success in making a cake lies in following the instructions to the letter..."

-Ujule! I have never been good at that; I always change something; but let's see.

-It was going to be super fun! There was going to be a drill today, mom! -Manuel complains from his bedroom. For him and his friends that means joking around.

-Oh well, honey. I told you, you did not come out on time and I am not going to run at this time when everyone is going as fast as they can to arrive punctual to a job that, for sure, they do not even like. I pass. I get caught up in it too, I go crazy and I do not want to. Either we leave early and go calmly, or you do not go.

Because I already know it: if we leave late, we run into the motorized fauna in a hurry and there we go, like yesterday when we

got into the car almost running and in a hurry and I told you: “Put your seat belt on”. I locked the doors, for safety, because of how things are. I turned on the radio: loud voices shouted their merchandises. Why do they scream? I changed the radio station, click: the news did the recount of all the femicide. Oh! It seems a lie that in a country devout of the virgin, they kill so many women, what a horror! Another radio station, click: “Dime cuando tu, dime cuando tu, dime cuando tu vas a volver, a-hai...”. And in a country infected with homophobia they chant Juanga, who is able to understand? How flexible... Click: a political commentator was scrutinizing the situation of the country, apparently without an exit.

A man with a golf beret drives the car on the left. Face of bored, tired, forty-something, two teenage children in uniform for school, connected to their respective cell phones. The classic car full of absentees.

Click: a new little gang of four or five boys with well-defined stereotypes, of different colors and attitudes so that no teenager can escape and sell their product. They sing simple and catchy songs, they are ephemeral, they collect a lot and they leave without fuss.

-Leave it, I like that one – Manuel knew the song. Inevitable.

In that, a boy with clothes of indefinite color because of the dirtiness and a sponge dripping with soap approached determined to wash my windshield; he almost succeeded, when I energetically told him no by nodding and with the hand. He left annoyed to continue his work as an informal worker, guided by the rhythm of the traffic light.

The woman from the car next to us, with her mouth opened, was curling her eyelashes and the soapy sponge was stamped on her crystal. Resigned, she set aside the teaspoon and looked for some coins inside her purse in exchange for the forced washing service, while they offered me juice, of orange, tangerine, beet or combined: “Take it!”.

On the right, a young man made roar rhythmically the huge tires of an electric blue off-road truck for the joy of a seven or eight-year-old little boy, who was balancing on the passenger seat, without a safety belt.

-But what a beast!

At the precise moment when the red light went out and the green light went on, the blue truck moved forward quickly and, at less than twenty centimeters, it closed onto me, forcing me to brake.

-What is the matter with you, idiot?

It is obvious that he did not hear me, we all had our windows closed, it was cold.

The blue truck sneaked between the cars, zigzagging, as if this was Formula One. And it is there, in those moments, when I tremble out of rage and I feel like putting the accelerator in depth and commit myself in a fight to reach the next traffic light first and so be able to show my supremacy...

-I am telling you, I get infected.

Where was I? Oh yes, cakes!: “the ingredients should be of the best quality: butter, baking powder, flour, eggs”. For a long time, I have wanted to write a book called Cooking with eggs and that it has many colorful illustrations. Another pending project. I read: “preheat the oven to 200 degrees Celsius”.

And suddenly, as everything that happens, an equal murmur approaches like a swarm that advances buzzing. A general, huge and growing rumor, which makes everything vibrate and that, when arriving, causes the earth to begin to stir us up, as if checking the contents of a box of matches; it shakes us in a brief chaos that seemed eternal.

Yank to one side and the other. Am I dizzy? To one side...No! to the other, it is trembling! Astonishment, to one side; alert, to the other. Wake up! Look for the exit! To one side, to the other...my children!

Instant response: Manuel arrives bursting into the kitchen screaming:

-We are going to die, mom!

-Not today, son. Come! Stand up!

I jump, jump, jump, while I automatically turn off, on my way, the stove with the soup about to boil. I grab Manuel by the arm looking suspiciously the walls and ceiling; I am pure adrenaline. We walk quickly and carefully, balancing on the floor which became gelatine.

I place us at the center of the courtyard of this nineteenth century mansion: adobe and beams, walls six meters high by one-meter-wide, the very image of stability and permanence that, contradictorily, now jumps nonsensical and oscillates from the foundations; it crackles rippling like a serpent vertically in an anniversary dance to which we are forced to attend.

All together evacuating at the one, two, three, chachacha.

I hug Manuel firmly by the back, who in his terror wants to run away and I order him, dominating myself so as not to scare him any more:

-Bend the knees and feel the earth, keep the balance, feel the power of the earth! Breathe, look around: what can fall? water tanks? are two, look, there is one and here the other one – I point –. How they move, look! that antenna, do you see it? it looks like a metronome! look how the house bounces! ayayay! Pay attention! take care of yourself, this is power and not tales, feel!

-Mommy, the dogs! – he worries.

-The dogs take care of themselves! You are first, look everywhere, my love, just look! If something falls, we move over there, that can not fall again.

Two plant-pots fall from their pedestals, distributing lilies and aloes all over the ground. At the same time, I think of my daughter Aurelia, who works in a school as a teacher. I count: new building, two floors, great garden. It will be fine, it has steadiness.

I jump, jump, jump. Seeing the house jumping is hypnotic, it looks like a toy and we are the pieces, we are so tiny! Now I know what a cup dice feels like.

Slowly, the trees rock less, more gently. The frequency decreases. My mom is alone! Apparently the tremor ends, although

the sensation that it is trembling, the doubt, will accompany me for months.

We melt towards the ground, still embracing each other, a tense silence is heard clearly. Cats and dogs approach us: a reunion of fragile mammals. Astonished, we inhabit the mystery completely.

Although the house looks fine, it takes us a while to decide to enter. At last we dare, cautious as thieves, slowly, hunched over, waiting for I do not know what. Manuel goes behind me, almost stuck to me. We contemplate the interior evaluating the damages.

Nothing, not even a broken plate. That crack over there, was it already there? The key to the laundry no longer drips, oh well, it got adjusted! At least it is something. On the page that I left opened on the computer, I write: “Fuck!” in Facebook and I send it.

-No, mom, it is the face from my school! – Manuel shouts in a moan.

