

AN ERA AND A PATH



Rubén Ardila

*Wayfarer, your footsteps are
the path and nothing more;
Wayfarer there is no path,
by walking one makes the path.*

Antonio Machado

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PRESENTATION

When I was asked to participate in this project on the autobiographies of Ibero-American psychologists, by the kind invitation of the editors, doctors Hugo Klappenbach (Argentina) and Ramón León (Peru). I considered it to be a great honor and a special privilege to share my experiences and my evolving development with my colleagues and

friends across the length and breadth of the planet. I also thought it preferable to not write my memoirs in the standard way, given the fact that some time ago I published my autobiography (1994) in the Spanish journal *Revista de Historia de la Psicología* after the kind invitation of my colleagues from Spain. I have written as well an extensive autobiography that was recently published (2012). On this occasion and for this book I preferred to place central importance to the context, to the times that I lived in, to my world, to the cultural background in which I was born and worked, and also present a type of self-portrait and show the future of the psychology I am immersed in and was an active part of.

The great social and cultural transformations that I have witnessed my whole life are enormous. I was born when World War II was at its most critical point (1942) and I have seen many cultural, physical, and economical transformations over time. My life has gone by basically during the second half of the 20th century and the first decades of 21st century. The world has changed and most certainly will continue doing so. I have witnessed many of the most important steps forward (and setbacks) of the recent history of civilization. The world was different and so was psychology in the national and international context.

GONE WITH THE WIND

When I was born there was no television or Internet, nor was it possible to cross the ocean in a few hours. There were no PCs. Women did not pursue university studies –with very few exceptions– nor did they serve in public office. They had many children, eight, ten, maybe more, in other words, all that were biologically possible. Wives stayed home, bringing up their children, managing the servants they had, and of course taking care of their husbands.

Houses were big, having a sizable entrance hall, gardens, backyards, numerous bedrooms, dorms for the maids (usually three of them who lived in the same house with their masters). Apartment buildings were scarce and living in one of them was not very attractive, it was like having “a house in the air”, due to the lack of gardens, terraces, free space to move around, and mainly the absence of land.

Religion was very important; Catholicism was the official religion of the nation and the priests influenced in education, politics and the finances of everyday life. Nobody wanted to be considered a “freethinker” which was a bad word, similar to a communist, mason or atheist. In many homes people prayed the rosary around 7 pm. Families had breakfast, lunch and supper together around the dinner table. It was an honor to have a son as a priest or a daughter as a nun. Young intelligent people eager to study and be helpful to society considered the religious life as an excellent option. The Catholic Church had an Index of Prohibited Books (*Index Librorum Prohibitorum*) that grew every year and in which almost all the main books that humanity had created were, from Hume, Copernicus and Darwin to Unamuno and the Colombian Vargas Vila. Those were the most interesting books to read, the ones that contribute to knowledge and were less boring. For these reasons, many times people committed the cardinal sin of searching for one of these

condemned works in bookstores and libraries, and read them in secret. Even the Bible (without the Catholic exegetes) was a forbidden book.

People dressed in a conventional way; women wore their skirts below their knees and men wore a tie, sometimes a vest and a hat, and even young people dressed like that. Blue jeans were not around yet and wearing tight clothes was considered bad taste, in women as well as men. Bright colors were not appropriate; a twenty-year-old girl with a red dress and high heels could only be a *fallen woman* (in other words a prostitute). People did not talk about homosexuality, which was a taboo topic in families and schools.

People reached adulthood at the age of twenty-one, not at eighteen. Before reaching this age they lacked civil rights and their parents had absolute command over them. Severe physical punishments, threats, disrespect and negligence towards children and young adults were frequent. It was not uncommon that a parent punished his twenty-year-old child with a belt for arriving late for dinner. Schools did not have sexual education and parents never discussed this issue with their children. A mother was in a difficult position trying to explain to her daughter about menstruation (when it was inevitable because the period arrived at an inconvenient moment), and fathers sometimes took their sons to a brothel so they would *become men*. All that was not strange to anyone and therefore was not condemned; it was a normal process for the development of the youth. Girls were virgin at the time they got married, and for the most part they did not know another man different from their husbands throughout their lives.

Women neither voted nor participated in political life and engaged quite little in the cultural life. In Colombia women did not have the right to vote until 1957, which is late compared to England and the United States, but not so late in the Latin-American context. Women slowly rose in politics, studied education and medicine (and later other majors) at the university, became more independent and gradually realized that they could make their own decisions, although their husbands continued to be the center of life and were those who always had the last word.

