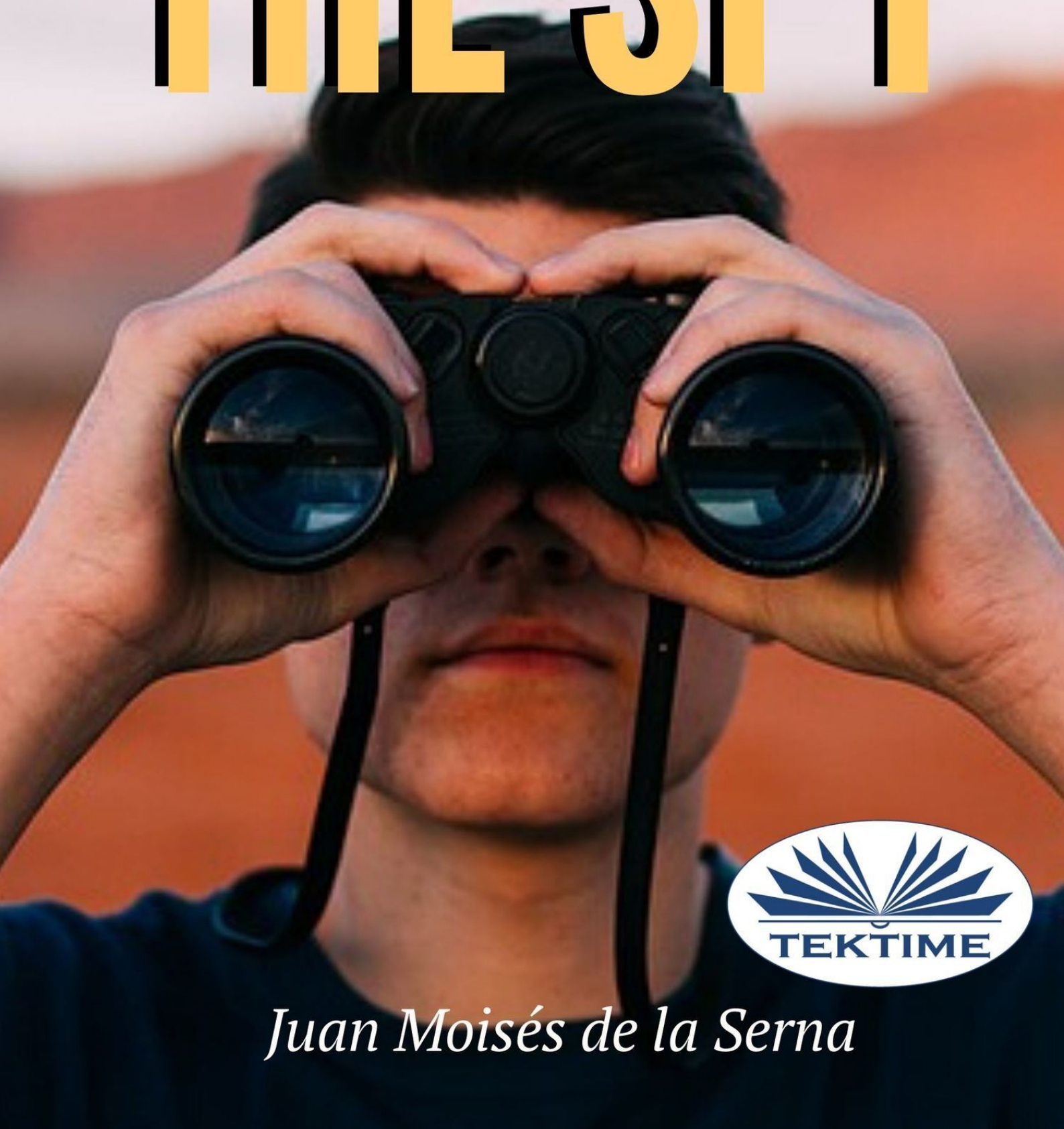


THE SPY



Juan Moisés de la Serna

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The Spy

«Tektime S.r.l.s.»

Serna J.

The Spy / J. Serna — «Tektime S.r.l.s.»,

The silence had already taken hold of each of the rooms in the house, so much that sometimes it was difficult for me to go there, where so many things had happened in the family. The silence had already taken hold of each of the rooms in the house, so much that sometimes it was difficult for me to go there, where so many things had happened in the family. At the beginning I turned on the television or the radio, to listen to a voice wherever I was in the house, and that made me feel better, but then, it seemed so absurd, deceiving myself, it was like I was with somebody, when there was nobody left. Joys, sorrows and sadness, listened in every corner of that home, in which my wife had always worked with such care to maintain order and cleanliness.

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Juan Moisés de la Serna

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SPY

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Translated by Annibale Marsili

Editorial Tektime

2020

"The spy"

Written by Juan Moisés de la Serna

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1st edition: may 2020

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Preface

The silence had already taken hold of each of the rooms in the house, so much that sometimes it was difficult for me to go there, where so many things had happened in the family.

At the beginning, I turned on the television or the radio, to listen to a voice wherever I was in the house, and that comforted me, but then, it seemed so absurd, deceiving myself, doing as if I was accompanied, when there was nobody left.

Joys, sorrows and sadness, listened in every corner of that home, in which my wife had always worked with such care to maintain order and cleanliness.

*There are moments in life
that we have to catch
keeping them with great affection
and try not to forget.
But never let's hope
that is always the same
if memory fails us
the memories will go away.
As much as let's pretend
to try to remember
"a bad air" took them away
and won't come back to us.
Memories and more memories
fall already into oblivion
since the memory as soon as
took them, they are gone.*

LOVE

Dedicated to my parents

Chapter 1. The Memory

The silence had already taken hold of each of the rooms in the house, so much that sometimes it was difficult for me to go there, where so many things had happened in the family.

At the beginning I turned on the television or the radio, to listen to a voice wherever I was in the house, and that made me feel better, but then, it seemed so absurd, deceiving myself, it was like I was with somebody, when there was nobody left.

Joys, sorrows and sadness, listened in every corner of that home, in which my wife had always worked with such care to maintain order and cleanliness.