-Oh, no! my perfect image is going to collapse! how embarrassing! – I answer to him with a singsong, defensive. The truth is that I was really embarrassed.

The recipe book waits at the table with its instructions. Of course I do not dare to even turn on the oven! I try calling my daughter, but the home phone has no signal; the cell phone neither. Oh, my Aurelia! She is okay, sure she is, I calm down.

As soon as we recover ourselves a little more, we go out the street towards Nona’s house, my mother who lives around the corner, how lucky. The people in the street go like we do, with eyes wide opened looking to see with what we will encounter. As if we knew each other from always, in silence, with brief gestures, we communicate to each other without formality, as well as one to another: concern, restlessness, relief of still being alive. We go afraid, scrutinizing the constructions where we go through. There is a lot of silence, not like the one at night. More, it is another kind of silence.

Women and men, by foot or by bike, they pick up their children early from school. A little girl says: “Today we did a simulation”. Black humor, level: the earth.

In the parking lot of the apartments where Nona lives, the neighbors are gathered. Pedro, one of them, distributes in little cups “a strong one for the scare”. I get one. “Just in time I arrived”, I think. As soon as we arrive, Alfredo tells me: “Your mommy is fine”. Thanks. What a relief.

Nona, from her little terrace, shouts:

-Daughter of my life and of my heart! praised be God! are you okay? and the kid? have you talked to her already?

-We are good. We have not communicated yet mommy, there is no signal. You, how are you?

We are getting updated while I go up the stairs.

-Perfectly, blessed be God!

-Where were you?

-Washing up. Oh, darn! – I said –, what is happening? I did not even turn off the washing machine and I left. I did not go down the stairs, I put myself in the frame of the door of the entrance; here at least they see me, and let be what God wants!

Manuel stays stroking the little dog, Candy. The neighbors continue talking condescending; they postpone returning to the solitude of their homes by relying on the company. They speak fast, they tell their experience. They agree unanimously to each comment. They get oriented to land safely after the turbulence. Even he who never greets, smiles at everyone and drinks from his little glass. He forgot how many times he has left us with a greeting in the air, passing through us without looking at us being totally shameless. He must be shy. Shy? No way! a creep! Well, enough, without hard feelings, he is also scared. What I can not stand, is that he has mockingbirds in cages, not that! But he will see, each person with its karma! Cheers! and in one gulp I drank the “strong one”. It tasted great!

-Do you want another, Aurorita? – Mr. Limon says to me.

-No, thanks, it is enough, I was already dizzy – I say joking from the handrail. Everyone laughs.

More neighbor’s children arrive to see their parents and the telling of the stories are repeated for them. A radio scrutinizes the damages known so far and we are silent in order to listen: “They

report that the church of Los Remedios, located at the tip of the Cholula pyramid, also was left without domes”. Zas!

Manuel goes up quickly, embraces Nona, searches through the horizon and exclaims:

-Come on, yes, it is true! Look at the pyramid!

They go up in a mad rush looking towards the church of Los Remedios and there it is, shaved from domes. An unusual landscape. We look like a family of prairie dogs looking far away. “They are going to have to make new postcards”, I think.

The three of us return to the house, where Aurelia is already waiting for us.

-My love! – We hug.

-How are you? the children well? the school? what a scare!

-All fine – she says –. I was able to return until now because we delivered the children first. Did you see the fumarole that the Popo threw out? – she says while the four of us physically conjugate the verb to embrace.

-Let us put our emergency backpacks. What should we carry in there? – I say, while Pablo, the sentimental partner of Aurelia, arrives in a hurry and asks –:

-Are you all fine? do you have water? – anticipating that this is repeated and there is a shortage.

News rain, immediately we share them: the epicenter was located in Axochiapan, Morelos; the earthquake was 7.1 degrees.

First the summer downpours carefully soaked the centennial adobe, then the earthquake came to crumble it. Houses and houses cordoned off, and aftershocks continued. Everywhere, because in Cholula there are churches everywhere. We saw fallen ornaments and cracked domes standing next to their corresponding towers, some inclined: San Gabriel, San Pedro, San Miguel, San Pablo, Santa Maria, almost all the celestial court. Thirty-five churches were closed.

This is how they would look, perhaps, while the natives built them, forced to dismantle their own sanctuaries and with their own stones – carved masterfully and turned inside out to hide its symbolism and beauty – to edify the temples of the new god. Submit to survive.

Will something rise from the debris? An old spirit that wakes up with the tremor willing to take its place again? Who knows, but for now...

-Nona, do not even think about going to church, huh? Pray here, that God is not going to get mad.

Well, she went that same afternoon! Of course, very cautious she stayed “just outside” so, on returning, to tell us that there were priests saying: “It is the house of God, come to church, nothing will happen to you”.

-But I better did not go in – she says –, and I complained to the sacristan that the organist was playing the music too loud and that causes vibrations, does not it? Not to play so loud, that even the fireworks were forbidden. To preach mass in the park!

-Oh, Nona, what can I tell you! Because of that and much more, I “Band-Aids” not even on the wounds! But do not go anymore, seriously, in case it happens...!

And so it was, they silenced the organist and for a few days the masses were celebrated in parks and atriums.

The images and news that saturate the media are an overdose of pain, hand in hand with spontaneous solidarity. Women and men of all ages heard clearly the call for help and, swelling instantly, they joined the service, inspired and determined, doing whatever was necessary to save, even if it was a turtle, a parakeet, a puppy, and not even to say of the serious emotion of participating in the rescue of another human, another me, that moaned under a pile of debris.

Fist held high, silence, contained breath, dozens of sharp ears are enlarged to the expectation. They go carefully removing stones, from enormous to small, until achieving to shake off the dust of their face and carefully bring water to their mouth, helping them in their rebirth, as midwives of survivors.

When they look at themselves, they show hearts full of compassion, some, and gratefulness to the others; knowing that they love each other, even if they do not see each other again and that each time that they remember each other, they will love again with the same intensity. It took an instant to consolidate a permanent bond.