Of course there was no Internet. Letters, books and government decrees were written by hand or on a typewriter, first manual and then electric. I have always thought that writing a very extensive novel in longhand or a philosophical treaty on the typewriter must be an arduous task. In many cases one version of the text was written, corrected and then the final copy was typed by the same author or the secretary. What a job! With the arrival of personal computers and the Internet at the end of 1980s all changed. In the lapse of 1987 to 1990 personal computers were implemented, emails began to be sent and nobody wrote books by hand or used typewriters anymore. Reading also decreased along with library consultation and the art of letter-writing. Writing letters that were literary works, where the great problems of humanity were discussed, was a literary genre that completely disappeared. The letters of famous men and women, including the letters of famous psychologists, are a thing of the past, a past that will never come back. Books such as the work of L.T. Benjamin, *A History of Psychology in Letters* (2006) could not include the letters of people of the 21st century, simply because those letters do not exist.

Universities in Colombia and the rest of the world were an extremely interesting and attractive refuge when I started to study in 1960. Students and professors were brilliant, carefully selected and with a great yearning for knowledge. Philosophy, literature, science, modern art and trips around the world were discussed; new theories were postulated and revolutionary artistic genres were proposed. In addition, all the students were politically leftists and revolutionary, siding with the parties of the nascent Cuban Revolution and enemies of imperialism. *Yankees* were the demons and it was believed that all the culture came from Europe, obviously not from Franco's Spain, which was at a politically radical stage, nor from the United States, but from France, Italy and England. The Soviet Union was admired for its progress in science and technology, and for achieving the egalitarian utopia. The art centered in *socialist realism* was even discussed, although the young Colombian intellectuals did not always shared it.

All the intellectuals were anti-clerical. Even at the universities of the old-fashioned Catholic tradition, being an intellectual was the equivalent of being anticlerical, a freethinker, a reader of Darwin and Marx. It seems to be a logical contradiction that there were intellectuals of the right wing, or Catholic intellectuals or conservative intellectuals (all of whom were supposed to be the same, and that was absurd). The young people thought -we thought- that the utopian world that the French freethinkers had dreamt of would be reached, a world based on liberty, equality and fraternity. Also achieved would be Marx's classless society where everyone contributed as they were able to and received according to their needs.

MY TIMES AND ERA

The decade of the 1960s has been highly lauded, being considered the most important decade of the 20th century. It was the time of important intellectual revolutions: The start of the Space Age after the launching of Sputnik I (1957), women's liberation, the university changes in France and the rest of the world -the month of May 1968 in Paris is remembered with nostalgia by all the intellectuals of my generation; birth control (the pill), which permitted the reversal of the population bomb predicted by Malthus and by any person who had elementary demography knowledge. There was the attainment of civil rights for the African-descendants thanks to Martin Luther King Jr. after three centuries of slavery and indignant discrimination; the period of European existentialism and its Colombian version, nothing-ism (*nadaísmo*); the gay revolution (Stonewall); the Cuban Revolution and the rise of the left among intellectuals of the world; the Cold War at its hottest peak during the confrontation between the John F. Kennedy administration and the USSR that almost led to a third world war that would have begun in the Caribbean near Cuba; man's landing on the moon in 1969; the gigantic advances in physics, chemistry and genetics; the search for a path for the so-called Third World with Patrice Lumumba in Africa and many other frustrated leaders in the rest of the world; the Vietnam War; LSD, the communes and the hippie movement of "make love not war," and the new trends in the art and the plays of Bertolt Brecht. It was a decade that had no parallel in the 20th century.

It was the decade of the youth. Having been young in the 60s is something that I am extremely thankful in life for. I spent this decade at the National University of Colombia as a student, starting in February 1960, and then after graduating I took a year-long formative

trip around the world with a lot of suffering and ecstasies. After that, I also spent several years in the United States as a graduate student when the Vietnam War was at its most critical point. This war was the central problem for us, the youth of the world. I returned to Colombia at the beginning of the 1970s. The 60s was the decade of youth, and today's young people consider it as a historical reference point; for me it is an experience reference point.

