

## Set on fire for protesting against oppression: An interview with Carmen Gloria Quintana

*In June 2016, CMHR Curator Armando Perla conducted an interview with Carmen Gloria Quintana. As a teenager in Chile in 1986, she was doused with gasoline and set on fire by soldiers for protesting against the Pinochet dictatorship. In this interview, Quintana gives a powerfully moving account of her ordeal, her transport to Canada for medical treatment and refuge, and her work for human rights. Women in Chile secretly sewed arpilleras (vivid fabric artworks) to tell her story, which have been incorporated into the Museum's exhibit. Quintana now lives in Montreal.*

*This transcription of the interview has been translated from the original Spanish.*

**Interviewer:** This interview with Carmen Gloria Quintana is being recorded in Beacon Hill, Quebec, on June 4, 2016 by Armando Perla.

Can you tell me about the political situation in Chile when you were a girl and as you were growing up?

**Carmen:** So, to describe Chile's political past, we have to talk about the government of Salvador Allende, and the *Unidad Popular* (Popular Unity) party, which was the first socialist government voted in democratically in Chile. With the Allende government, the Chilean people were looking for equality by having their basic rights met, including the right to good education, health, work, and retirement for all.

But that threatened the economic interests of the big transnationals and big business in Chile. Many companies began to nationalize, which was a big threat for the United States and for the Chilean bourgeoisie given that it could set an example for other countries looking for democratic and fair avenues for their people.

So a plot for a coup was hatched between the Chilean armed forces, the Chilean right wing, and the United States. The *La Moneda* presidential palace was bombed, leading to a civic-military dictatorship based on a liberalist ideology, and that dictatorship seriously violated human rights for 17 years. It began by detaining anyone who opposed it, torturing them in a flagrant violation of human rights.

There were detainees, people who went "missing," and tortured political prisoners. I was only five years old when the military coup happened, so the dictatorship was there from the beginning. When I was 18, I took part in the national protest and became one of the dictatorship's victims.

**Interviewer:** Could you tell me a bit more about your childhood, growing up in the midst of the dictatorship, and what values you learned at home?

**Carmen:** So, my childhood... I came from a humble, working-class family. My father was an electrician and my mother was a homemaker. My five siblings and I grew up in the Nogales district of Santiago. My family had a lot of structure. My father worked a lot, and my mother raised us and we all went to school.

But we always lived in fear, given that from our childhood, people would tell us that our family was a leftist one. They weren't militant, but they had been strong supporters of Allende's government, and raised us with the values of what had been the *Unidad Popular*, which meant that as children, we were always hearing about Allende, idealizing much of what the *Unidad Popular* stood for. My parents would always tell us about the injustices occurring in our country, about the violation of human rights, always living in fear knowing that you couldn't speak publicly, that you could be detained.

So it was always a topic of conversation at home, but not in public. One of my grandmothers had been a social leader, and when they were younger, my parents had both been somewhat involved in bringing Allende into power. But afterwards, given the generalized fear, people stayed at home. And when the big national demonstrations started up in 1983, my whole family took part; we would go to the National Stadium...no, the first time was on General Velásquez avenue, near my home, held by the International Workers' Association – I was 15 years old at the time – and later it was in Parque O'Higgins park, where I also remember taking part.



Carmen Gloria Quintana in 1986  
Photo: Fondo Archivo Diario La Nación.  
Universidad Diego Portales. Colecciones  
MMDH

Later, when I started university, I remember wanting to be more actively involved, always at a pretty basic level, not as a leader or anything like that. So my older sister and I were in university, and my other siblings were in high school, and we both were part of the Students' Federation at the University of Santiago, where we were studying. And we took part in the protests, we went out into the streets. I recall carrying flags and signs demanding freedom for the political prisoners in support of people we knew who had been detained, because there was a climate of great fear.

I remember that many times I would go into the university, and there were military and *carabinero* (national police force) buses inside. And **many times the university president would let the *carabineros* into the university to harass the students who were demonstrating or holding meetings.** So it was not uncommon to hear that a classmate had been detained, with his or her whereabouts unknown, or that someone had been murdered in some demonstration, struck by a

bullet, so we always lived with a great deal of fear about what might happen.