And the merit is of all the chains that were formed in each collapsed construction. They celebrate and rejoice for each survivor. Or they regret sorrowful the discovery of another corpse. Intelligence, dexterity and skills are generously granted with optimal agility, in general, from all angles:

The brave Topos who work without rest, are incredible and indispensable. The hardware dealer who donated his whole heart and inventory for strangers in disgrace; taco makers, tamale makers, water sellers, who give their merchandise to keep the forces of the rescuers and, with the forces renewed, they are able to be on time to help one more. Neighbors who take out plugs so that whoever needs can use the service. Musicians who animate the rescuers with melodies and, in their own way, they try to console a little the anguished relatives and friends in vigil, who, exhausted, await news at the foot of the debris. Trained dogs, privileged noses that undertake the mission with their usual loyalty. Unquestionable friends.

We leave the ruthless jungle in order to become an evolved community. The anonymous army of competent beings that make up our country, emerged in unison, amazingly articulated. In society, the certainty of our sufficiency germinates. A girl sings, giving what she knows and what she can: Giving. Help from abroad that does not wait, rescue teams from here and from there. Brothers from other countries bring their knowledge, tools and experience. Friendship and compassion witnessed with facts. That is the humanity that I dearly love, to which I aspire: the one of the authentic nobility that dwells in each one, not the one of blue blood that has amply demonstrated its falsity.

It was tragic, heartbreaking and irreparable for those who went their way without us and who, nevertheless, nest forever, with their best clothes, at the epicenter of our throbbing.

It is amazing to imagine what we could achieve if we permanently conquered this exultant, intense and purifying state that, like a lightning, surprised us, illuminating for a few days the dark night that covered us, unleashing the spirit towards a creative process.

I make myself these considerations while I am stirring another soup, another day. We decide to stay all together in case there are aftershocks. Well, strong aftershocks, because those of low intensity continue to deplete the buildings that were damaged.

I only believe in the national seismological, since the vermin begin to reappear. Seers of terror that slip through the cracks with prophecies of even bigger catastrophes; fanatics of disinformation or simple clowns who mock about the bewilderment of the most naïve.

-I hope that the Popo does not erupt, since the epicenter was in its slope... – I comment during the meal.

-That is all we need – responds Nona.

We are afraid; we are overwhelmed and in occasions like this, it is better to withdraw and be together. It reassures.

We are collecting basic things for the emergency backpacks. It is a good exercise, although we had to buy chocolates twice, because the first batch we ate it between Manuel and me.

Thirty-two years ago – how time passes! –, I traveled around Mexico for almost two years with Aurelia's dad and with only a medium backpack. I carried materials to make earrings, embroideries and drawings, the I Ching and some clothes. If I liked one thing, I had to get rid of another. I was not willing to carry more. Besides, in a basket with a lid was my kitten Lilith.

We slept in sleeping bags, in hammocks, and once we made a delicious and aromatic mattress with sacks filled with straw and lavender, because our kind host in San Cristobal invited us to stay indefinitely in the attic of his residence, which was an old mill with very little furniture. We took the floor and, for two months, that summer we enjoyed our mattress, to which we renewed the straw and the lavender every fifteen days or so. But the summer passed and the cold of the place invited us to go to bathe in the sea.

There, in the warmth of the beach, we camped in front of the huts of the “uncles and aunts”. So, we, the young ones, used to call the fishermen and their wives, who for little money sheltered us in their piece of beach, feeding us with simple and delicious food. Win, win.

We played with their children, we helped in something, but above all we took the activity of joy and contemplation very seriously. Just what I need right now.

While we made earrings and thread bracelets that we sold to the tourists, we also strung together dreams, many dreams! In a word, we were young. There, on the beach, we carefully elaborated my Aurelia. Beloved daughter of mine.

One morning, at full volume we heard on the TV of the “uncles” an anguished voice: “The apartment complex Juarez, they are communicating to us that also the Regis Hotel and...” What is going on? It was September 19, 1985. We listened until the transmission was lost. We could not believe it.

We sought to communicate with the family. Nothing, we were isolated from the world, neither telephone, nor telegraph; well, we were not even able to get a bus. We returned to Puebla in the back cabin of the van of some party-going-people, that, for our fortune, two nights ago in Cuernavaca, in order to continue the party, they had the happy idea to “continue it”, what the kids these days call the after, in Puerto Escondido, which at that time was actually hidden. And there they arrived, happy to break their leashes and run in freedom for a while.

In the cabin, with Lilith and the backpacks, we crossed the meandering Sierra Madre Occidental. A nightmare, because of the curves and the worry, because at each stop that we made the news were more and more creepy. The revelers left us in what was before the Federal District. We continued straight to Puebla. The only memory I had left from that D.F. is that it had a penetrating smell of fear.

It was nice to travel around carefree. I had a feeling of safe shelter, I was in my country, right? my house. Could it be that I was young? We were cautious, evidently. We used to travel during the day, we installed ourselves with light and we were not stupid. We separated a few years later, in peace.

Today the news, because of so shocking, scare me diminishing my strength. The daily record of violent incidents with which the

media bombard, makes me tremble; the news that they broadcast seems to come from the Alarma! that yellow pasquinade, do you remember? does it still exist? the one of “matolo porque engañola” (kill him because he cheated). Is it on purpose, as “the bogeyman” to scare children so they obey and be quiet?

And the mobilization continues. Thousands are dedicated to the task, transporting food in their cars; in their bicycles, messages; they receive in their homes crushed strangers who lost theirs. Some lend their machinery.

Without giving up the challenge in the face of urgency, spontaneous internet-users, professionals and amateurs, managed their machines in makeshift offices; or from home, using up talent to map, inform, link, put together practical plans, report where and what is needed and warn about new routes to individuals, so that nobody takes away the larders that, armed among neighbors, in schools and universities, are delivered in spontaneous civil collection centers.

Or they personally distribute them, making sure not to turn them into political booty, to be immediately labeled with partisan emblems and stored waiting to be used opportunely during the coming campaigns. What we have to see! Making reverence to the work of others and immediately passing the urn, everyone knows that.

Private vehicles go to the most remote affected communities using their own resources. They travel through those hills that are almost always seen from far away and arrive at the forgotten country houses that refuse to disappear. They access following various itineraries, satisfied to help with something, distributing without measure nor a touch of pettiness, food, clothing, equipment, blankets, medicines, to the invisibles, to the usual ones.

And we saw them, on screens or live, in their real landscape, which is not that of a pampered memory, that of the nostalgic calendar of the kitchen that shows us the picturesque idyllic “small town”, where the “little indigenous” live with their “little animals” going dressed in white in the direction to the flea market of well-equipped stalls and translucent awnings of cheerfully vivid colors.

