

Marcos letter to a child

(with an introduction by Manuel Henríquez from *La Jornada*, March 5, 1994)

At 1:30 a.m. on Saturday, February 26, Francisco de los Santos, auxiliary of Bishop Samuel Ruiz, looked for Marina Valtierra at a hotel in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, to give her a letter that Subcommander Marcos wrote in response to the message that Miguel A. Vázquez--13 years old--had written and sent via his mother, Marina.

Briefly, Miguel said to Marcos:

"I think that you did what was necessary, because there was no alternative to rising up in arms, since the government did not listen to the needs of the Indians; it was not interested in the misery or the hunger of the Chiapaneco population.

"Admired subcommander: Sometimes it is necessary, as in this case, to rise up in arms to be heard and paid attention to by the corrupt government. I would have liked for there to have been peace from the start. I send you this letter to tell you that since the armed conflict in Chiapas began, I have kept informed of it."

The young man decided to extend the message of the subcommander to all of the children of Mexico by sharing his letter with *El Financiero*, *Proceso* and *La Jornada*:

To the child Miguel A. Vázquez Valtierra:

Miguel:

Your mother gave me your letter, along with the photo of you and your dog. I'm taking advantage of the fact that your mother is returning to your land to write you a few hurried lines which you may not yet understand. Nevertheless, I am sure that one day, as I write to you here, you will understand that it is possible that men and women exist like us--faceless and nameless, who have left everything, even life itself, so that others (children like you and those who are not like you) can wake up every morning without words that silence and without masks to face the world. When this day comes we, the faceless and the nameless, will be able to rest, finally, under the ground... quite dead, certainly, but happy.

Our profession: Hope.

The day is almost dead-dark as it dresses in night and the next day begins to be born, first with its black veil, then with gray or blue, according to the taste of the sun, whether it will shine or not, dust and mud in our path. The day is almost dead in the nighttime arms of the crickets, and then this idea of writing you comes to me, to tell you something that comes from one of those "professionals in violence," which they have called us so often.

It turns out that yes, we are professionals. But our profession is hope. We decided one fine day to make ourselves soldiers so that one day soldiers would not be needed. That is, we picked a suicidal profession because it is a profession whose objective is to disappear: Soldiers who are soldiers so that one day nobody will need to be a soldier. This is clear, right? And then it turns out that these soldiers who want to stop being soldiers, us, have something that the books and speeches call "patriotism." Because that which we call country is not a vague idea found only in letters and books, but a great body of meat and bone, of pain and suffering, of sorrow, of hope that everything will change in the end, one fine day. And the country that we want will have to be born also from our errors and missteps. From our dispossession and our broken bodies a new world will have to rise up. Will we see it? Does it matter if we see it? I think that it does not matter as much as knowing for certain that it will be born and that, in the long and painful birth of history, we contributed something and everything: life, body

and soul. Love and pain, not only do they rhyme [in Spanish, "amor y dolor"] but they unite and march together. Because of this we are soldiers who want to stop being soldiers. But it turns out that in order for soldiers to no longer be necessary, one has to become a soldier and prescribe a discrete quantity of lead, hot lead writing freedom and justice for all, not for one or for a few, but for all, everyone, the dead of before and of tomorrow, the living of today and always, all of those who we call people and country, those without anything, the losers of always before tomorrow, the nameless, the faceless.

To be a soldier who wants there to be no need for soldiers is very simple. It is enough to respond firmly to a small piece of hope that everyone else deposits in each one of us, those who have nothing, those who will have everything. For them and for those who have kept to the path, for one unjust reason or another. For those who try to really change and become better every day, every evening, every night of rain and crickets. To accumulate hate and love with patience. To cultivate the fierce tree of hate for the oppressor with the love that struggles and liberates. To cultivate the powerful tree of love that is wind that cleans and cures; not the small and egotistical love--the large one, the one that improves and makes one grow. To cultivate among us the tree of the hate and of love, the tree of duty. In this cultivation to put one's whole life, body and soul, breath and hope. To grow, then, crowd and grow step by step, pace by pace. And in that climbing and falling of red stars, to not fear, to not fear until surrendering, sitting down in a chair to rest while others continue, to catch our breath while others struggle, to sleep while others stay up.

Abandon, if you have it, the love of death and the fascination with martyrs. Revolutionaries love life without fearing death, and seek a life that is dignified for all, and if for that they need to pay with their death, they will do it without drama or hesitation.

Receive my best hug and this tender pain that will always be hope.

Health, Miguel.

From the mountains of the Mexican Southeast,

Insurgent Subcommander Marcos

P.S. Here we live worse than dogs. We had to choose: to live like animals or die like dignified people. Dignity, Miguel, is the only thing that one should never lose...never.