Gradually I was closing the rooms, those which I didn't use at all, or those which brought me so many experienced memories just by seeing, most of them joyful, which strangely caused me great suffering, perhaps because I longed for them, or maybe because of the certainty that wouldn't be repeated anymore, that everything that I lived there, would remain only in my memory, as long as it lasted.

Even though I told my wife repeatedly to move somewhere else, either because of work or retirement, she always said no, her place was where her memories remained, there she had seen her children grow up, and he knew the whole neighborhood, and that made him feel at ease.

For some strange reason she preferred to leave, as she said, "things as they were", without changing anything in the house, not a single picture or photograph, and when I asked why she just said, "that's fine".

I had been having trouble leaving on vacation, since on several occasions, when we were older and our sons had already moved out, when we were both alone, nevertheless, she always hoped someone appearing in the house, and finding reasons because she didn't want to stay away from that place more than two or three days.

But how were they going to appear? If some of them lived in other continents, and with the one closest to us, we hardly kept in touch after we had that discussion.

It's something of which I still regret, not so much because it was completely unnecessary, but rather to the consequences it had in our relationship. Since then my wife looked at me in a different way, I know I was right, that our son was wrong, but she, as a mother, didn't understand why I didn't support our son when he needed.

For me her loss was the most difficult thing, just thinking to that moment, I can barely breathe, so many years of coexistence, although not always peaceful, there was always a lot of love and respect between us.

In recent years, we almost had separate lives, but we respected each other, we loved each other, but each one tried to develop their own activities without counting on the other, unlike when we met that we wanted to do everything together, and be sharing as much time as possible.

Perhaps it's the habit, but we almost did not see each other except for lunch and dinner, she had planned each evening, a different activity, sometimes going out with friends, sometimes visiting some relative, others ... I liked to be quietly at home, I had my notes and calculations, without realizing that she had left, but ... when she died ...

Everything changed, now I had more time for my things, no one who could tell me that I had been with it for too long, no one to remind me that I had to rest, no one... but for me everything I did, dedicated so much time and believed so important, for me, all that had lost its meaning.

The house had gradually turned into a mausoleum, I do not know why, but as the years went by, I filled the walls with pictures of the children, and grandchildren, which we were receiving from time to time, in occasion of a new birth or some celebration.

Now I can barely recognize the ones in those photographs, it's not just for the eyes, that's why I have the reading glasses and it would be impossible without them to see things with details, but those faces no longer tell me anything.

How many times I stopped discussing with my wife about different photos, about how happy we were, and the desire we had to see that again, instead now, they are there, like stops in time, as if they were from another life, to which I no longer belong.

Without her, I cannot imagine a past, in each of the places where we went, she was there, in every celebration we attended, she was there, and in so many photos, we were both, but now, except for her, I can hardly recognize the rest of the people in the photos, and ... in addition, there's no one I can ask, there is not even with the one who to comment those photos.

Now they are part of the wall, as if it were a wallpaper, I don't stop to look at them, because for me they are strangers, one day they shared my life but now I do not feel them far away, I just do not feel them.

When I go down the corridor, sometimes I look at the photos that are hanging, they are from totally unknown places and people, curious to try to guess who they are or what they do, but no, I cannot remember!

An assistant occasionally comes home to do a little cleaning, at first she asked about my grandchildren, and I pointed them out on the photos, but now, I do not know where those photos are, nor do I know how many grandchildren I have.

I hardly want to talk, because I have nothing to say, my memories are painful, not because I have not lived much and have much experience, but because my most important memories are precisely those of my great loves, and those, unfortunately, are not with me anymore.

I can remember my first love like it was yesterday, she worked in a bar on the road, near the gas station, just outside the town.

I always refueled the minimum so that my vehicle walked, for having to go to put gasoline next day, and so having some excuse to enter that bar to have breakfast.

At first I had not noticed her, she was a new girl in the village, maybe someone passing by. Her kind smile and curly black hair made me go crazy. I was not sure if she had even noticed me, used to attentions of other men, but my persistence paid off. After a few months going there daily, one day she told me:

– Okay, tell me really, what do you want?

– Well, today I'd like to eat an house specialty! – I answered.

– No, really! You're the only of our customers who comes every day, it's cold or hot, and even when the gas station is closed, then what do you want?

I was left speechless, so I sucked it up and I happened to say:

You!

– What? – She asked astonished.

–Yes, all these days, weeks and months, I've loved you, and that's why I came to see you, to spend a day without seeing you is like taking off the morning sun!

She went to the kitchen running, I think she was confused by my words or something, and after a while she came back and said:

–I'm leaving, this is my last day of work!, I was here only to earn some money, before I went on my way, you have been very kind all this time, and thank you.

–But I... I just declared.

–Yes, I know it and your words are very nice, but it was too late, if you had told me before, maybe we could have taken advantage of the time in another way, now ... it's too late -That said, she turned around and followed with her work.

I could not taste anything, despite how succulent everything seemed to be, I just stayed in that place for five more minutes and left almost running, I could not believe it! I had gotten used to see her every day, her pretty smile and her black hair, and now ... she left me.

I thought, I don't know, to talk to the boss, to tell him to pay her more, I even thought to pay the boss for the difference in the salary increase, I thought to talk to her and ask her not to leave ... I thought ... but the next day, when I came back, believing that it had been a bad dream, she was no longer here, nor the next, nor the next ... until I made up my mind that I would never see her again, that my great love had disappeared from my life, and I would never meet again a woman like her, she was unique.

Painful memories, I can still remember her smile and her hair, especially that hair, as I liked, it seems I am seeing, as if it were yesterday, removing it from her face, when that treacherous strand that was leaking fell out, and putting it behind the ear with her finger.

Although it was not a corresponded love, I have never been able to forget her, since she was my first love.

I do not have any pictures of her, so many scattered all over the house, but there is nothing of that part of my life.

Nor do I have any friends, neighbors, anyone known, they have left this world or have gone to the nursing homes.

The neighborhood is not what it used to be, now everyone is in a hurry, they don't go out in the morning to mow the lawn, nor to play with the children on weekends, sometimes, it's strange to be here, everything is so changed.

I know every house, every tree, but people are so unknown to me that I do not know ... I do not feel comfortable when I go out, even though the people I meet always show me a smile after greeting me.

Someone occasionally still needs me, talking about my past, about my experiences, as if that is important, but I think I find it tough to face the time passing and that my best moments are already so far, that seems to be someone else's.