No, there they are, a miserable crowd not romantic at all. From here come many of the starving beggars of the street corners, the windshield wipers; the maids come here when they go to their town, and the next town is the same, or worse.

And, even so, they receive us from their pain and their daze with joy of carnival. Victims of a traditional pillage, worse than all the tremors together, we have treated them, as a country, without any respect. They live in an inequality that is not accidental. A complex reality that is not seen on TV.

How old is our country? Mental and emotional age, more than historical. This mural is Mexico, full of textures, facing the shaking in its center the earth, was set in motion creatively and harmonically, with the exalted and capable imagination, giving me the impression of maturity. Our multiple diluted differences for a common good. For a moment we walk through utopia.

Enough time has passed to digest the confusion of pruning and grafting. We survived the process of conquest, independence, revolution, all attempts to achieve fullness with some successes; others have already gone to waste. At the moment, we are going through the state of corruption. Are we already mature to set a new course? for a trip to health? to shake us off pests and fructify?

A mobilization of magnificent proportions was celebrated, between the astonishment and the passion summoned by the earth, which provoked initial surprise and immediate action, from which we came out enriched before our own amazement.

Here was where, although a little late to react, the government could have done something beautiful. Its work. For what in justice it is supposed to be there. What a waste, gee! With the golden opportunity to be inspired leaders, examples of guidance, pride and climax of the common people. They could be respected, remembered with affection, their story be written with grateful acknowledgment. I do not doubt that it must be tremendously complicated to govern, but it is not a monarchy, they can get hold of very capable people for their work; from the human capital that we

have in order to achieve that this nation of ours be what we deserve. Gosh! Do not you feel embarrassed?

While I think about this, I am putting a change of clothes of each one, something that we do not use much, in each backpack. The one of Nona is smaller because she can not carry. Eighty-two years old and one fifty tall; but, as she says: "Height is measured from the head to the sky". And, even if she is the highest of all, we distribute what corresponds to her in the others. Hand lamps, IDs, sleeping bags, tent for each one. Yes, I have a very complete equipment.

It will be necessary to make some repairs, but it is enough for everyone to take a small and complete covert for a few days, meanwhile it is one thing or the other, just in case. Hopefully not. Individual medical kits, now also chocolates, well hidden because, you see, those always come out before time. Tuna, milk powder, coffee, tarpaulins.

Oh, Henner! it has been already five years. Look at that having all this and even repeated, you died doing summit in the Pico de Orizaba and you left the phone with GPS in the van! In order not to carry it. You said that you were only going and coming. You had done it so many times, you were a certified guide, you were overconfident and, you see, even monkeys fall from trees. (even an expert makes mistakes).

As always, you liked celebrating your birthday on the mountains, Popo, Izta or Pico. It was your ritual, that was how you celebrated: October 28, day of the victims, what a coincidence! what a tenebrous coincidence! At 57 years sharp you fell in the crack and we found you three days later.

How much I would have wanted to hug you, so that you were not cold, to bring you back alive. The agreed time came and you did not come back. You, punctual and strict, if you said at four o'clock, at that hour the bell would have rang. Well, it did not ring. Worried, I searched in the computer if there had been accidents on the road, and nothing. You were not answering the phone. I never imagined that you had not come down.

I fell asleep that night wanting to convince myself that you were in Serdan City, spending the night because you were tired to drive back. And I dreamed that you were going up a staircase towards an attic. I wanted to go with you but you did not let me, I had to stay with Manuel, our son.

The next day I left Manuel under the care of Aurelia and Nona, with the command that they would not tell him anything until having truthful news. I went out early with friends to look for you. We went all around, we were sent from one side to the other around the Pico. At night, in a village at the slopes, we went to the police station, in front of the park, for some information of the search.

-No, miss, at night all is suspended because the climbers do not go up, the snow becomes ice and it is very dangerous. Until the sun rises, they can go up again – the cops explained to us in a small green, tight and grimy room.

It was so long for the sun to come out! I went out desperate in an attempt to breathe alone; they kept on talking. I walked slowly, dealing with my grief and with a horrifying cold, when from I do not know where appeared a little girl with a little dress and a sweater as to go on a field day on a sunny morning. “She is used to the cold”, I thought. She paired her step to mine and she asked me who I was looking for. I told her. “Mmm...he already died”, she exclaimed as if nothing.

I stopped in short, perplexed. I do not know exactly when she disappeared, just like that. She was not there anymore. I began to pray frantically to try to dissolve the impact that the certainty of her comment produced me. When leaving the police station, the friends who accompanied me said to me:

-We go to a house near from here where the rescuers of the town are, in order to know at what time they will resume the search.

I nodded automatically.

We went. To top it off, it was a funeral where, the relatives of the deceased drank coffee gathered around a large bonfire burning in the middle of the street. They shared with us. I approached the

fire looking for heat, but malicious comments and grim looks full of resentment chased me away.

-Because of the outsiders, we risk our lives.

-If they do not know the mountain, why do they go up?

-They think it is a game, they do not even know.

Their words were impregnated with menace, with rancor.

What desolation I had!

Later, in a hotel in Serdan City, exhausted, I dreamed that you sat on the bed, you took my hand and said goodbye. I got up furious with you, more clung than before to finding you. With all the will which I was able to have, I fiercely suppressed any hesitation that could bring me closer to surrender. I begged and promised all the deities that would want to pay attention to me. I went from the petition to the demand, and back again to the petition.

Twelve groups of rescue climbers were already looking for you. Many, your acquaintances. I got calls and messages of encouragement on my cell phone.

Those days, wherever I looked, little skulls, ghosts, witches and pumpkins smiled at me. It smelled as cempasuchil and copal. I still tremble when I remember it.

You stayed at the top. There was a storm and the fog came down ahead of schedule, you deviated a few degrees, which were extended during the advance, till it took you to your death. You loved the mountain and finally it corresponded to you.

With my forehead on the ground, in front of it I promised, in exchange for you, to plant in it ten thousand trees with my own hands if it would let you return. "Give him back to me, for mercy, give him back to me", but it preferred to keep you. I would have done the same. You left from a great landscape.