One day, I was detained at a demonstration, a few months before I was burned. Around 100 of us were detained. They released us the same day, but it was the first really terrifying moment my parents went through.

**Interviewer:** In those activities in which you were involved, where did you find the courage in the midst of the dictatorship and the climate of fear, to keep fighting and demonstrating?

**Carmen:** I think that many people had that courage...not just me. There were many people who kept going, because I think that we were all tired of feeling that oppression, that lack of freedom. There was a desire to know what it was like to live in a democracy, because we would see that the faculty couldn't talk freely about things, and people couldn't share their ideas for change. There was always the fear that even the classmate sitting next to you could be an informant. That atmosphere of unease and mistrust was so great that people felt the youth was losing its strength. There was also the desire to experience something new and put an end to the injustices and the human rights violations that we were hearing about every day.

**Interviewer:** So can you tell me what happened on July 2, 1986?

**Carmen:** I was 18 and attending the University of Santiago. A national civic strike had been scheduled for July 2 and 3 by the *Asamblea de la Civilidad*, which was a group of political parties, well, technically, political parties were prohibited, but they still existed, and they called on everyone, on the entire country to go on strike to put an end to the dictatorship. The union was also involved, the students,

everyone was calling for it, so we were all very hopeful that this could really be the end, because the protests were massive. There had already been a major economic crisis in 1985, prompting many people to get involved.

So on July 2, we had arranged with other people of the University of Santiago to all march to the university, and given that I lived nearby, that day we got up early and went out to march to the University of Santiago. Enroute, we met up with Rodrigo Rojas and two other youth who wanted to build a barricade on General Velásquez Avenue, because it was a main thoroughfare.

We were all in the mood to demonstrate, and agreed, but even before we did anything, we were intercepted by a military patrol. That day, the dictator had threatened that if anyone protested, we would suffer the consequences, because they were going to use the entire army to crack down on the protestors. So we all ran off in fear because the soldiers were carrying machine guns and wearing facepaint; their faces were streaked in black.

We all ran off, and unfortunately, they followed Rodrigo and me – we were running in the same direction. They got Rodrigo first, and they beat him to the ground. I was running behind him, and they got me and put me up against a wall. They went through my things and threw me to the ground, kicking me. They hit Rodrigo much more than me ... he was lying half-unconscious on the ground.



Then another military patrol came and turned around. They had a canister of gasoline that supposedly was what we had left behind, and began to insult us about the barricade, shouting and getting angry. Rodrigo was still lying on the ground, and they doused him in gasoline, like they were watering a plant. I was standing, and they had two machine guns trained on me, and they also doused me from head to toe. This all happened between eight and nine in the morning.

I didn't understand why they were doing this ... I never imagined that they were going to set me on fire ... and I was thinking I would have to clean myself well and head quietly home; I was sure they were just playing with us to scare us and that they would then send us home. That's what I thought, and while they were doing this, an incendiary device came at us and exploded, and flame engulfed the entire area where Rodrigo and I were.

I panicked, trying to put out the fire with my hands, rolling around on the ground to try to put out the flames, but I couldn't. Then when I fainted, I could feel that I was being wrapped in blankets and thrown into a truck or pick-up truck, I'm not sure, and then I lost consciousness. When I started to come to, I realized I was on a road and I could feel soldiers' boots on my body and a lot of people laughing.

Then they dumped me into a ditch somewhere outside the city. I didn't realize that it was near the airport. So they left us there, and Rodrigo Rojas shook me to wake me up, and I woke up and I saw that he was all burned, like a zombie, with no skin, all white. It was strange, very strange, and I was in a lot of pain. We started off, but we couldn't walk very well, we were like zombies.

We walked toward the highway that we could see in the distance. And as we were walking, I saw signs saying *Quilicura*, which was pretty close to the airport, and we started to hitchhike so that someone would stop and take us to the hospital. People were frightened and nobody would pick us up. Then

some labourers came who were building a house across the way, and they made us some benches with bricks and lay us down there, and then the *carabineros* came.