Years go by, and every time they leave more mark on my health, and unfortunately, they are taking away the memory, the most precious thing I had, all the rest, my personal belongings, I do not care if they get full of dust! Memories seem to be erased little by little, blurred like the mist in the morning, and so many experiences with them.

Someone has suggested that I should write a book, at my age, like it's so easy! I have even been asked to make a documentary about my life, but I have not seen it clearly.

So many things I could say, but I do not feel strong enough to remember everything, and not in front of a camera and with strangers listening to it.

Every time I remember a fact I get excited, since I live it as if it were happening at that moment, but then, when it's over, I have a deep sadness, when I realize that it's just a memory, something from the past, that remained relegated in time, almost forgotten.

I don't know why the memories of my youth and childhood are increasingly clear, I can barely remember what I ate yesterday, but I can do it about the adventures I had when I was a kid, or the most important things that happened to me during high school.

So many people with whom I spoke and I came across, so many who loved and loved me, family, friends and acquaintances, all that affection and shared emotion, and I do not know where any of them are anymore.

Surely they have made their lives, and they are enjoying their children and even their grandchildren, wherever they are, but sometimes I wouldn't feel so alone!

The nights are the worst moment, sometimes when I try to sleep I'm flooded with a lot of memories, experiences that happened in the house, the stories of an old man, can be said, but it's a whole life, day after day, how many things experienced! And I start thinking, and one thought leads to

another, and to another, and sometimes the hours pass and I can't sleep, until fatigue and exhaustion make me fall weary.

At other times, the aches prevent me from spending the night, when it's not one thing it's another, if I stay in a position too long I can feel the knee or the back complaining, every night until I finally fall asleep.

Of course, the alarm calls me every day at six in the morning, just as it has done since I started working, when I was young.

A "my mania", as my dear wife said, that I never left, not even when I stopped having obligations once I got old, but I've always liked to take advantage of time, and not allowing the sun rise before me.

Perhaps it was force of habit, or perhaps I felt comfortable knowing what I had to do every morning, anyway, as much as she tried to persuade me, I always woke up at the same time, whether the sun rose or not.

Every day, as soon as I got up I looked for an open space and did my exercises, a few stretches, to have some flexibility, enough to wake up before washing my face with cold water.

"The secret of my smooth skin is the cold water in the morning!" I heard about that from a famous actor, who bragged about his skin despite his age.

At my age, I don't do it for aesthetic, or for the skin, just to clear it, but whereas that was necessary for a long time, it made me ready to go out to work and start the day, but now ... many times I stay in front of the sink mirror asking me, "What now?"

I go back to wash my face, hoping that I can think of something to do in the day, and nothing ... I look in the mirror, and it returns a face I barely recognize, some wrinkles that were never there, now covering my whole face and not only, I'm also seeing the hands...

I don't know how others are as they get older, but in my case, it has not been a pleasant thing to see how little by little all my dreams and illusions have been diluted over time.

I have achieved a lot, but why? Who will remember me, my work and effort? Who cares now about the thousands of hours dedicated?

Eventually, it's true that someone can recall when one day he met me, but apart from friends and family, no one cared about what I did and achieved.

I can't complain, I spent a relatively good life, I always devoted myself to what I loved the most, but nevertheless, right now ... there are only memories, and on many occasions not even that.

Sometimes I went to the office, where I have so many folders of work accumulated, years ago, I sat and opened some of them and reviewed, looking at the work done and reminding it.

So many notes written with evident emotion, thinking that it was going to "make a difference", as today's young people say, and time has left everything in oblivion.

Years have gone by and what I remembered before with pride, became almost a strange sensation of curiosity, I saw those heaps, and I didn't know what was in there, I opened them to know what they were, with an approaching anxiety, it's sure that all that was mine, but I didn't remember I wrote this, or when it happened.

I was sure it was my handwriting, at least I did not doubt, and that it was in each of the hundreds of notebooks and reports scattered there, but little else I was able to recognize the time spent in that work.

This was when I realized what was happening to me, I was losing my memory, which was always so good, now I was unable even to recognize what I wrote.

My papers were already the papers of a stranger with my handwriting, unable to see any kind of order among such a folder.

It made me frequently so angry that I threw the folders on the floor, and ... I do not know ... I tried to make it not so ... but everything was useless, and the feeling of despair invaded me, making me believe that life doesn't do any good..

After a while, when I made me feel calm, I picked up paper for paper, and without knowing why, I put them where I thought it was their place, without being able to even remember what they contained, I just managed to classify them according to the date that appeared in each of those manuscripts in their upper right side, as strenuous as it was this task, I didn't leave it until putting together that puzzle, although I couldn't put everything in a chronological order, at least together according to every year.

I have not returned there in a very long time, it makes me angry! So many hours of work between those four walls, those papers that I no longer know what they are, not even if they are still good.

Sometimes I sit in front of the TV, even when is off, and I try to remember some past moments, times when serious events were hidden from the public to avoid alarming them and I imagine what their life would be like, without noticing they were in danger.

They carried out a very busy life, they barely notice the work behind it in order to bring there the sense of well-being.

I still remember the first time I have heard a discussion about the subject, my gifts for numbers had made me stand out among my teammates, it was during military service, something that would have gone unnoticed by anyone, but not my captain, when he realized it, he wanted to offer me a promotion.g

A decision that I will always be grateful for, because it gave the opportunity to do a great service for my country and to save so many of what could have been a painful death.

–You have a gift! – the captain told me that day.

–I don't believe it's a gift, it's a talent – I replied.

–A talent? He asked startled

–Yes, a talent given by the Creator.

The captain completely puzzled, after a long pause said:

–Whatever! I'm sure you will do better service in Pennsylvania, over there they will prepare you to complete something important.

–But, what about my parents? What am I going to tell them? – I replied, between surprised and bewildered by his words.

–Do not worry! The army will look after your family during your absence, that is what you wanted, right?

–Yes, indeed, we just arrived and my parents don't know the language, and although some friends of ours help them out, they still haven't found a job.

–Relax! They will get the paycheck right on time every month, but you have to fulfill your duty.

–Of course, I'll be the best! I won't let you down!, but what am I going to Pennsylvania for?

–You will have time to figure it out, all I can say now is : make your parents feel proud of you!