When they finally found your body and brought it down, they summoned us at a crossroad. As I was getting out of the car, I saw how, in one, two, three, they swung you, completely wrapped in a cloth, and they threw your beloved body into the punt of a police van. The sound of the blow hit my heart.

From there, to give part and keep record in the local office, where they coldly interrogated me, as if I had committed a crime.

-Are you the wife? Were you married?

-No.

-The concubine declares that today the deceased, name....

“Concubine”, I thought, and I saw myself wrapped in veils embroidered with bells, with a precious stone hanging in the middle of my forehead, beautiful. I asked for a chair, I was falling. I had to go for it. When I came out of the interrogatory, I drank a coffee which caused me tachycardia. I remembered that I had not eaten more than one tamale and one atole (corn-flour drink) for three days. I left half the coffee, and right after a jumping character appeared.

-Madam, are you the widow?

-Yes – I said. The concubines are left widowers? What am I? I thought.

-My deepest condolences and from my company – he said while handing me a card –. I come to offer you our funeral services, we adjust to any budget.

He seemed to me a young vulture. I eluded him. “Thanks”. Later, he reappeared at the morgue, when I did not know what was next. He knew his job well.

-If you want incineration, it can be here, immediately. Or we can prepare him to take away for one, two or three days.

Whaaaat?

-If you want him for taking away, how do you want us to prepare him?

“The only thing he missed to offer: in pipian or pickled? I thought. It was for two days, without seasonings.

I wanted Manuel to see him if he wanted to. That he had a choice, that his father would not only disappear from the scene like that. He did not want to, he was six years old and the blow was brutal. Even today we are dealing with the remains of that other earthquake.

I was left cut opened; the death is icy. I do not know if one's death, but the one of a loved one, it is. I know. That is how it was for me. It left me an icy cold feeling that took a long time to pass. And something was cauterized inside me.

Today I can talk about it, but I spent more than a year afflicted. Without an idea of how or where to continue life. I did not want anyone to leave home, I wanted to have them all close by, not to lose sight of them. I did not trust life; I did not trust death.

I had panic attacks while driving, while being away from home, when going to pick up Manuel from school. Curiously, when going back, with my child in the car, I did not have them.

A single certainty took hold of me, although sometimes it eludes me, or sometimes I elude it when I get angry. Only love matters.

And I continue with the emergency backpacks, because the Popo and the replicas just do not stop! Tweezers for the eyebrows, because since I went through menopause I get a few thick beards that I hate. If at least it was a full beard, I say... Toothpaste, toothbrush. Are needed five more stakes for the little houses. That is why I do not like lending things, now they are missing! But I always give in when someone asks me for something. I hate myself! but not anymore.

-Did you call Civil Protection again, sweetheart? It has been a week since it trembled and they do not show up.

-They are very busy with serious cases, mum. I sent the pictures of the cracks to Jimena, to architect Casas and to teacher Andres. They say that they are not risky, that there is nothing to worry about.

Meanwhile, we inform ourselves of what kind of fractures are dangerous. There is one that is the ugliest, right on the way through the bathroom. It is very cumbersome, we go through there with uneasiness, looking at it in case it breaks right at that moment; it would be very bad luck. So better the pee in the compost, are phosphates. All the rest, oh well, we go all around and we enter by the other side.

This house is like “in one go”, it is like the ones from before. A sausage of bedrooms and rooms until getting to the kitchen. All the rooms face the patio, except the bathroom! That was annexed later, in a small room that was for sewing, or something like that. It remained there like a big box half the height of the house, with a door and window, next to a corner. Nothing aesthetic. But the rest is worth gold! The spacious rooms are delicious, the kitchen huge. It is beautiful, with its three ironwork balconies facing the street. It even has a hiding place from the times of the Revolution, in the living room, under the floor. I have never wanted to go down, several people fit in. It could be a cava, well seen. But I do not like its “vibe”. Let it be there.

And life goes on with its many domestic details. There are no classes yet because of the revision of the schools. For me, better. I like being with Manuel, besides not driving with cold in the morning and heat in the afternoon. For me they are vacations.

His sister gives him homework; and although he grumbles, he is occupying himself in learning by himself. Life, I have noticed, is a long personal investigation. In knowing how to search and knowing what we are looking for, there is the key. Although sometimes one finds that which extends the doubts, change the route and it gets to another place. And so we go, choosing.

At times, I do not deny it, Manuel drives me crazy. When he gets bored he starts to get dense. He wants what he does not have and he does not see what he has. It happens to me too. The miracle happens as soon as he finds a thread to follow and he finds an idea that interests him, by himself. He wants it, he courts it, he becomes passionate and starts doing it regardless of the result, for the pleasure. Without interruptions, he generates something in the process which builds it. It is built.

-Time to eat! Come now! Food is ready!

Sitting at the table, we comment the reports of what has gone on in our day. They have already stopped the search for victims, that is very sad; let other days continue.

-If I were them, I would keep on looking, there may be more people, it is not fair! – says Manuel disconsolate.

I do not know how to comfort him, nor me. Everything possible was done, they say. Now comes the reconstruction, we must continue. Oh well.

Numerous interesting proposals for temporary housing for the victims are offered. Mongolian yurts with PVC, minimal and complete booths (Housing used by nomads in the steppes of Central Asia, protected by a thick cover, easy to transport and optimal to withstand the intense climatic changes). So simple designs that make me think: how could it not occur to me before? They reuse the adobe; they build with PET bottles. Anyway, there is a lot of wit in the face of so much work. In Juchitan, where the first earthquake hit so hard on September 7, they still can not finish. This is going to take a long time, it seems.

It turns out that the old shovels resting the dreams of the righteous for years, and the pots with holes that were once plant pots, are useful to move stones in the absence of wheelbarrows, they go! And the Henner helmets for motorcycle, for climbing and paragliding, too, they go! Manuel keeps his favorites, it goes! Electric gloves that we do not use, they go! Gardening gloves, you think so? Well look, in some way it will help them.

These objects are added to many other things that Maria and her boyfriend have gathered together with other boys and girls, who, besides enjoying exploring the beauty that nature provides at any point, they help.

Enthusiasm is a precious word; it means: “with divine inspiration”. That is how they are, that is why they love what they feel. Inundated, they are, at the same time, divine. In those we are, when the sad lion of the knocker of the hallway rumbles announcing, at last! To whom do you think? To Civil Protection. Taran!