PSYCHOLOGY

I found myself in psychology as a profession by way of biology and literature. Where I grew up (in Pereira) there were no psychologists when I was in high school, nor did I meet one until enrolling at the National University of Colombia in Bogotá. However, I had read many books on psychology, neurology, genetics, evolution and hypnotism, along with many biographies, psychological novels and a lot of excellent quality literature, such as the works of Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Stefan Zweig. This Austrian writer (and Freud's friend) was one of my favorite authors. I read all his works completely, several novels, biographies, essays, books on politics, all of which deeply influenced me. I had also read Thomas Mann, Herman Hesse, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Bertrand Russell, Oscar Wilde, and many other high quality writers and philosophers.

All these influences were a jumbled concoction to which were added the ideas of Darwin and Ramón y Cajal, along with my deep preoccupation for religion, philosophy and social justice. This led me to think that psychology was the appropriate path for my complex intellectual inquisitiveness.

I started my studies at the National University of Colombia (Bogotá) in February 1960, when I was 17 years old. I was a young man from Pereira (a small city in the provinces) who barely knew Bogotá and I arrived to the capital and to the university with great hopes and expectations. However, I found some surprises. In the Faculty of Psychology -which was the only one in the country at the moment that trained psychologists- the professors were for the most part psychoanalyst medical doctors, the syllabus (curriculum matrix) lacked a structure, the intellectual level was low, nobody had a clear idea what psychology as a profession was and it was confused with psychoanalysis, clinical psychology and psychiatry. Conversely, students were brilliant and had as a goal to be psychotherapists, which was something I was never interested in. I made many good friends, and some of them remained close for years.

Nonetheless, I resumed the polemic discussions that I had had with many teachers in my secondary school in Pereira. I was an argumentative student, well-informed; one whom professors respected for his analytical competence, but one they probably would have preferred not to have in their classes. I studied, read many books on psychology and many others not on psychology, confronted many of my professors, respected others and got a reputation for being controversial, a critical person and a good student. It was a prolongation of my struggle to find my own way.

The National University of Colombia between 1960 and 1964 obviously was not only the Faculty of Psychology. It was much more than that, and for me it was a paradise; it made me wake up and discover unexpected and fascinating worlds. I made friends with students of mathematics, engineering, philosophy and the arts. We organized study groups and immensely enjoyed that exploration through the domains of culture, science, art, the humanities, politics, leftism and the search for social justice in that great decade of the 20th century, the decade of the youth, the decade of the 60s.

I lived most of my years as a student very close to the university and spent almost all my time on the campus, including Sundays and afternoons. It was possible to have breakfast, lunch and dinner at the university cafeteria at very cheap prices, which allowed us to have long get-togethers, which frequently wound up in my apartment. We talked about the origin of the universe, evolutionary ethics, the unconscious, sexuality, the knowledge of the world, the mathematics of Bourbaki, modern art, Bertrand Russell, French literature, the latest books of Sartre and Camus, and about all topics human and divine. My friends, who came from different programs of study, were like me, young people concerned about the world they lived in, tremendously intelligent and tremendously disoriented.

I registered in several courses in other departments of the National University because I thought those had a more demanding intellectual level. In the Faculty of Psychology the courses of psychoanalysis, repeated again and again (as developmental psychology, clinical psychology, personality, etc.) were terribly boring in my opinion. I was never convinced about psychoanalysis, as opposed to my classmates who for the most part assimilated these ideas without much argument. I knew that this was not the path although I did not know what my path was. I was sure that psychology had to be much more than psychoanalysis. I dedicated myself to reading the history of psychology (the books by Murphy, Boring, Brett), and I became convinced that there were many paths different from psychoanalysis. However, I did not believe that psychology was a science lacking unity, with schools such as structuralism, functionalism, behaviorism, existential psychology and others. Ernest Jones' biography of Freud was fascinating, as were the works of Jung. However, I totally rejected the Rorschach Test, the TAT, other projective tests, the absurd speculations that were assumed as dogmas among my professors regarding the unconscious, defense mechanisms, Thanatos, the states of infant sexuality, etc. I carefully studied those topics before disallowing them and my grades in those subjects were always high. To say that the Rorschach test had no validity or predictive power in the clinic, I had to study that with great care and exhaustively justify my affirmations.

For my professors and also for the majority of my classmates (with whom I had study groups and talked long hours in the most cordial and intellectual context imaginable) psychology was equal to clinical psychology and equal to psychoanalysis. The only difference from psychiatrists was that we were not physicians. But we did the same; in other words, analyze the unconscious of the patients who lay down on sofas five times a week for several years.