Somebody must have notified the *carabineros*, who asked us what had happened to us, and neither of us dared say anything, because we knew that if we did, we would be taken away, “disappeared,” so we stayed quiet and the *carabineros* didn’t do anything. A lot of time passed. I was in so much pain and so angry that I told them to just shoot me, because I didn’t want to go on feeling the pain, and then they seemed to react and took us away. They got a car to stop and they took us to a polyclinic.



A polyclinic is like a local health centre, and the nurse there left us outside. Then she asked me to come in and asked me what had happened, and I told her that the soldiers had burned us and asked her to please call my mother and father. I gave her my number and she called them, and then I fainted and don’t remember anything more. That’s a bit of what happened to us.

Rodrigo had second- and third-degree burns to 70 per cent of his body. He died on July 6, 1986. I had 65 per cent second- and third-degree burns. After nearly two years of operations, I survived, with disfiguring burn scars covering my legs, arms, face and hands.

**Interviewer:** After the local clinic, did they take you to a hospital? What was your recovery like in Chile?

**Carmen:** It was very slow...I was unconscious almost all of the first two months. I rarely came to during that period. I was in a coma for two months, on the brink of death. First I was in the Posta Central, which is where Rodrigo died, according to Chilean publications. Conditions were so bad there under the dictatorship that if I remained there, I would most likely die, so I did what I could to be transferred to a private hospital, the *Hospital del Trabajador* (workers’ hospital). The clinic costs were very high, something like \$2,000 a day, and every day in emergency was even more, which was paid thanks to national and international solidarity efforts.

It was amazing how many people were in solidarity with my parents. They tell me there were huge line-ups of people who wanted to give blood and skin, people who put money into a bank account opened by the *Vicaría de la Solidaridad*, a human rights’ organization, to pay the hospital costs. Money came in from exiles living abroad to express their solidarity.

And there were *velatones* or candlelight vigils, because people thought I could be kidnapped and “disappeared.” So there were people who spent all night outside the door as guards, and there were also people outside who were praying with candles all night. It was very touching. I didn’t see any of it, but people told me about it later.

And they started, since everything was so expensive, and this went on until mid-September, we began to receive offers from other countries to continue my treatment elsewhere, including the United States, France, Germany, Italy, and Brazil. However, most of the countries only offered to take me and my mother. Canada was the only country that offered to bring my entire family. Given that we were very close and didn’t want anyone to be at risk in Chile, we chose Canada.

The treatment was very painful because they had to use my own unburned skin; they had to remove it, and every time they removed skin, it was like having open wounds. It was so painful, and my skin stuck to the sheets. I couldn't wash myself or walk, or use my hands. I lost hearing in one ear. So it was a long process. First, there were the grafts to replace all of the burnt skin, then waiting for the skin, the little I had, to heal so that they could take more skin from the same spot, use temporary newborn pig skin, grafts of human skin that was compatible with mine.

It all took many months and was very painful. Once they knew I was going to live, they began the reconstructive surgeries given that, for example, I couldn't separate my arms from my body because they were stuck due to the burns, and I needed an operation so that the skin would "give" and I could move my arm. My neck was stuck to my chest and they had to operate to separate it. I couldn't move my hands...they were sort of stuck together, and they had to operate so I could separate my fingers.

So many operations were required to do all this, and to start to "reteach" the skin to move like normal skin. Recreating the skin folds took many months of therapy, massage and exercise. I couldn't walk very fast, because I hardly had any leg muscles. Everything had been burned, so the muscle had to be regenerated through exercise, and I had to relearn to use my hands. I couldn't use a spoon so they had to hand-feed me. It was a very long and tiring process.