-Good afternoon – they wear badges, they show credentials, we salute, we shake hands. Very well presented with vests and official helmets. They are three architects and a technical specialist, no idea on what. But “come in”.

-Welcome, good thing that you already arrived!

-Are you eating? Are we interrupting you?

-No, no way! it does not matter! Come this way, please.

And if we say yes, that right at noon people usually eat. Better not in case they get offended and come back in six months.

We show all the cracks that we have discovered with the days. We ask, they explain us.

-There is no problem, the damage is not of concern.

-Oh, thank goodness! Well, we can be calm.

We crossed looks of relief. Fiu!

-Make them see the roof, Aurelia! – says Manuel, who loves to go up whenever he can.

-A month ago they waterproofed it – says Aurelia, do you want to see it?

-Yea, sure, since we are here, at once. Let's go.

I see them go up the sea ladder that stands out from the wall and I better wait for them. I love solid land, although with so much aftershocks, real or imaginary, that seems like a joke.

While I wait for his return, I look at this second patio, the one of knick-knacks. So much wasted space; if we fix it we can put a little chicken coop and a vegetable garden, entertained I make plans. You see, Venezuela, so rich and going through hunger, without supply, and what there is, very expensive, they say.

Outrageous in an oil country! What perverse maneuvers of the government and its henchmen! Cheating continuously, to at any rate, always keep the score in their favor. What do they win? Outside of their exclusive club, nobody likes them, and I think nor inside. Breed of vipers! Would say Jesus Christ referring to the beggars of that time. Do not they see that they are going to die? That they will not take away anything, even if they accumulate everything?

Oh, but it is not their fault; well yes, too. But those who let them do and undo without asking for reports, there you go for being bad citizen! There you go for being distracted! There you go for being submissive! How awful! This theme always irritates me!

Instead, Saudi Arabia seems to be putting it together, organized....
How will they do it?

I better clean this, and some tomatoes. If they come out through the compost, the more here! And being in that disorder, they coming down from the roof, Aurelia livid and Manuel quiet. And now? A woman architect, the eldest, tells me:

-You have to leave now. You can not sleep here; it is very dangerous.

-Wait a minute, slowly – I ask. Although I heard perfectly from the first time, what I want you to tell me is what is this game. Oh, how humorists! But in their faces I can see that no, it is no joke.

-Once again, please. How? Why? What is going on?

-The floor has a crack of at least one centimeter all through, better get out. Is the house yours?

-No, it is rented – I answer with a thin voice.

-Well, talk to the owners, because it even threatens the school next door, faces the courtyard.

No, not even to think about it! Playtime, an aftershock, no, no, no! the children! See the terrible story about the school in the DF; sorry, “Mexico City”. Was something won by re-baptizing the DF? I do not think so. As if there was no work to be done!

“Ups!” I think. I left the soup on the fire! I run and turn off the burner. Now we have half concentrated and salty soup. Pfff! I sigh and I go out to find out more. They are already marking with phosphorescent spray paint the wall in the street and the entrance with a folio number. They give Aurelia some papers, which she signs and they leave a copy to her.

-See you later.

-Thank you very much.

-Nothing to be thankful for, it is our job. Excuse me.

Gosh! And now? To make matters worse, that day rained. It was the last downpour of the season, confirming the diagnosis of the specialists. A pretty curtain of water, like that of some elegant hotels, fell through the mentioned crack all along the length of the house;

from the kitchen, through the bedrooms and up to the wall of the balcony facing the street.

While we were running moving up furniture and piling up various objects, the dogs went to lie on their rugs, keeping safe; and the cats climbed into the spontaneous mountains of things that we were accumulating, and licking unconcerned, they watched our agitation.

The following nights we slept in Nona's apartment. The little animals stayed at home, what else! I was depressed and disturbed, I wanted to sleep until everything was solved. Impossible. I spent the days between washing clothes, shopping and food, limiting expenses to a minimum.

I was exhausted from thinking up solutions. I scratched at my convolutions to see if I could find an idea. And no, all the ideas had gone for a walk. Now we were victims of the tremor, without right for any help because the house was not ours. Everything was dismantled, how to put it together again? Fortunately, misfortunes do not last forever, who would endure? So, somehow or other, we have to overcome it.

I drank linden blossom tea by gallon. How good that there was no mescal, because I would probably would have thrown into vice! Going away from my palace, thrown towards where? Whatever, to look for a house. How expensive everything is! Since Cholula became "Magic Town", it became expensive. We saw some insignificant little houses; we do not fit into any.

I accumulated so many things that there is no need telling you! without restriction. Imagine, seventeen years living here, with rooms four by nine, a central patio with trees that I planted and which today are taller than the house itself.

And besides, although it seems incredible, I never had the rent increased. Well, I painted it every two, three years, on the inside one time, on the outside another; it amounted to painting two houses. I made it prettier, I placed planks in the attic, all from my pocket; if something broke down, I fixed it. Hey, I was never a bother. Nor the owner with me; it was perfect.

He has about twenty houses and this is the smallest one; seriously, he plays Monopoly. He had seven siblings and they died one by one of old age. Only he got married, he inherited what the others left and he has only one daughter, who is going to get everything. Lucky her.

After a few days, we found an apartment that our budget could cover. In all, a little bigger than my old bedroom, it was like being in the whole house at the same time. I did not enter in the apartment, let's say that I put it on me! If I could carry it, and with two holes for my legs, I could walk with it on top of me, like a snail.

My soul fell to the ground! Where will I store my things? How do the Japanese do it? No idea! A temporary refuge of those that are proposed, would be fine. Yes, sure, and have them place it in the park, if not, where?

To sell whatever can be sold, to give away... I do not know. I remembered my great-grandmother, who had her "little chair for crying" in a corner, and when she needed it, she went there, sat down, I imagine that she was dressed in lace and perfumed with rosewater and benzoin, and she cried between deep sighs. I wanted to cry anywhere, with the little chair or without it!

Oh yes, fool, and those who lost everything in the earthquake? Do not be silly! Yes, it is difficult, it hurts, but we are all fine, you got to be kidding! take away the drama from your life! I already have lived before with only a backpack; this will not scare me. Come on, let's keep on going!