A few of the teachers did not teach psychoanalysis but psychometrics. They were tests with better scientific substratum, with a mathematical foundation and with solid and

credible statistical support. The Weschler, the Raven and the MMPI tests interested me. The topic of the differences among individuals in intelligence and personality, and the differences in gender, race, social class and age captivated my attention. I scrutinized these matters on my own, more than was required at the university; I wrote somewhat and turned in various papers at the university. At this time my readings were better thought-out and more systematic, much more structured than they had been earlier. At the age of twenty I knew how to read a book, look for others of the same theme and related topics, write summaries, contrast ideas, extract principal concepts, discuss them, reread them and reanalyze them.

Anyhow, psychometrics was not the path for me, although I always respected it and continued doing so. There had to be another way, but what would that be?

At that time I knew that an identity problem existed with the professionals of the new fields. What was a psychologist? What differentiated him from a psychiatrist and a psychoanalyst? Was it necessary to study medicine in order to become a psychotherapist? Was our field of work different from or the same as the one of physicians, psychiatrists, psychoanalysts, and pedagogues? These topics absorbed my time and my interests and gave origin to my thesis to opt for the degree of Psychologist that was entitled: *The Profession of Psychology (1964)*. It was a topic that I worked on later for several more decades in the guild organization of psychology, its juridical recognition, the enactment of an Ethics Code for psychologists, the relationship with related professions and similar matters.

What is interesting was that the professional identity problems were not exclusive of psychologists. *They were suffered by all the professionals of the new or young disciplines* such as architecture, economics and dentistry. Later on sociology, anthropology, and linguistics emerged, also with a professional identity crisis as the one possessed by economists, architects and us.

WORK

Work has been the central axis in my life, and in it scientific research and the writing of books and articles. I did not become a fiction writer because I thought I could do a better job in another field, in science, precisely in psychology. However, it is obvious that these vital decisions are not completely taken in a rational and planned way. I continue reading literature, history, archeology, astronomy, and I don't regret having abandoned literature as a trajectory, even though I really never seriously pursued it. My published novels *Nefertiti (1961)* and *Walden Tres (1979)* are more a social critique than contributions to literature. I do not think I have made any contribution to Colombian or Latin-American literature.

I have written many books and on a variety of topics, almost always based on some scientific research. They have been on the psychology of learning, psychobiology, behavior analysis, methodology, the history of psychology in Colombia, Latin America and the world, the profession of the psychologist, ethics, social psychology, social problems, and conceptual and philosophical aspects of psychology. The book that had the highest

acceptance was *Psychology of Learning* (1970) of which 27 editions were published. *The Psychology of the Colombian People* (1992), *Psychology in Latin-America: Past, Present and Future* (1986), *Philosophy of Psychology* (with Mario Bunge, 1987), and especially *Experimental Synthesis of Behavior* (1993) are works for which I would like to be remembered.

The 300 plus scientific articles are the proof of my interest in science and research. They are based on scientific studies, on inquires about varied topics. Some of the dissemination articles in newspapers, mainly in *El Tiempo* refer to the “big issues”, always within the perspective of scientific psychology.

The *Latin American Journal of Psychology (RLP)*, founded in 1969, and *Advances in Latin American Psychology (APL)* founded in 1982 as *Advances in Latin American Clinical Psychology (APCL)*, were enterprises widely recognized by the international psychological community. The idea was to create a forum with high standards for psychology in the Spanish language, equivalent to the best in the world (which always were in English). This psychology forum in Spanish went as far as I wanted it to go and even more. I presided over the RLP for 35 years from 1969 until 2004 and the APCL for 22 years from 1982 until 2004.

The Ruben Ardila Foundation for the Advancement of Psychology (which was always presented as the Foundation for the Advancement of Psychology, FAP) was created in 1977, with the purpose of publishing the two journals, APCL and RLP, to finance scientific research in psychology, collaborate with the development of scientific psychology in Latin America and organize seminars, workshops and publications. It did not carry out great activities nor did it have sufficient resources to fulfill its ambitious goals, but in a modest way, it reached the objectives for which it was created. It remains to be seen if the FAP will continue its chores in the decades to come. Now the RLP and the APL are not part of the Foundation, and now the FAP is in charge of financing research projects, of recognizing colleagues, of promoting scientific psychology, of supporting those that participate in scientific congresses, etc.