**Interviewer:** What can you tell me about Rodrigo Rojas?

**Carmen:** Rodrigo Rojas was...well, I knew him, but not very well. I had seen him once before that day. Rodrigo was the Chilean-born son of Verónica de Negri. Verónica de Negri was a leftist activist who was detained during the coup d'état and imprisoned in the concentration camp on the *La Esmeralda* ship. She was tortured, raped and detained for many months. During that time, her grandfather took Rodrigo Rojas to Canada and he came to Quebec with him and his brother.

Later, when they had done everything to secure Verónica's freedom – she fortunately was freed – she joined them here in Quebec, and they all immigrated to the United States, to Washington. So Rodrigo grew up between Quebec and Washington because a lot of his family stayed here in Quebec and he was always travelling. He was a U.S. citizen, and when he turned 18, he began planning a trip to Chile, to learn more about his roots. He was also a professional photographer, so in addition to an identity quest, he wanted to use photography to document what was happening in Chile.

Rodrigo arrived on a Sunday just beside my neighbourhood where University of Santiago students were working in soup kitchens as part of a grass-roots protest against the dictatorship, but a light-hearted one. Every Sunday we would participate in anti-Pinochet political activities, while at the same time making food for everyone there, organizing games for the children, and educating people about what was happening, inviting them to help make bread. So Rodrigo Rojas took a picture of me when we were playing with the children jumping rope.

Coincidentally, I remember that I noticed Rodrigo, because he looked different from the Chileans there. He was very handsome, and I asked my sister who that handsome young guy was, and had suspicions about him being a fink, an informer. My sister told me that we'd have to be careful, because nobody knew him, and we briefly thought that he could be an informant. So then my sister went up to him and asked him where he was from, and he said the United States, and that his mother was in exile. So then our suspicions abated a bit. And two days later, I met up with him again on July 2.

**Interviewer:** Are there any copies of those pictures he took? Do you have a copy?

**Carmen:** Yes, I have a copy that his mother gave me; I have it downstairs and can show it to you, if you'd like.

**Interviewer:** So you said that Canada offered to bring your whole family...how many people are in your family, and who are they?

**Carmen:** So I have a brother and four sisters – there are six of us. My father, Carlos, is now 76 and my mother, Agudelina, is 66. Emilia is 49, I'm 48, Lidia is 46, Marcela is 45, Carlos is 43 and Patricia is 41. My sister Emilia married her fiancé in Chile so she could come with him, so we ended up being nine people in all. And we were all in our teens...the oldest was 19 and the youngest was 11.

So this occurred during a fairly intense development stage for us, and it was quite a powerful experience. We received a great deal of solidarity here in Canada and from the people of Quebec. They rented a fully furnished and equipped apartment for my family. People took turns at the hospital where I was a patient, translating from Spanish to French. The people, the Chileans, would read the news to me, which was wonderful, a tremendous experience, and I continue to be grateful to this day.

Then my parents started working, studying French first, and my siblings, too ... they went straight into schools for immigrants. But my mother never got used to it here because of the cold winters. Starting over took its toll on my parents, and they separated while in exile, in 1987. So my mother decided to return to Chile in January 1988, and the younger children returned with her: Patricia, Carlos Lidia and Marcela.

For me, those first two years were spent between the hospital and travelling, making statements to the Human Rights Association. The first time I got out of bed was in March 1987, and I went straight to the United Nations in Geneva, where I made a speech to tell people about what had happened to me, putting it into the context of human rights violations in Chile, because the dictatorship was trying to make this sound like an isolated case.

My objective was to make people realize that, while they had burned me, it could have been any other young person in Chile, and that the disappearances were an ongoing thing, along with torture and the lack of freedom of expression. Once again that year, Chile was condemned for its systematic violation of human rights. From that moment on, I took a series of trips to different countries around the world, denouncing human rights violations, until July 1988; I did this for around a year. I decided to return to Chile to participate in the "yes" or "no" referendum. I stayed there from 1988 until July 2010. During those initial years, I advocated actively to denounce the systematic violation of human rights in Chile.

**Interviewer:** Can you tell me now about the person who made the arrangements; the diplomat who made all of the arrangements so that your family could come to Canada? What was it like, what was the offer of assistance from Canada like?

