

September 19th 1985. I was 13 years old. We were living in that apartment I told you about (the one my mother bought). This place is even nearer Mexico City downtown than the other flat we used to have in La Narvarte. This location is very relevant to my story because Mexico City downtown was the most affected zone by the earthquake.

I was expected to be in school by 7:30 am, so I was ready to leave home at 7:00 am. It used to take me 20 minutes to go to school, but my mother had previously asked me to take my grand mother to her apartment before going to my secondary school, thus I had to leave earlier.

Basically, there were two ways to go to my grand mother's. One was to take a funny public transport called "pesero" (the name comes from the fact that many years ago, the bill for this kind of buses was 1 Mexican peso). The other was to take a "trolebus", which is an electricity-driven bus. Taking a pesero was faster, but my grand mother insisted on taking a trolebus (trolebus is a kind of "romantic" public transport due to the fact that it has been used in Mexico for many years, thus elderly people are very comfortable with the idea of using it. I suppose that it reminds them things about their past).

So, we went to the trolebus stop (two blocks from home) and picked it a few minutes later. We had to stop at the corner of two important avenues: Xola and Universidad. On my left I had the offices of the Telecommunications and Highways Ministry. These offices were composed of one building (about 8 floors) and a tower (about 30-40 floors with many parabolic antennas and all the stuff needed for electronic communication systems). On my right I had two apartment buildings. The traffic wasn't as bad as usual.

So, we stopped on this corner shortly before 7:19 am. The earthquake began at 7:19 am. In the beginning, the earthquake was oscillatory. Suddenly I felt a very strong circular motion and realised that everybody was horrified. I was not because I was not really understanding what was going on.

However, it took me just a couple of seconds to realise that we were in serious trouble. I saw people running in the street and drivers leaving their cars and running towards the sidewalks. I do remember that I could hear nothing but silence, except for the moments when the earth was reaching the starting point of circular motion, as in those moments EVERYTHING cracked. It was awful and, believe me, it was just the beginning.

Some people in the bus began shouting and one guy had the "bright" idea of getting out of the bus and running away. Thank God he did not do it and nobody followed him, because the electric wires that fell on the ground a few seconds later would have killed them all. You are fully protected from electrical hazard in a trolebus precisely because it is built to use electric power.

A few seconds later I saw how the walls of the buildings on my right began to fall down. In the bus a woman was praying and several people joined her. I could not. I was totally flabbergasted. I could not understand how Nature could be so destructive in such a short period of time. I was also intimidated by the overwhelming power of Nature. It was as if Nature had decided to get rid of us.

Then the worst part of the earthquake began. From being a horizontal circular motion it became a vertical motion earthquake (In Spanish, we refer to this kind of earthquake motion as "trepidatorio" which basically means that everything is "jumping" due to vertical earth movements). Then I thought that was my end.

The Ministry buildings on my left were cracking and crumbling. Suddenly, the top four floors of the building next to the tower collapsed. I saw it all. The tower itself was just about to take off, and then I thought that the bloody building would fall over us.

Meanwhile, the buildings on my right were just about to collapse. Bricks and glass kept on falling and injuring pedestrians. I could also hear a horrific sound coming from my far right, and I supposed that a building had just collapsed. Indeed, I learned later that many people got killed in a nearby building.

Actually, maybe my grandmother and I saved our lives because she insisted on taking the trolebus. If we had taken the pesero it would have been likely to stop right on the corner where the building I just mentioned collapsed. Who knows, it is just a possibility.

The earthquake was more than 2 minutes long. We were so shocked that once it was all over we just thought on continuing our journey and keep on going with our everyday life activities. The trolebus reached our destiny and I took my grandmother to her place. Then I went to school and learned that the school building was seriously damaged and that, due to the news that were being broadcasted, we should better go home, in case we still had one.

Mexico City was in total shock. Nobody knew what to do.

OK, let us make this chronicle more interesting by dividing it in several parts. I need time to remember more details about what happened. Additionally, I want to tell you several sides of the whole story and I think that the best way to do it is by delivering one topic at a time.

Kisses,

Salvador

Hi Annie,

This is the second part of my earthquake chronicles. I must warn you that this episode is difficult to believe as I will tell you about phenomena for which I have no rational explanation. As a scientist, all I can tell about the following events is that I cannot understand them on a rational basis. However, those events did happen to me.

In the early evening of Sunday September 15th 1985 I was at home, taking it easy and trying to fall asleep as I was a bit tired. I remember I was lying on my bed facing a wall and swearing because I was not being able to sleep (I usually have trouble to sleep at night). Gradually I got into this delicious semi-unconsciousness prior to falling asleep when, suddenly, I was violently awoken by an awful sound. The sound was coming from my window (to give you an idea of spatial distribution, my feet were pointing at the window) and it was like the noise that trucks with construction material do when delivering bricks or sand.