Those were his last words or orders , I'm not sure!, because next day, two soldiers arrived at my barracks where I slept with my platoon and they took me out of the base where I was completing my training, they took me to an uncertain destination.

Wow, how strange! I can almost chew the sand that the jeep was raising from the road as we were approaching that military base.

It was a particularly hot day, despite of, the emotion of the moment prevented me from thinking about something other than finding out how I could use my talents.

I remembered it almost as if I was living it, and despite that, I'm unable to remember the name of the base.

I am sure that after three years of training there, I would know without hesitation but the passage of time erases what you want and without warning.

Although even the most familiar names have dissipated from my memory, I have long since came up with a system by which I wrote down all the important names, dates and events of my

life, and from time to time, I placed a white paper on the side and tried to write down everything I remembered.

It was a child's play! At first, how could I not remember the name of my grandchildren? Or the date of my wedding? But over time, the blank sheet I was trying to fill in, remained more blank to my despair, until one day, I came to forget where the list was stored, where I listed the dates, names and events that I never thought I could forget.

I still remember when we bought that toaster on the kitchen, and how my wife and I fought over the color. She wanted it lemon yellow, and I preferred it silver.

In the end, as in all things, I gave in to her decision, in fact our fights, if you could call them that, were due to insignificant things on most occasions, then, Why not giving in ?, deep down, Did the color of the toaster actually matter?.

She was comfortable having everything in her own way, although those bright colors did not convince me, but she always said something like: "this cheers the room up".

However, now I am not able to remember when it stopped working, if it broke down, or why I no longer use it, for me it is another dish, like many of those that I find in the house, of which sometimes I doubt how to use.

Sometimes I open the drawers to see what's inside, and I find everything, pieces of junk in some, tools in others, empty boxes in the one beyond, I didn't know that we could accumulate so many things that now are unusable.

In one of the drawers I found a toolbox, I have never changed a light bulb! Why would I want it now?, Despite thinking about it, and after a few moments of looking at it, trying to remember if it was ever used, I just close the drawer.

My wife, how much I miss her!, if I only knew where she is, surely in heaven! But heaven is so far away!

I have no doubt that if someone has deserved a rest it has been her, always so willing to help others in whatever they need, and she did it all with a big smile and without any protest.

She didn't even complain about the many hours of loneliness that she spent while I remained locked in my office working, or about the trips I had to leave for weeks.

Every time I was back, she had a beautiful smile waiting for me and a warm voice to ask me how the trip went, even though I knew I couldn't tell her anything related to my work.

Sometimes I get up and after washing up and completing my exercise routine, I sit down by the dining table, and I wait, and wait, I don't know for how long , until I realize that my wife is not there anymore and that she will not longer bring me breakfast, then, great sorrow invades me and I barely feel like getting up and fix my self breakfast.

In fact, is not my thing to be in the kitchen, since I never excel at cooking or frying anything, only when I didn't have any other choice I helped whenever was asked for, specially at parties, when we hosted big crowds and my wife couldn't manage to prepare everything.

I liked better to set up they able and scrubbing at the end of the meal, and go grocery shopping when we didn't get it delivered at our door, but that was about it.

On the other hand, since she's gone, if you could call it that, and despite that at the beginning I was resisting because I considered it "her territory", now it feels like I'm spending my life in the kitchen.

I have never realized how much work the kitchen demands, and the hours it takes, and also the sorrow of knowing that those were her things and that now she will never use them again.

Many times... I stayed quiet, waiting to hear something, maybe a noise coming from the kitchen as it did while she was fixing dinner, maybe her singing while she was looking after her plants,... well, I don't know what is it that I'm doing, but I miss her greatly, that I do know.

Even when I returned to my life as a civilian, I was still in contact with my former colleagues, worried about being up to date on everything that came out of my area, despite this, and the many hours of study I have dedicated in my life, time does not seem to have mercy on me.

Although the list of people with whom I maintain contact is getting smaller, since some have moved far away, and there are even those who no longer want to know anything about these government issues.

It is true that others are gone, at least I can count another day of life and I must be grateful for it, but I have long since lost count of how many days have passed, in fact, if it were not for the notebook that I always carry around, I wouldn't even know what year I was born.

In this small notebook I have written down the most important information: my name, my address, date of birth, what are the things I should do on the day, who to call if I have any issue...

Although I don't know why, there are fewer and fewer numbers on that list, several deleted, I guess the person will have changed the phone number or is no longer among us.

My memories! How many times I was offered to write about my life, so that the new generations could learn from it, but of course, I couldn't! I was forbidden to do so, due to my work I signed several confidentiality agreements.

If I told any of the military secrets which I knew, I would be sentenced to death.

Well, said like that seems very drastic, but it was the truth. I had seen it before, enthusiasts who wanted to raise their voices and let the whole world know about the secrets of the government they had worked on and even a journalist who was willing to tell it on the front page, and all of them simply disappeared.

Traffic accidents or in the bathtub of their homes, were the official reasons why two days before being published, the people involved simply were not longer there.

It was something they taught us from day one, you do not play with the government! They know everything and don't allow any information leaks.

Even when there are, it is they who take care of it, because they do not allow a single detail to come out to light without their authorization.

For a long time I just had to close my mouth and look the other way, as if everything was normal, and as if society as we know it had no alternative, but it is not like that.

I tried to have my own documentation of everything I did, as an activity record, but it was not possible, the day I left the army, interestingly, all my belongings were confiscated and they only allowed me to take out of the base a suitcase with my clothes in it.

I, who had accumulated so much information and enjoyed my own home since the day I had arrived in the army, I saw myself with a small suitcase and the number of a bank where I would receive my pension for the rest of my days.

In the following months, I locked myself in my home office trying to remember all that knowledge, looking for data and writing about it to put together my own files, a strenuous work that resulted in an office full of folders everywhere, and what was the point of it?

When I entered that place, I felt proud of my job and proud of being able to collect as much information, to order, classify and shape it, but now I hardly know what's in those piles of folders.

When I see it and I read the sign on the folders, I think that will be important, but it has been a long time that I lost curiosity about things.

I guess everything is now old paper, past cases that nobody cares about, government secrets that have been forgotten.

So many and so many lives saved, that they will never know they were, so much work done to achieve it, and the world remains oblivious to the reality that it was about to live.

