

## History of a Letter.

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### Abstract

*What follows is the epilogue to the book [Fuego de puro amor: mensajes desde la Resistencia \(Santiago: Cinco Ases, 2021\)](#) reproduced with the generous permission of its editor, Axel Pickett Lazo, and the author, Camila Krauss Ruz. It is dedicated to all the executed political prisoners of Chile's civil-military dictatorship.—TH & GM*



### History of a Letter

When I was invited to contribute a few words to this book, I was moved but also hesitant to accept the invitation. My whole life has been marked by the fact that I am the daughter of an executed political prisoner; I struggle whenever I think of my father and the circumstances of his death. Writing a few words for this work would force me to confront an event in my life that causes me pain.

I was two years old when my father, [Fernando Krauss](#), was executed in Valdivia, and it was not until I was seven, when we were already living in Cuba, that I fully understood the meaning of death and, in particular, what it meant for my father to be executed. I realized not only that I would never see him again but that his death had not been a natural one. He hadn't fallen sick, he hadn't suffered an accident. Others had decided that he should die: not for being a criminal

or a murderer but for his ideas and for being a social fighter. Fernando had dedicated his short life to building a more just society, and this had brought about his demise.

In 1975, I was living with my mother, María Inés, and my brother, Fernandito, in Havana, with the community of exiles from the 1973 military coup. ‘La Pollita,’ as they called my mother, was one of many young militants of the MIR who had lost their husbands and life partners and formed part of what seemed to me a group of sacred widows. The ‘sacred’ had to do with the status of untouchables held by these women who had lost their spouses at the hands of the dictatorship.

Growing up in that environment, I learned from a very young age that my father had been a hero, a revolutionary. He and many others, like my uncle Ricardo Ruz, embodied all the virtues of martyrs. That dimension of their lives was reaffirmed in each act of commemoration and in each of the meetings that the adults made to remember and honour our dead.

In these acts, the heroic existence of the fallen comrades, the qualities of their thought, their dedication to the revolutionary struggle and their capacity for sacrifice were remembered and praised; they were never spoken of as ordinary people.

These rituals, aimed at boosting morale and reaffirming the will to maintain the Resistance, also had another effect: in my eyes, my father was dehumanized. He ceased to be a man and became a martyr. And martyrs are always perfect, blameless. They are not human.

Once, a classmate from elementary school in Havana approached me at recess and said: ‘I wish I were like you. I wish I had someone in my family who had died for the revolution.’ She said it with all innocence, like a child coveting another’s toy.

Many years passed before, having returned to Chile, and listening to the stories of family and friends who knew him closely, I began to really get to know the man who was my father, to understand his humanity. These were stories that brought out his character, his sense of humour and his personality. I also learned how, from his cell, in solitary confinement, he would sing to his fellow prisoners to raise their spirits. It was then that I saw him in a new light, and his death became more irreparable to me. I was pained by his death the way it hurts to lose someone you love.

This book brings us the living words of many who continue to walk among us but also of many we lost. It brings back our loved ones. By reading the fragments of these letters, we hear the way in which they spoke, we feel their fears, their doubts, their uncertainties. We see people of flesh and blood who worry about the mundane details of everyday living, give instructions, comment on their day-to-day lives.

Some of these letters make very difficult reading. Many of them are farewell letters written [by people] before they died. What fortitude you have to have to know that you are going to die, and to be able to still encourage your loved ones, leave them with words of comfort and instil in them hope! These letters embody life without a single word of repentance.

As a family, we were unable to physically preserve the letter that my father managed to leave before his death. It got lost in one of the many house changes while we lived in Cuba. My mother jealously guarded a box with the few of Fernando’s things that she was able to recover

after his execution, including his last letter, to be given to her 'in case any misfortune should befall me'. In it he wrote: 'A thousand years may pass but we will meet again'. He encouraged her, declared his love and asked her to 'take care of Camilita and the little brother we love so much'.

Along with the letter were some dried roses. On the petals and aged leaves of the stem were messages of love written in ink. They were the vows of lovers, commitments exchanged between two very young revolutionaries who had loved each other with the urgency and intensity of a beautiful and terrible time.

My mother never showed me the letter that Fernando left her. I used to 'steal' it from time to time to read it and look at the dried roses. I wanted to know more about that young man with the wide smile that I saw in the few photos that remained of him. One day, I copied the letter by hand but lost my copy in the maelstrom of returning to Chile. I still remember the shade of blue ink and calligraphy, the confident strokes of my father's hand.

While I am not comforted by the loss of that precious letter, I treasure the memory of how good it felt to read it, how comforting my father's words were. His tranquillity, his confidence in a better future never ceases to amaze me. Fernando was so young, barely twenty-four years old but, in the last days of his life, he was able to leave us a message as magnificent as this: 'Life is beautiful, and you must live it with joy, whatever the circumstances'.

Camila Krauss Ruz