By the time I stared at my window I saw a projection of buildings collapsing and people running in every possible direction, in total chaos and terror. I could also hear two shouts: “NO” and “NOOOOOOOOOOO”.

The images and the sound left as they came, just in one second. I was shocked and could not make any sense of what I had just seen. In order to make sure that I was not sleeping I stood up and stung myself with a needle. It did hurt.

I was kind of used to getting disturbed while sleeping. For example, I used to wake up in the middle of the night being totally unable to move or speak. I had to wait a few minutes in order to move any part of my body. I asked several people about it and, to be honest, nobody was (or has been) capable of providing a proper explanation I could understand. These phenomena kept on happening to me until the end of my first degree. However, I had never seen a kind of a movie along with sounds. That was really new to me and it never happened again.

We Mexicans celebrate our Independence on the night of September 15th and the full day of September 16th. We do not go to school on Sept. 16th (bad tradition) and therefore I had a free day. So, I went to visit my friend Gerardo (the guy who taught me martial arts); he used to live just a few blocks from my place. When I finally got to see him, I realized something was wrong with him. He was reluctant to talk so I decided just to sit and wait. Eventually we shared our experiences. Gerardo told me that he had no idea what was going on with him but he knew that something awful was going to happen. I told him about my vision and we ended up promising that we would share any other kind of information we got hold of. Unfortunately, we eventually understood what our premonitions were about just too late.

Tomorrow I will tell you my recollections about the days after the earthquake.

Salvador

PS This chronicle is now looking like a novel, isn't it? ☺

Hi Annie,

Here I am, with the third episode of “Earthquake Chronicles”. Now I will tell you my memories about what happened immediately after the earthquake.

As I told you, when I finally arrived to my school I was told to go home immediately as our school building had been damaged and we all were in total uncertainty as for the fate of our families.

I could not move for a few minutes. Chatting with my friends I realised that we were not able to understand how destructive the earthquake had been. One of us had a radio and by listening to it we learned that the city downtown had been knocked down. Tens of collapsed buildings and thousands of corpses. Terrifying stories came up second by second.

I walked back home and when I was about three blocks from my building I was stopped by a soldier. He firmly said that I was not allowed to enter the disaster zone. I replied that I had to see my family, and that I was expecting him to help me and not to give me crap. Thank God the soldier chilled out and gave me a hint to get home via a different route.

When I got to my block my breath came back: the building was still there. I got into my apartment and saw all my family. God had been merciful to me once again.

I went to the roof with my father, to have a view towards the Communications Ministry that collapsed and the uncountable number of buildings destroyed in downtown. The view was horrifying. The ambulance and police patrols were terribly noisy, and the whole city was paralysed.

We did not have any public service at home. No electricity or running water. We obtained water from a deep hole (made by the earthquake) in the street.

My mother and I went out to see how things were in our neighborhood. Among those buildings that collapsed, there was one in particular in which everybody died, except an old man who left home before the earthquake to jog. Sports saved his life but at the same time, he was left with nothing. No family, no home, nothing.

As time passed by we all Mexican citizens realized that our government did not know what to do. Both federal and local governments were in absolute shock, and as a result we had a few riots. We, inhabitants of Mexico Tenochtitlan (Aztec name for Mexico City) had had enough. We took control of the City.

From 1921 to the day of the earthquake, Mexico had been governed by one political party only: the PRI. The PRI was a useful political tool to pacify Mexico after our Revolution (it finished in 1917), but by 1985 it had become a corrupt party and we therefore had a corrupt government. In addition, those who were in power in 1985 were just a bunch of jerks with no idea whatsoever about the leadership required to build a progressive country.

People in power are usually a mirror of their fellow countrymen and countrywomen. It was indeed the case for Mexico. Also, many people thought that, as long as the PRI provided food and shelter, we should let them run the country. I have always opposed that view (I inherited this attitude from my father who, as I told you, used to be socialist.)

However, in the aftermath of the earthquake we learned that neither the PRI nor our government were in control of nothing. They were useless and stupid and they let us down when we most needed them. My people saved themselves and our city. I am proud of those heroes who took people out of those buildings that had suddenly become their graves.

It was not surprising that the first serious citizen political movement in Mexico came into reality in 1988. The long journey towards our democracy and maturity as a country began in 1968, grew up in 1985 and is still in the process of becoming a full reality.

Going back to the aftermath, I wanted to go and help people to save those who were buried alive. My father did not let me do it and this is one of the things that still annoys me from that time: I wanted to save lives but I did not have the courage to challenge my father.

The afternoon and evening came as a shadow and fell onto Mexico City. Fire, impotence and anger but also hope were common feelings in our hearts. However, we still had one more test to pass...

Next episode: September 20th, or how I learned how to find happiness and fun in our sorrow.