"A change in the course of history" our commander had told us when he gave us our first case.

The instruction was over after the hard training. Unlike what I had imagined, I did not have to do as much physical as intellectual activity in there, from the first day they had me attending classes of all kinds, mainly languages and mathematics.

Soon I started taking private lessons on a subject that I had not heard anything about before, cryptography.

This is an art, so to speak. The ability to hide messages in sight, something that was already used since the ancient Greeks, and that consists in making variations on the text, either of the position of the letters or of the letters themselves to send the message to its recipient. No one else can understand it without the decoding key.

The Enigma machine was the first and last thing I saw in my classes, it was like the height of mathematical development for message coding.

At first, all of that seemed confusing and complicated, but when they taught it to me as simple, chained mathematical processes, everything was easier to learn.

It is nothing more than making a message difficult to read, at least difficult for the enemy, because to whom it is addressed, it must be simple and unambiguous.

So many and so many read encoded messages, that sometimes I have dreamed of them seeing myself deciphering messages. The numbers, the hidden, who would think that there would be such a close relationship between them?

When I started it, I was so enthusiastic that I even dared to propose my own coding methods, but of course, many before I have worked on it, and quickly discovered my codes and unmasked my method.

It was about making a coding impossible to discover, except for the person that who had the decoding key.

They asked us to be able to invent new methods while showing us intercepted messages to decode.

At first, they were simple test messages with contents as simple as: “Well done!”, “You are improving!”. But soon they were changing, they were true messages used in ancient times to communicate positions, bases’ names or missions.

And then we began to receive "messages from the enemy" in our hands, as we called them, although we didn't really know who they belonged to.

They were intercepted messages, which we had to decode and know without error what they said.

Hence the importance of knowing other languages, because these, unlike those we had seen so far, were not in English and the first thing we had to do was identify the language in which they were written and then be able to decipher the message.

Some were simple, such as French or German, since they have very characteristic accents, which make them easily identifiable, but, on the contrary, others were very complicated, such as those from Eastern European countries.

Although we were clear about its origin, due to the influence of Russian among its characters, identifying which of those multiple countries of the so-called “Iron Curtain” came from was a more complicated task.

Our enemies, on the other hand, seemed to have the same task as us, to complicate everything, and if we managed to crack a code, the next one would surely be more complex, mathematically.

But all that effort had been worth it, we had managed to stop spies, transactions with stolen sensitive information, and even small-scale attacks, but that was nothing in our record of success.

As we progressed in our work, we were less and less, as we were distributed throughout the country as intelligence specialists, to help the various government agencies.

Although we all corresponded fluently, because that way we could share the advances we made, the work gradually became more solitary, or well, more technological, the machines at the beginning and the computers later, began to have a notable role in our work.

It was no longer necessary to perform large calculations in order to find replacement values, now it was necessary to give the parameters to the machine, so that they were the ones that worked for us, but of course, we had to give them the correct parameters to work properly.

That was the greatest risk of our work: making mistakes, which in any other position could mean the delay of an airplane or a lost letter, in our case, it meant losing the opportunity to get ahead of the enemy, see what he thought or how he planned to act.

And all this despite the fact that the civilian population was not aware of anything, it is true that they talked about the tension between nations and that some were sensitized regarding the policies on the other side of the iron curtain, but little did they know about the "Intelligence war" that was carried out every day.

At the beginning our work was easy, the messages were either translated or not, that means, when they are translated they have a meaning and they can be read, if you do not find the code, you can't know what it says. You only had to try combinations of keys until the message made sense.

"At eleven at the embassy", "Under the statue of ...", or "We continue south, near the border ...".

Sometimes they were simple fragments of something, short and specific instructions, addressed to someone to follow up.

Many times, we did not know what they meant and our mission ended when we returned the message with the translation, so the army knowing who had been intercepted and after knowing its contents, could take the appropriate measures, which we never cared about much, that was not our mission.

But the most difficult thing was when the messages had more than one meaning, something that took time to find out, because we were still using the same method, decoding and sending.

The high spheres began to complain about our results, "we had not succeeded," they told us over and over again. We were surprised, we did not understand how it was possible, we had managed to decode the message, as we had always done: "Behind the third tree" or "At eleven in the same place."

The content was the same as always, we had done the decoding well, despite this our bosses were not happy.

Life is like that sometimes, we think that we are doing our best and that that will be enough, and everything changes overnight. I still remember when I had to move to Spain, I knew the language and some customs of its inhabitants, but nothing more.

I had always thought that if they moved me they would do it to Washington, or if I had to go abroad, I would go to London or Paris, but to Madrid? I couldn't wait for it! What would I do there?

A decision that only increased my curiosity to know what a mathematician specialized in coding and decoding messages would do in that country.

I tried to work as much as possible, trying my best, but my work at that time was still rejected by my bosses. Not because I failed, not because I didn't do it right, but because they said "We have gone at the right time, and we didn't find anyone!" Or "There are no troops where the message said!", which puzzled me, and it just increased my pressure.

Spain, what a country! It completely changed my way of seeing life, at the beginning I did not interact with anyone, I rarely left the embassy where I felt comfortable, as I did not know anyone I preferred to stay in reading, but soon they started inviting me to parties, and I couldn't refuse, I had to attend as part of the staff.

I was not a friend of the parties, and less of that loud music of the Spaniards, those songs and dances, I did not understand them because it seemed all quite confusing. I tried to pay attention to

the lyrics, while seeing the showy movements of the dancers and I did not understand the meaning of all that.

Within a few months of being there, they sent me to introduce myself to the command, an institution of the Spanish army. I didn't know very well why, but it was an order, and you know, you always have to comply those without questioning!

As soon as I got there they arrested me, I didn't understand anything, they stripped me of everything I had and they put me in a cell where I was held for several hours.

You have chosen a bad time to leave your embassy! –A captain told me that he was the first one I talked to.

–What? – I asked a little confused.

– Your country is at war! –That person told me.

"At war? But what are you saying?" – I asked surprised, I thought I had misunderstood.

And as a military man, you can't be on the street – he kept telling me.

–No, I wasn't on the street, I was coming here ...

– Anyway, you are invading our country and that is why you have to remain arrested.

– Invading, me? With what, with my briefcase and my hat?