WHERE DO WE BELONG?

In the historical period which corresponds to my life, in this place and at this time, the concept of homeland, nation and a cultural belonging has had plenty of ups and downs. I thought many times about what the limits of my world were, not only at an academic level, in a historical or ideological context, but also at a country and cultural level.

A great number of people identify themselves with the area of the country where they grew up. In Colombia we definitively are part of a subculture: one is *paisa*, *costeño*, *santandereano*, *valluno*, *llanero*, *opita*... but a bigger identity is with the country, and we all are Colombians. Another identity is with Latin America, another one with western civilization and one more with the entire world. Where did I belong? To my subculture, to my country, to Latin America, or was I really a “citizen of the world”? This last category seems to be a little arrogant and this is absolutely not my personal style. I am not arrogant

and I think I have never been. I recognize my limitations, my weaknesses, and I am sure I do not have all the answers to any problem.

With the passage of time I decided I was a citizen in all of these categories, but above all *a citizen of Latin-America* – a classification that did not exist, and does not exist yet but I suppose someone will invent it one day. I was born in San Vicente, Colombia, within the Santander culture, grew up in the *paisa* culture in Pereira, lived on the Cundiboyacense high plateau in Bogotá, identified myself with the Latin American civilization and have discovered that all men and women of the planet, beyond the cultural and linguistic limitations, we all share many things- we are one people. It was a planetary culture, basically the *cosmic race* of the Mexican José de Vasconcelos, but in a much broader sense.

It was also a certain kind of humanism, of respect for the differences, of valuing the capacity of people to discover their own path –to understand that we all are equal and we all are different.

In the 21st century many nationalisms and many cultural and religious conflicts have been reborn - many atavisms that we believed had been overcome thanks to science, but were present and revived before our eyes. Irrationality, conflicts, deaf dialogues, nationalism and regionalism have reawakened and have been characteristic of these decades. It is as if humanity did not learn from its errors, as if it did not know its painful history and was condemned to repeat it.

WHO AM I?

I have never believed that a human being could be a good observer of himself or herself. I believe that we are not capable of looking at ourselves with objectivity and making an adequate evaluation of our behavior. One is a better observer of others than of oneself. However, despite this I wish to try to present a brief *self-portrait* with all the limitations that this involves.

I have been above all a person interested in *understanding the world and my own world*. This has led me after a long and tortuous investigation to the search of scientific truth. I believe in the human capacity to know, to love, to be solidarious, to correct mistakes, to forgive, to be forgiven and to encounter one's own path. I feel that each person is the author of his or her own history.

One of my most relevant attributes of behavior is *persistence*, the search for long-term goals and the *commitment* to what I do. I do not give up easily. I restart the journey. I strive vigorously. I do not stray from the path as torturous as it may seem. Difficulties do not scare me, and I persist until the goal is achieved (or on the contrary, on very few occasions, until I consider that the aim is unreachable in realistic terms).

Another of my distinct personal traits is that I am tremendously *sensitive to human pain*. I suffer along with those that suffer, agonize with their difficulties and I wish the great

problems of humanity were not so complex and unmanageable (poverty, violence, marginalization, discrimination). Although in the majority of cases I do not outwardly express my suffering, this existential anguish is always present. There is the *Weltschmerz*, the overwhelming weight of injustices, the lack of solidarity, alienation, anomia, the lack of respect for the differences, observing the monotonous passing of lives that are wasted for lack of opportunities, the despair of people to find a path and try to transform into reality what they feel they could become, the indifference of the “good” people and the marginalization of the immense suffering masses.

This profound *solidarity with human pain* could have transformed me into a social critic, a politician, a poet, or one alienated from the world, or a revolutionary, or a nihilist like many of my generation. None of the above happened. I do not think I could have been either a good politician or a good nihilist.

The interest of knowing, understanding the world along with my own world, and my disorganized readings about philosophy, science, literature and travel led me to convince myself that the *path of knowledge was my path*. Not because I had studied in a good high school, nor because I came from an intellectual family nor because I had had a spiritual guide or a mentor. I did not have any of these advantages. My journey was rather solitary.