And there we went. Aurelia, my beloved babe, she went to her school, my son to his, and Nona and I to cover the day-to-day work, to get boxes and to pack. Nona, as always, willing to help even in what she can not. I must watch her, because she climbs, like a Chinese tightrope walker, in three chairs to remove a spotlight that is not even worth fifteen pesos, risking everything! It is incredible!

Nona was born in Mexico City. My grandfather studied law and, therefore, he earned the nickname, which was repeated some Sunday at family meals in the house in Puebla, "the communist". He found great pleasure in booze with the classmates of the faculty. And

my grandmother had no choice but to take the lead, believing that it was something like an investment: “Today for you, tomorrow for me; when his career is over, he will take his place. This is temporary”. Yes, sure! That never happened; he never changed, but she grew a lot. They ended up divorcing after having three children; Nona the eldest.

-I worked as a secretary – my granny told me one night in her kitchen, having dinner –. In those times there were no labor rights for mothers, nor day care centers, as now. I used to leave your mom well eaten, changed, wrapped as a taquito and gave her the blessing so she would not vomit and drown. I had no choice. When I returned from work, eight hours later, with hard breasts full of milk – that must have hurt! I think –, and I unwrapped your mother, “she was steaming, as a tamale”.

A little bigger, around one-year-old, that was not possible anymore, so I left her under the care of the concierge.”

The paternal grandparents went from Puebla to Mexico City to visit their son, daughter-in-law and granddaughter, in 1936 or so, and they found my mother tied from the waist to a tube from the central fountain, because she was crawling so fast that she could be in danger, and the concierge had a lot to wash, she could not be carrying her.

They brought her to Puebla, they had a lumberyard and they lived in comfort. She attended the American School until, one afternoon, in a moment of boredom, she discovered a floorboard of the room that stood out from among the others. With her little finger she lifted it up and, oh! wonder! she found a treasure! That was upholstered with canvas sacks that the great-grandfather kept totally filled with pesos of silver 0.720.

-I filled my pencil case, which was like that, long, with many pesos. It was easy for me, why the hell not? – she tells us.

For a few weeks she was the school’s sensation, she bought sweets for her friends everyday, until in the Head teacher’s Office they realized that there was a lot of money, they detected it and told my great-grandparents, who made an uproar and moved her to

another school as punishment to correct her, to the boarding school El Progreso, of nuns, paradoxical name.

-Sor Elodia was tall, abundant in flesh, with a pigtail and completely dressed in black. At five o'clock she entered the galley which contained the beds in two rows, as a barracks, and clapping her hands she shouted: "Hail Mary full of grace, time to get up!", walking along, back and forth, without any mercy. We were little girls! And from there like little lambs towards the baths. I had to bathe with my nightgown on, so as not to see my body.

-Girl, put on your nightgown!

-But I am going to bathe!

-Put on the nightgown!

-And how do I bathe?

- Well, like that. Under the nightgown!

Then to dress almost hidden, and then to mass and then breakfast. She still recites the Our-Father in Latin.

She only went out on weekends. She did not like that not even a little bit.

"I am not staying here – she thought, so she was thinking up plans for her escape –. Run, but where? And then, who protects me? No, my security!". Imagine at that age, it is like to be taken into account. If someone with brains had led me, they would have achieved a lot. Because I plotted, I made pipe dreams, I reconstructed family conversations and I remembered "the Communist". At that time there were posters, in shops and posts, saying: "Communism no, Catholicism yes". There it was the master plan for my liberation.

-I pretended to be very distressed near the gossippiest of the classroom. Her name was Victoria. It was a signal, I still remember. I cried throughout the corners, all acting! This girl, nor lazy nor slow, burning with curiosity, insisted me that her friendship was true and that she would never betray me, that I should open up with her to vent myself – she tells us.

And it was just what my mom, precocious being eight years old, was waiting for.

-I have a great sorrow – she said brokenly –. No, I can not tell you.

-Please Rosa Maria, be confident, I will not tell anyone. I swear.

And so for a while she was cooking her slowly. Until she let go of her regret:

-It is just that, no, I can not.

-Tell me, do not keep it.

-It is that....my dad is communist.

In the afternoon, the grandparents gave a thousand explanations to the mother superior.

-The thing is that my husband makes jokes to my son because he studies law, but in no way, mother superior. Look, it is a joke, a nonsense. He also calls him “pen-pusher”. We are a Catholic family, the priests of La Concordia visit us.

-Yes, Mrs. Rosita, but in this school she can not stay longer. I am very sorry.

There was no way, expelled. That same night she had dinner at home, very happy. A jewel, my mom.

Well, to look for school. Let’s see, let’s go with Mr. Gumersindo Vargas.

-Who was an honorable man, old-fashioned, but very old-fashioned! Rigid, a stereotype of that time: vest, watch chain, graying mustache trimmed, robust, dressed in gray, sitting behind a gray desk in a dark office.

“How awful! – Nona thought -. Going from bad to worst! I am not staying here; I am not staying here!”.

-Yes, Mrs. Rosita, we can admit her. She has to do an exam to see on what school grade she corresponds. Let’s see girl, how much is eight times four?

-Twenty-seven – she responded proudly.

-No, well, six times six?

-Twelve – with a satisfied face.

-Think about it, the multiplication table of number four can be easier. Four times seven?

-Forty?

-There was the double life exercised since that time for my salvation – says Nona.

Because she is a master in manipulation. “Tell me about it that I know her forever!”, I think.

-But you know it, Rosa Maria! answer right! - her grandmother said.

There was no way, she did not even get one answer right; they could place her in first grade.

-No! but if she has to be going into fifth grade!

As a next option, the German School.

-There, the sky opened for me – Nona tells –. It was illuminated, broad and there was that beautiful man, Herr Theiss, the Head-teacher. They made her do an exam again.

-I did it real well, you know? Because I answered everything. I was free. I studied, little, but I really played, I made friends! I was happy.

She excelled in sports, with the best time in 100-meter races in the country, and she was invited to the first Pan-American and Caribbean games. But my great-grandmother said conclusive:

-In the family there has never been mountebanks – and that was the end for her in races.