– I said surprised, I did not understand anything that was happening, I even thought that I was misunderstanding what I was hearing, something that I did not want to believe, because my knowledge of the language I had already tested it many times.

–Less jokes ! Everyone here is suspicious until proven otherwise, you are awaiting a war council!

–But, what are you talking about? – They told me to appear in command.

– Did they tell you? Who told you? – He asked very seriously.

– Well, I received orders from Washington.

– Let's see, show me! – He demanded impatiently.

– I do not have them with me, I only fulfilled what they told me to, I was never told I have to present any document.

– Yes, they all say that! They say they don't know what they are doing, that they carry out orders. You are not the first spy we have behind bars.

–Spy? – I asked surprised, he had called me a spy, I couldn't believe it, it really was a confusion.

–Of course ! Or do you think we have locked you up to admire our facilities from the inside ? Until our government decides what to do with you, you will remain locked, and pray for your government to be willing to cooperate, because if they don't...

–What if they don't ? – I asked scared, seeing that this man was serious, and that he planned to leave me there.

– Others before you, have been in this same room and with those same bars, and not all have returned to their country, many have served as bargaining chip, but the rest ...

I remember that I was very scared at the time, but speaking of money, where have I left mine? I have to go out for bread and I don't know where I left the cash, it doesn't have to be far, maybe in the kitchen, because bread goes in the kitchen.

After checking everywhere, rearranging everything I had and opening all the drawers I said to myself: "It must be on the dining room table, because bread is for eating."

I went there and looked again without success, a little frustrated by the situation I thought, "Well, it wasn't important" and I sat in my armchair, next to a large window where I could see a small garden.

I don't know how many times I had run out of food because I didn't remember where I had left the money, even though I had it written down in my notebook, the one I carried everywhere, only that sometimes, I forgot to look at it as well.

This memory, seems that it only worsens, how can this happened to me? I was always told that I had photographic memory ! Just one look at the message and I was able to retain it to mentally translate it before any computer, and after years and years of secret work, I had managed to repeat each written report, to put together a personal file.

My memory ... if I have been able to show off something in my life, it's of having a good memory. Cultivated every day with many hours of study and reading, because although it may not seem like it, languages need to be practiced continuously to keep them fresh.

How many hours have I spent studying each of the languages I know, or well, did I know, or who knows if I still know them.

That is something that surprisingly I think I have not lost, the ability to understand other languages, on television sometimes I put one of those international channels, and I understand it without problems ... it's like what they say about riding a bicycle, "Once learned, never forgotten, regardless how many years that you go without practicing".

Something that has helped me a lot to progress in my career and arrive, strangely, to know more secrets than many presidents, since they only wanted results, and we were a few who knew what to do in each case.

My task as a mathematician had changed over time, and I went from translating messages from others to creating complex models to encrypt my own. It was no longer about coding one or two words for the field agents, security should be maximum for all government documents, and they asked us that if there were leaks, the stolen documents couldn't be read by our enemies.

And from there, without expecting it they moved me to intelligence, well, until now I was working for one of their sections, but then it was knowing all the secrets.

Everything that the government denies or is silent, I was the first to know, and codify it.

There was a system within the system, an exclusive coding for ultra-secret documents and messages, as colleagues liked to say.

These, in no way were to be deciphered, so the work was sometimes strenuous, and the demand even greater.

It was no longer about knowing where the positions of the enemies were, their advances, and even their field agents, now they knew each of the tactical and intimate details of the relevant people of the enemy regime, their family, their lovers... A huge amount of information classified as vital and that should not be available to any other than the authorized person.

That seemed to me nothing more than a curiosity, something like those magazines that only serve to pry into the lives of others, but little by little I became interested, not so much for people and their relationships, but for certain issues that were hid from the public voice.

But yes, I was very clear that I never, never should say anything, since my life was at stake.

It never occurred to me to comment on any of those papers, despite their seriousness, and then I saw on television such absurd news about it, a chemical accident, a fire started without apparent cause, a plane that fell inexplicably.

I do not know how people can be so calm seeing these absurd justifications, if they stopped to think they would realize that that, more than news, is misinformation nationwide.

So many implausible stories to cover some government operation or a frustrated attack, and nobody stopped to think how strange that sounded.

Maybe everyone would rather look the other way, and not ask anything, feeling safe like this, sometimes I have heard that "naive people are the happiest" to refer to when you ignore what is happening around you, that gives you a False feeling of happiness.

Hundreds and hundreds of interventions on American soil with the same result, "Neutralized Agent".

At first I did not know what it meant, but it became clear to me that neutralized meant eliminated, because when that word appeared in the reports, there were no more news of that agent again.

All the spies were classified, and we received periodic reports of their follow-up, what they did, who they talked to, who they had relationships with ... until one day, they were neutralized, and from there nothing.

Sometimes reading the newspaper that they left on the porch every morning, I started to think if what I read would be true or not. Some news seems so false, I wondered if it was a government thing.

Although I have been disconnected from all that for some time since I retired, I am sure that the government has continued to do what it believes is best for the country, or at least we were always told so, "Freedom is not something that you have by right, it is something that is achieved by force", from time to time our superior in the academy reminded us.

At first, after I retired, I cut the most absurd news from the newspapers, an oil platform sunk by a tsunami, a gas explosion in an Alaska region ... unconnected things, which make no sense whatsoever, and I tried to guess what had really happened.

When I was active, I didn't have to guess, I knew, exactly who had done what, how many dead, and how it was justified. And as absurd as the news that covered that was, no one seemed to wonder about the truth of what happened, even the relatives of the deceased were "at ease" with the "official version", without questioning anything.

A few months after I retired, I had so many cuts, and so little idea of what really happened that I abandoned it, since it was impossible to know for sure what was behind each news, or if any or several of them were related.

Now, when I read the newspaper with those kind of news, which are clearly absurd, I simply smile and wonder what the government will have done this time?.

In fact, I have noticed something strange with all those spy stories, I understand that it was necessary to keep the enemy under control, but sometimes I think that, if there were no real threats at one time, strangely our government intervened to "stir things up" and the others must answer.

I do not understand much the sense of losing the peace and tranquility that a calm season can offer, but it seems that to someone at the high spheres, that seemed boring, because at that time they always took advantage to annoy the enemy and make him react.