**Carmen:** Well, I don't know much about that... I found out about it later. It was very interesting, because last year, in June 2015, we brought to Canada the exhibition "Fragments, Memories and Images" (*Fragmentos, memorias e imagenes*), created by the Museum of Memory and Human Rights of Chile, and that exhibition was covered in the *La Presse* newspaper, so they interviewed me, and because of that interview, Christian Labelle discovered that I was living in Canada and contacted the journalist, who gave him my email, so he wrote me and I responded. We arranged for a meeting, and he came to the office where I work at the Chilean Embassy, and he brought me an *arpillera* (colourful patchwork images sewn on cloth depicting scenes from daily life) as a gift that you took pictures of, and he told me a bit of

the history of the *arpillera*, which was the expression of gratitude from my neighbours (in Nogales, Santiago) for what Canada had done for my family.



And I discovered that the story around our coming here had been very complicated for the Canadian Embassy at that time, because when they were organizing our coming here, it was Christian Labelle who proposed bringing the whole family, not just me and my mother, with a security contract so that we would feel safer in a foreign country. So the Canadian government agreed, and entrusted him with all of the arrangements. It wasn't easy for me to travel, because I was in critical condition. I had come out of my coma but it was still risky to travel such a distance. I had to be lying down, taking up eight seats, with attending physician Dr. Villegas, and one of my sisters who had received nursing training, and my family.

It was a difficult trip, and Christian suspected there could be an attack, given that someone like me was leaving Chile, going out into the world to denounce what had happened. So he was worried there could be an attack. That day, he used his personal vehicle with diplomatic plates to closely follow the ambulance carrying us, because they couldn't attack a diplomat, it was riskier. So he stuck close to the ambulance, going through red lights, fueled by adrenaline.

What he did was really heroic because at the same time, they were also dealing with issue of the attack on Pinochet. I think the Chilean individual that had been involved in that was at the Canadian Embassy, and there was so much stress; it was really a stressful time for Christian.

So that's a bit of the story around our coming to Canada, which was also the result of the solidarity of the Chileans with the Quebeckers here, who had a committee. After the coup d'état, the Quebec-Chile committee was formed and continuously worked in solidarity with Chile, raising funds and sending money to the political prisoners. Union delegations went to Chile as observers, so it has always been a very active movement, even today. At that time, they were the ones who asked the Canadian government to bring the Quintana family to Canada, which is how this trip came about, and to bring us here, and Canada became our country.

It became my second homeland, because the first time, two of my sisters and my father stayed to live here; two married Canadians and have Canadian-born children, three children each who are Canadians. I returned to Chile along with four siblings, and now the four of us are back living here. I came in 2010 with my husband and three daughters. My younger sister came in 2012 with her husband and two children, and my mother and father come here in the summers to see their grandchildren, so we really have roots in two places.

**Interviewer:** Can you tell me about why Christian Labelle gave you the *arpilleras* – what's the story behind them?

**Carmen:** I told you some of it before, but, well, it was nice, because, as I said, he contacted us through the museum, through the journalist who wrote the article. He wrote to the journalist, who gave him my

phone number, then he sent me an email, telling me who he was, and I answered him. So we agreed to meet in Ottawa, and he came to my Ottawa office, and I brought my husband, because I told him my husband wanted to meet him.

He arrived with the *arpilleras* he had kept from 1986 to 2010 – almost 20 years. They are in wonderful condition...they look new. He gave them to me and told me that they were a gift from the people to me. He said that he had kept them in secret all this time, hoping to see me again and give them to me, because he felt they belonged to me. I told him no, that they were his, but he insisted. They are very beautiful, and now I have them.

There are two *arpilleras*: one depicting the time people held candlelight vigils outside the Hospital del Trabajador in Chile when they were basically protecting my life so that I couldn't be kidnapped, with people forming prayer chains, solidarity chains. The other *arpillera* shows when I was being put on the plane taking me to Canada, all wrapped in bandages, on a stretcher, with my whole family. So they show two moments of solidarity from within Chile and internationally. They show what humans can do for each other when we all work together, united in a cause.