At her eighty-two years old, we were here now, choosing, say, very selectively each object to adjust to the dimensions of the new house to which the earthquake forced us. We got rid of furniture that no way could they fit in the apartment. We threw away totally full garbage bags everyday; of the big ones, black.

-Where was all this if we used to clean the house continuously?

We separate wood, plastic, what a plague! Metal, paper, can be sold, call Mr. Moi so he can take it away and whatever he gives us is good. Who needs five sets of tea? If we do not even use them! To the old bazaar of antiques. Toys: those that do, those that do not. Clothing: that does, that does not.

-This is good, we give it to Maggie, that as you know her husband totally disregarded his responsibilities and poor Maggie

always wears rags, because of so many children she has. The toys too.

-But she has not even paid you the twelve thousand pesos which you lent her almost three years ago!

-Well, the universe should take it on account of any karma that I owe, what else! Every time I call her up she even gets offended, better leave it there! But I learned. It will not happen to me again! Also poor Maggie, either her children eat or she pays me. Well, let the children eat.

I did not feel that I was moving to another house, but that I was descaling myself from the previous house. The round begins, the bell rings. In this corner, with attachments and from another epoch: The Nona! and in this other, with attachments, but determined to throw, Aurora! There we go. In the center of the ring they both pull a sweater from each other that has not been worn, but that “can be useful”, says Nona. With arguments, Aurora tries to take it from her, but Nona defends herself and swears that now she will use it.

The daily bread and a round for everything: dishes, goods and chattels, ornaments. Labeling boxes, tie them up, make budgets with moving companies, to see which one is better for us.

At night we returned to Nona’s apartment to snuggle, tight, but comfortable, and to rest.

To think, to think, in an unstoppable train of ideas that had already returned from their walk, but not the good ones –, I woke up restlessly, continually. The savings were vanishing, and another and another day were passing on settling the unscheduled move, the apartment’s month of deposit, the one that runs, and it really runs fast! the recurring expenses...

-The thing is that it does not stop trembling since it trembled! – I say complaining about the situation with this metaphor in front of Aurelia, who with her forceful logic answers me:

-That is right, it is always shaking. The earth is alive, as you. “I can not even complain at ease!” I think. But I am grateful to her, she brings me back to the road with her clarity. Sometimes she shakes

me and many more times she teaches me, I listen to her carefully. She is brilliant and sensitive.

When I reproach myself for not having achieved accomplishments that gave me fame and fortune or achieved titles and recognitions, I see my children so beautiful, intelligent, irreducible, full of virtues. There I see that I launched the biggest company and I have dedicated my life with benefit. Really I will leave to the world a couple of valuable beings that, without a doubt, they make it better.

I became sort of “the opossum (tlacuache)” of the song of Cri-Cri: “I change, sell and buy equally”, removing the one of “I buy”. I sold Henner’s machinery that, I gave up, I was never going to use. It pays one month of school. Period.

It could have been a slow move, because the deposit and the current month payment was covered; otherwise, I would not want to think about it. And even so, it was very hard. Passing things in the car and with the help of friends with vans, one day some, another day others and so on, we finally achieved the move. Next, to unpack and again, to take out more things, because we still did not fit.

Aurelia shared with me an idea of enormous utility, very good. Just what I was missing.

-if it does not make you happy, thank it and let it go. You will not miss it, ma, believe me. There is a Japanese woman who writes books about this, she told me.

A treasure of wisdom that can be applied to all areas of life, at all levels. My growing pains are diminishing, the weight that I am carrying now, is less thanks to her advice.

Out from the corner of my eye, I had seen the minimalist style, in some magazine. Nothing to do with me, I thought. All those straight lines, the furniture, the clothing, the gray, beige, black walls; so cold and unwelcoming, is not my thing, I always thought.

What I had not noticed, other than that I did not like the decoration, was the background that sustains it. yes, that is, if I have only what I like, I can see everything, that gives me the opportunity

to use it and develop it. Why having what I do not like? It takes away time from what I do care about.

It is simple: I can focus, and by not dispersing myself I achieve results. I think I accumulated so many things out of fear of fully committing the myths of my idealized image. Out of fear of not being the perfect painter or sculptor that I told myself that I was, and better, I covered it with things that kept me busy and complaining, instead of solving if was useful for what I had imagined or not, and to something else. Out of fear of failure or success, but that is another topic.

In any case, the earthquake decided that it is time by leading me to this. Frugality in living is not a punishment, it is more of a blessing, now I see it. It does not have to be gray or beige, it can be of the colors and materials that I want; the importance is the lightness and the approach. Until I understood it! “As it is inside, it is outside”, they say. It must be, it seems true.

All kinds of knick-knacks went through the filter. And as if by magic, the pieces were falling into place. Manuel learned gladly and we were thinning of knick-knacks and good and functional objects, but that they had already fulfilled their role with us and, I hope, would be useful for someone else. Lighter, the apartment is being perceived spacious, pleasant. Less is more, in this case.

I started to like eating in the “good” tableware which only came out at Christmas in order to set up a simulacrum of ephemeral elegance that was vanished the rest of the year, in which we used to eat in several plates orphan remnants of earthenware, putting together a collage on the table of every day that, it was not ugly, but it was not beautiful, it did not make me happy. There being kept, the good tableware, in its showcase seemed to say to me: “You do not deserve me”. How ridiculous, any day trembles again and goodbye unused tableware, life without living.

And there was time and space to remove from the bottom of the bottom of the trunk, projects postponed for years, they are still warm, they still make me happy, they stood firm waiting to see at what time it would tremble so that, at last, I would be removing the

obstacles, from big to small, until hearing its slight moan which denoted that there was still something alive there, my dreams.

I dusted them off and looked at their eyes knowing that I was going to love them forever. They are me. This earthquake had its epicenter in my chest, it threw down the walls of my resignation. It resized the complaint, the useless, born of the pain of denying me, the frustration of hiding my talents for another time. if time is the only thing we do not have, we live of moments. The earthquake prompted me to be reborn.

How else can I teach my son to follow his passion if not by example. To preserve his originality by exercising it.

Time passes and we go back to the everyday. It was beautiful to be connected in the same frequency, vibrating. Something more that the floor and buildings was cracked. The certainty that this can not change was hopelessly cracked. Many little lights have remained lit, illuminating the hope until it dawns. Our children and we deserve it.

Yes, it is more the hope.