Many and many stories not always with a good ending, that made me wonder if there were other interests behind, the army arm dealers are always the most interested in the government being one way or another on alert, intervening in small or large wars; but then there are the military, who would have no reason to exist in a peaceful country; and then the politicians, who often base their discourse on patriotic sentiment, against the enemies, without them, what would they say?, or how would they justify the expenses?

Each and every one of them wanted one thing, to have a high level of action and intervention against the enemies, although this was changing over the years.

Allied countries became strategic objectives, new enemies arose, and paradoxically, enemy countries of a lifetime, became key allies in the area.

Despite my access to information, I couldn't see the whole equation and understand the movements involved. There was a lot that escaped me, although I had more information than any of the generals of my government.

Be that as it may, if it were a chess board, it had gone from being a simple pawn, to being a tower, a safe place for government secrets, but far from the central figures of the board, the ones that really make the decision... And speaking of chess, with this memory issue, I don't know how I can manage to play every day.

They had forced me to learn to play chess, a strange game at first, but that helped me to have an agile mind, which suited me very well with mathematics.

But in a short time I had no opponent to beat, and the others got tired of playing because they always lost, so I had to learn to play against myself.

A board game for two, only for one, which created a small problem for me, because when I changed position and had to play with the opposite color, as I knew the strategies I was going to apply, I had to think about how to refute myself. In the end a game could become endless, spending days and days to win it.

My point being, with this memory, it was becoming increasingly difficult to follow the games, because as soon as I got up to see something, and returned to the game, I did not know what color of chips I was playing.

Such is the case, that I had to start placing notes before getting up, such as "Now move the white ones", but there came a time, that I even forgot to write those notes, so I stayed blank, looked and looked at the board, trying to guess what chips I had to play, and I even had a hard time thinking about the plays.

It was weird, I presumed to be able to see the whole game as soon as I started playing, being able to predict in which movement I was going to win, now, instead, it was strangely difficult for me to concentrate on knowing what to do.

So much that chess has become one of many things that I keep in the house, junk that I suppose at some point served, but now only serve as an ornament.

Many of them I have kept in the drawers so that they are not in the middle, but then, I don't even know what's in there.

Sometimes I entertain myself by opening the drawers to surprise myself with the amount of objects that are stored there, some of them gave me the feeling that it was the first time I saw them, but it couldn't be, if they were there, it's because I would have put them there, and despite that I couldn't remember, either when or where I bought them, if it was mine or someone else who had lent it to me, and sometimes, I did not even know what that "junk" was for.

Not even the plants, which my wife cared for so dearly, not even these survived my forgetfulness. Although she had told me, "Before the nap, pour some water and they will last forever," but even that simple instruction I was unable to remember, and they all dried up.

The lady who came to do the cleaning from time to time, brought me a new plant to "give joy to the house," as she said, and told me when to water it, despite this, they did not survive.

Well, for me it was better, so I had no more of those obligations, the kind that then overwhelmed me for not knowing if I had fulfilled them or not.

I believe that I have already obeyed too much during my life, and that I have also more than fulfilled my patriotic duties, if one could say so.

Luckily I never had to use a weapon, but I'm not naive either, the information I was handling has led some to death, especially spies from the opposite side, but above all it has saved lives.

Luckily for everyone, mathematics is finite, and as much imagination as we throw it, there is always some element that can be used for decoding, it is only a matter of time and effort.

Thus, we could be aware of the progress of our enemies, many times without intervening so as not to reveal that we were able to read their messages. Then everything got complicated.

After the Second World War, our country assumed a relevant role worldwide, we were no longer a country that only limited ourselves to guarding our borders, now we maintained world peace, and our work got complicated, so much that they sent me to Europe to work from there, because that was the greatest political interest of our country at that time.

The Nazi threat had put the intelligence of all European countries in check, but especially ours, despite the distance, something I did not fully understand until I got there.

At the time, no one had noticed the real danger of that popular movement, or everything that had happened afterwards, and it couldn't be repeated.

That is why they sent me there, to study everything I could about the advances in codification of the Europeans, who strangely had come a long way in recent years, something that I could observe over time, how great technological advances occur in times of war and not only in terms of armament development concerns.

I do not know what it is, the need to survive or something else, but the progress when there is imminent danger is evident, and nothing better than Europe to prove it, always threatened by one side or the other, and yet, look how They have progressed leaving their competitors behind and becoming world leaders in many fields, despite the fact that they practically had to rebuild their nation from their foundations after World War II.

So, they sent me to Europe, as a diplomat, cultural attaché with a mission, to learn from our allies, which is what the Europeans were called at that time, in return, from our government they would receive tactical assistance, so that they could rebuild their cities and towns.

At first everything went well, but what am I saying?!, Well, removing the incident in Spain, from which I learned to take nothing for granted and cover my back very well. Someone had tried to get me out of there, and I hadn't even noticed it. False instructions that I had never seen before had put me behind bars waiting for a military trial.

Luckily, in those troubled times, not everyone thought I was a traitor, and with help from inside they managed to free me and took me out of the country, with the promise of never returning under penalty of death.

"An exile is better than death," I thought, but they had left me on the French border without knowing what to do.

That was not much safer than the country where I came from, so I had to look for some kind of embassy or military base, from where I could communicate with my command, to give signs of life and request instructions.

As I could, and after many hardships, I finally got to England and I felt at home there.

Already at the border I was able to show my papers and they treated me very well, at first they sent me to a nearby military base, to corroborate my story, but when they were sure that I was who I said I was, everything was easier.

Chapter 2. The Farewell

I had not yet reached thirty, when one of the strangest events of my life happened. I remember it perfectly, because that year we had to work non-stop for the most relevant historical event that has happened to the American people, the arrival of man on the Moon.

An event that changed the conception of what until then we knew about the universe, now seemed to be all closer, accessible, so that in a few years time we could colonize that neighboring star.

How naive on our behalf! So many hours of television broadcasting debates between journalists and intellectuals about what we should do there, what it meant to be the first step in the colonization of other planets, both talking and making plans, for nothing.

There were even those who sold moon plots, so that when colonized one could have their place there, and now, after a few decade, What about all that?, nothing, because nothing was real, not even the technicians of that time believed in everything that was said, now it seems that there is no interest in colonizing the moon anymore.