Religion, in turn, was tremendously relevant at the beginning of my adolescence, as was science. That interest to understand the world of astronomy, evolution and physics and at the same time the world of values, of the purpose of life and of good and evil led me to profound uncertainties, and a series of reflections. It was a period of agony and ecstasy- a period of confusion, decision-making, and debates with my high school classmates who were as puzzled as me and therefore we were not able to help each other a great deal.

I came from a Catholic family, as were the great majority of Colombian families at that time. My father was a very intelligent man, very analytical in his concepts and I spoke with him sometimes about the relationships between religion and science. My mother was a sweet and marvelous woman, with whom I never talked about those things out of respect for her. My teachers at school were not good interlocutors and I even thought that I knew much more than my teachers about evolution, cosmology, and the multiplicity of religions that there were in the world. Darwin's books, in his original writings translated into Spanish and which were long and complicated texts for a thirteen-year-old boy, were my guides, as well as the books of Ramón y Cajal, whom I consider as one of the thinkers who has most influenced my intellectual development. Altogether, they would be Darwin, Ramón y Cajal, Bertrand Russell and B.F. Skinner. All of them were the most decisive intellectual influences in my life, if not hierarchically, then chronologically, along with Stefan Zweig, whom I mentioned previously.

From the readings of Darwin and Ramón y Cajal I sensed that science had the answer to the usual queries of humanity related to values and the purpose of life. I stepped back from the Catholic religion and from any other religious cosmic vision before I turned fourteen. This choice was decisive in my life and oriented it in many respects. From the age of fourteen I consider myself to be a “non-theist”.

But at the same time, this breaking with the conventional answers thwarted my existence and put myself into the position to grapple to find non-theistic solutions to my existential distress related to the pain in the world, the social injustices, the vast emptiness that was the consequence of thinking that the universe might not have had any meaning and that *life only would have the sense that I was going to give to my own life*. This was an absolute philosophical thicket for a young adolescent at the end of the decade of the 50s living in a 100,000-inhabitant city located in a country that at that time was in a very limited stage of development.

Having taking my life so seriously at an early age has not been so good. I stuck by my ideas, continued reading on astronomy and evolution, discussed for many hours with my friends (as clueless as me), and became entangled in problems with my secondary school teachers for presuming I knew more than they did. I wrote a great deal, authoring an astronomy book, many romantic poems, a couple of novels and some essays about evolution for the high school paper. I believed that my destiny was to be a writer, a poet, a man of letters or an essayist.

To become a writer it is mandatory to be a solitary soul. It is crucial to be able “to live with oneself” for extended periods of time. A book of essays is not written in a couple of weeks, or a novel, nor is a scientific or philosophical theory written in a few months. Those are long processes, lengthy periods of solitude, which could only be endured by introverted people and I definitely fit into the definition of introvert. Some time ago, I personally asked Hans J. Eysenck how he would define himself according to his theory of personality and he said that he was a stable introvert. I think I could define myself in the same way.

Likewise, I have been *very fond of my family*, of my partners, my friends, my profession, my working place, my people, and of my world. I identify myself with science as a whole and especially with psychology, which has been the center of my life since my twenties. I identify with the people that have shared my life and my world, with my son and his nuclear family, with my colleagues, with the university, with that complex country called Colombia and with the multi-colored and contradictory Latin American culture. And obviously, I identify with humanity as a whole, and with that affectionate response that I find in people that seem to be very different from me, but in the end are very much alike.

I consider life has been generous to me; I have met marvelous people and I have been in the right place at the right time. I have loved and have been loved. I feel that *my travel companions have shown solidarity* and that life has been pleasant in general. Nevertheless, nothing has been a gift, nothing has been easy. I have had to fight, persist, err, find my own way, build a context, and “make my path by walking.”

BEING DIFFERENT

For most of my youthful years I considered that, I was different from the others, felt strange, an outsider, as if I had come from another planet. It was a sweet-sour strange feeling, not very enjoyable for someone who wanted to be accepted and loved, to have “a

million friends” as the song lyrics go, and to agree with the surrounding people and with many others. It was a feeling of being different, not better or worse, but different.

During my secondary studies, this feeling was centered on the fact that I belonged to a family that moved from one region of the country to another one, totally different. At the same time, I was a person that took life too seriously while my classmates enjoyed life tremendously and seemed to be happy and charming. I also was a well-adapted boy, with a sense of humor, with many friends, a friendly smile and one who socialized with people (although not as easily as my classmates did). However, I was a different and strange person because of my debates with teachers on topics of religion and science, my studying countless books that nobody asked me to study, my thinking that there could be an ethic, which was independent of religions within an evolutionary context, and also for my sexual orientation.