It was wonderful when he told us the story I just told you about the risks they took to bring us here, about what was happening at the Embassy, and how, when everything had calmed down, those local residents had gone to see him and gave him the *arpilleras* that they had made to thank the Canadian Embassy for what it had done for the Quintana family.

**Interviewer:** A *velatón* is like a vigil...

**Carmen:** Yes, a *velatón* is like a vigil ... Every night that I was in the hospital, candles were lit, and people prayed or formed energy chains, willing me to live. For around a month and a half, all of the people gathered in the morning to hear if I had survived the night. And there were always people outside, at the door, collecting blood, donating skin ... lines and lines of people.

**Interviewer:** You also said that what happened to you was something that systemically occurred during the dictatorship. Could you tell a bit more about how many known cases there are or what happened?

**Carmen:** Well, there are nearly 4,000 cases of disappeared persons who we still don't know where the bodies are or what happened to them. There are families, people like Ana González, for instance, whose husband, two sons and a daughter-in-law – four family members – all disappeared. She's almost 90, and from the first day they disappeared, she has been part of a group of families of the "disappeared," and she still doesn't know what happened to their bodies. Most such people were tortured and went missing.

The remains of some of them have been found, for example in lime ovens. Testimonials have also been given of how bodies were thrown into the sea, weighted down so they wouldn't float. This was all done by the military, the secret police, and the Pinochet government's CNI (national intelligence agency). Many political executions were also carried out.

If I'm not mistaken, there were some 47,000 political prisoners, some of whom were later executed. I can't recall the exact number, but there were hundreds of political prisoners, not just prisoners but people who were violently, sadistically tortured; many women were raped, as well as men. Many pregnant women were detained, disappeared, and many were tortured and taken prisoner.



**Interviewer:** And the burnings ... was it something common, or ...?

**Carmen:** No, burning was not a common occurrence. They did make youth put out burning barricades with their bare feet. But to burn two people alive was a first, and it horrified people. I believe that what the dictatorship was looking for was to horrify people so that they were afraid and wouldn't go out to protest, because the demonstrations were in high gear. But the plan backfired, because people kept protesting.

One of the most painful things about the entire dictatorship was the complicity of the justice system, which could have saved many lives, but it never put in place any constitutional protection when people were detained. It didn't conduct any investigations; it just archived the information, without investigating it. And when cases were investigated to silence or appease international public opinion, typically when *carabineros* or the military were involved, it fell under the jurisdiction of the military justice.

So there was ultimately no objectivity. When my case was being dealt with from 1986 to 2000, we had to wait until 1998 for the first sentencing. They jailed all of the eyewitnesses: the people who had seen what happened, youth that had gone out that day with us and who hid behind windows and doors, labourers who watched from inside a factory. The closest witnesses were held in jail so that they could think about their testimony. My sister who saw some of what happened spent two days in isolation with her fiancé, also so that she could think about what had happened.

Another youth was kidnapped, with two guns held to his head so that he would change his testimony, and many people were taken away. They went door to door in the neighbourhood saying that anyone who lived in or near the area shouldn't say they had seen anything, that if anyone talked they would be killed.

So it really was a joke, and during the dictatorship, the person who was in charge of all the military patrols was promoted from army lieutenant to captain and then he retired because he was declared as having mental health issues. He received a millionaire's pension and now he's free.

However, last year, in August 2015, a conscript revealed the truth, breaking the pact of silence, and it went off like a bomb in Chile. In fact, I had to go to Chile because this soldier said that the army had bullied them into silence, that they had all been kept a full year, because many people were doing their military service, and they had been kept in the army and drilled with the versions of what they had to memorize and say in court.

They rehearsed thousands of times their version of how I had been burned so that would not contradict each other, and they had each been threatened with death and reminded that they had to take care of their families, so that no-one could change their testimony. So they kept them in the army until 2005, which was the year that the Supreme Court handed down the last sentence, which ended in a tie vote. There were six judges, half of whom voted in favour of a negligence verdict and half for murder. In Chile, when there is a tie vote, the decision goes in favour of the accused.