People from the LGBT community (lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgenderists) almost always report problems of isolation and solitude in adolescence, those of depression, for having a “secret that was very risky to tell to another person”, and they describe difficulties associated with the fact of being different, strange, being different from the others. The term “queer” in English means above all “different”. My sexual orientation was defined through time after a long and complex process, but it was not an embarrassing process, and I did not feel humiliated, nor felt uncomfortable or discriminated against. As a colleague said, I was not going to be judged by history for my sexual orientation but for the work I have been doing in science, in the psychology guild organization, as the voice of the discipline and in my research projects and publications. *It is not going to judge me for what I do in bed and with whom I do it.*

However, to arrive to this stage of clarity and definition I had to pass several years of “agony and ecstasy”. At this time of my existence, sexual orientation is one additional aspect of my personality, like having dark eyes instead blue ones, being right-handed instead of being left-handed, or possessing a better aptitude for mathematics than for foreign languages. It is just another aspect of that enormous set of personal characteristics than make up an individual.

I worked a lot for gay liberation ever since I discovered that a social movement with that objective existed. I participated on working teams in Puerto Rico when I was a visiting professor in that country. What’s more, I tried to organize a group in Colombia, was a member of the first associations, presented papers in psychiatry and psychology congresses and agreed with the efforts to accomplish integration of this minority into the society. It was not an easy task, but neither were the other tasks that I had undertaken throughout my life. None of the tasks that I self-imposed were easy.

However, I was also different because of many other things, not only for matters of sexual orientation, but also for taking life seriously, for agonizing so much over human misery and the pain of others, for thinking that a utopist society could be organized in the tropic with no one’s help but a group of idealistic youngsters (*Walden Tres*, 1979, and in the real non-utopist world as the Horcones community of Mexico was able to organize). I was different for thinking that good things were going to last forever, that my friends were

going to be life-long friends, that nations could find convergent points, that people were solidary and respectful towards others and that the future in store for my son and my grandson was going to be much better than the life I had lived. I was an optimistic radical although every day I found arguments that contradicted my positive and optimistic ideas. Humankind was much less rational and logical than what I had wished. The ones who consider that humans are rational animals do not know history, Bertrand Russell once said.

FAMILY CONTEXT

My father, an extremely intelligent man, hard working, headstrong, and demanding, influenced my immediate family. As for my mother, she was a sweet and solidary woman who could have become a great poet. I am the oldest of five siblings, the second in the family, Enrique, is an endocrinologist doctor, the third one, Alfredo, is a psychologist dedicated to psychobiology, the next one, Olga, is a linguistic researcher on indigenous languages, and the youngest, Martha, is an expert in international politics. This is a family of people that take their work seriously and know that it is mandatory to be perseverant, obstinate and willful if one wishes to accomplish something important in life.

All this also applies to the succeeding generations. David, my son, studied physics and holds a Ph.D. in Astrophysics from the University of California at Berkeley. He works for NASA in California. My wife Ana Lucia dedicated part of her life to anthropology. My nieces and nephew follow the tradition initiated by my generation of working, working, working, and also of not taking money seriously, nor power or status, being blind to the differences of social classes and gender. They are also tolerant of diverse ideas (as long as they are with ours), and think that they could change the world based on effort and intelligence.

There is no doubt that this is a complex family context. I am very proud of my son David, my grandson Alejandro, my daughter-in-law Debi, my brothers and sisters and my parents. I am also proud of my partners throughout my life, my friends and colleagues, my collaborators and of my students on both sides the Atlantic Ocean. All of them for many decades have been my travel partners through life.

THE NEXT STAGE

What follows in my life is to consolidate the work started during these decades, and strive for the consolidation of the legacy which was generously recognized by those who presented and analyzed it (see Flórez Alarcón, 2003). Also, I plan to accomplish several research projects that were on the back burner, update some of my books, write about certain topics that have been pending for lack of time and for other priorities, and return to some research questions that I have not been able to answer.

I enjoyed very much the company of the people that were with me on this life journey, my nuclear family and my extended family, my friends, my colleagues, my critics, my students and the marvelous people that endlessly showed solidarity with my efforts.

Without these men and women from many countries and various cultures and generations, my life could not have been what it was.

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