And one of the judges was Torres Silva – he was a judge and was also the auditor general of the army. So it was this kind of justice. This happened last year when that soldier revealed all this, Fernando...I can't remember his last name, Fernando was his name, and there was a scandal in Chile because it was revealed that in the army – the coup happened 40 years ago – in more than 20 years of democracy, that

the army was still holding on to the information and failing to cooperate with the justice system, and was an accomplice to all of the crimes committed by Pinochet.

Then another soldier spoke, confirming the version of the first, so the case was reopened and they began interviewing all of the soldiers who had taken part. And one of the patrol captains who had been there, hiding, was the one who, according to these soldiers, was the one who started the fire. So now Judge Carrosa, who was appointed specially to investigate the case, has been investigating for more than a year now. Last year I went once again to promote the cause for human rights in Chile. I gave interviews in all of the media outlets and newspapers. People recognized me in the street; it was quite an emotional and powerful time.

**Interviewer:** The last question to wrap up is if you could – I know that we already spoke a bit about this, but the exhibition is on freedom of expression – could you tell us a bit more about July 2? What were you going to demonstrate about; what did you want to protest or have to say against the dictatorship?

**Carmen:** Well, that day was a major national strike. Everyone stopped working or studying to go out into the street to protest against the systematic human rights violations, violations of the right to life, the right to physical integrity, the right to freedom of the press, because in Chile there was no freedom of the press, only official newspapers like *El Mercurio* and *La Tercera*, which were in the hands of Chilean pro-dictatorship economic monopolies that censoring the news. There were alternative radio stations, but typically when the news did not reflect the dictatorship's views, they were shut down. A few weekly publications that struggled to come out were quickly censored.

So there was very little freedom to say what you thought or to print information on what was going on. Later, in 1990, I went back to university, and there were classmates two years younger than me who knew nothing about what had happened to me. The world knew about it but not people in my own country. It was awful how they brainwashed the people so that they didn't know what was happening in Chile.

What we wanted was freedom, the right to life, to integrity, to circulate freely in the streets, to live in peace - because people could be raided in their homes, they could go into a group gathering and force you to open your bag, and you had to open it without any rights to anything, to resist. If you took part in a demonstration, you could be killed. So people were demanding minimum rights, not even social rights, the right to health, which had been privatized; public health was in total crisis. Education was terrible, and public education had been privatized, pensions were a pittance, there was no work, the country was really in chaos under a dictatorship with very few freedoms.

**Interviewer:** Is there anything else that you think is important to raise that we haven't spoken about or touched on?

**Carmen:** So we could perhaps say that in Chile, there are still legacies of the dictatorship that are very hard to overcome. One could say that it is still hard to find freedom of the press in Chile, because there are two main media consortiums in the hands of the Chilean right wing: *El Mercurio* is owned by Agustín Edwards, and *La Tercera* and *La Cuarta* and many other newspapers are owned by Alvaro Saieh, both clearly right-leaning businessmen.

All of the news is ultimately filtered through right-wing editorials, and more alternative centre or left-of-centre newspapers don't exist because there is no money to support them. Before, during the final years of the dictatorship, many of those papers were published and were censored, but they received

international solidarity support. But when the dictatorship ended, they all went bankrupt and the only way left to get news in Chile was via the right-wing media and its biased news coverage.

So in Chile, this is the legacy of the dictatorship in the expression in Latin America's most neoliberal country with the most profound imbalance between the wealthy and the poor. There is a huge difference in their earning power. Education is part of this issue. If you were born poor, you study poor and you have no access to anything. If you're born rich, you study rich. It's the same for the right to health: it's ok if you have health insurance, but if not, they see you in a public health clinic of poor quality. Retirement pensions are in the hands of private companies and make it very difficult to get by.

Many human rights cases have gone unpunished, even my own case. We still don't know about the many "disappeared" prisoners, so there is still a long way to go before a complete return to democracy.

**Interviewer:** Thank you.