At that time I was very far from my country, in an undercover mission, but instead of being in the field of the enemy, it was within the territory of our allies.

My mission was to discover, copy and forward technological advances, referring to the encoding and decoding of messages, that is, the art of encryption, for which I was authorized to use any method within my reach.

I will not say that I did not do it, because my bosses wanted results, but it was always justified, so some scientists disappeared during their vacations, or had to suffer the kidnapping of a relative to get them to cooperate. Nothing nice, but work is work!

I was not in charge of that part, just of asking the questions and validating the knowledge that these scientists gave me.

And then they were released, because once we have discovered their keys, it didn't matter what they did.

Although more than one had to be visited again, because they developed different keys after being trapped, to continue hiding their messages....

In the meantime and in order to remain undercover, I had a second life as a university professor, which allowed me to access libraries and approach other professors, being updated with them latest work and informed of what they knew about other scientists have discovered, anything of interest to me.

Without knowing the rest of the faculty served as my ears, in case they found any scientist had made any type of discovery, then without anyone knowing, I visited them in order to get the information out of them.

At that time, I had even acquired a certain reputation in the world of chess, but only in friendly games, since I tried not to appear in public events that could discover my identity, in case I had to change my destination, so that nobody could recognize me.

Despite that, some universities they used to call me to give a lecture from time to time, and after this, I used to play two chess games with those who were supposed to be the best in that institution.

To tell the truth, I used to win the first game without a problem, and the second one, I would not say I let them win, but I did not want to leave the institution that had invited me in a bad position.

And when no one saw me, I sent the corresponding report of my progress weekly, as well as the information I had obtained from those scientists who managed to cooperate.

Everything seemed simple, and one could already say that I was an expert in it, when a new destination arrived, Israel.

At first I was surprised, I had no previous idea, at no time they had suggested or asked me anything, so I asked to confirm the instructions, it was not the first time I had received false instructions, due to my position and handling of the delicate information that I always had in my hands.

I had to learn to be cautious just in case, as they say, since on more than one occasion I had fallen into someone's trap, as it happened in Spain, and that despite the time elapsed, I couldn't find out who wanted to make damage me so bad back then.

After confirming the instructions, I got rid of the support team, the one that was in charge of doing the dirty work, kidnapping and extortion, and I took my suitcase to an uncertain destination, a British colony that had few signs of progress.

At first I thought that it was some kind of punishment, although I did not understand the reason, it did not seem to me that I had done a bad job at any time, although it was not the first time that those who bothered or did not perform their function well were sent to an inhospitable destiny from which they almost never returned.

I did not know where I was going, I only knew it was desert, quite the opposite of what I had enjoyed so far, with mild summers and rainy winters, but in any case a pleasant temperature, but the desert!

I had left my professorship at the university, my privileged position, that kind of comfortable life I had, and everything to go to a desert, I did not understand! But orders are orders! And you always have to be willing to meet them.

It would be like coming home, well, at the origin of my military training, there in Arizona ... in Arizona ?, yes, there it was, then it had not been in Pennsylvania!, that was surely the place where I found my first love.

This memory makes me change dates or places, and the worst thing is that I don't even realize it, until someone tells me, and not even with that.

I still remember once I was talking to someone, about an upcoming appointment, I don't know what, I think, about the doctor, and I was telling him that on the sixth day of next month.

– Of course! – the voice on the other side of the phone told me -See you next Thursday .

– Thursday ?, I have said on the sixth, and it is Tuesday.

– No sir! I have it here, next day, the sixth is a Thursday -. -What? not, miss !, next Thursday is the ninth -.

– Are we talking about March?

– Sure, Miss! What! Do you think I don't know what month I live in? -

– But ...– she hesitated. -Which year?-

–Well, what will it be ?, from 1984 – I answered surprised of her question.

– No sir, it is not that year! We live in 1990, surely you are looking at an old calendar- she replied.

–In 1990 ?, what are you talking about ?, we live in 1984, or am I not going to know in what year do I live? – I asked annoyed.

–I don't want to contradict you, sir, but it's 1990.-

– Well, I don't believe it, let's see! Who is the president ...?

–Sir, I don't think this conversation leads to anything." I would be grateful if you could contact me with another person with whom I could resolve this issue to end it.

Then my wife put on and solved everything, apologizing about my bad head.

Actually, despite everything, and after cutting, I was still convinced that I was right and not her, thankfully my wife reassured me by saying:

– Nothing happened, she is new! Do not worry that I will take you to the doctor on the day of the appointment.

They are things of the memory! which, over time, you know, it is normal that there is some failure from time to time, but it always put me in a very bad mood when someone made evident my forgetfulness.

Sometimes I spent hours thinking about what I had forgotten, trying to understand how or why it happened.

Although my anger almost did not last, because after a few minutes I had forgotten the reason for the anger and left it.

How much time wasted trying to remember ...!, On some occasions I was able to find out what it was and I was surprised that I was angry at that insignificant thing, but I was not able to control my emotions.

Over time, I was increasingly uncompromising, it bothered me above all, that others did not fulfill what they had said or what I expected them to do.

On the other hand, when I was wrong or something happened to me, I always found some justification for it, minimizing that mistake by telling myself that it was a matter of age.

How different it was now from when I was young! Then I was a faithful achiever and without allowing myself to fail for any reason, and of course, I had no memory failure, moreover, thanks to my work and chess, I had a memory that some even compared me to a walking encyclopedia.

To anyone, the mitzvot, the six hundred and thirteen precepts of the Torah, might seem like many, but for me it was the natural way of life, everything was planned, what should or should not be done, and there was no possibility of error, which gave me some peace of mind knowing how to respond when a new situation arose in life.

Although I do not consider myself a religious extremist, I do believe that I am a good Jew, at least that was what I said to my captain, whom I accompanied to Israel, from the British base.

They had taken me as an interpreter, since my boss did not know Hebrew, because although it was an British colony, that language was not spoken and known by all, being Hebrew the most used among those arriving from different parts of Europe.

My captain had asked for my references , because he was not sure of my loyalty, since they had had some other problem with the collaborators, as they called the civilians who generously lent themselves to acting as interpreters.

But my orders were OK, and although my origin was not listed as personnel of the American army, my report left no room for any doubt, because from the intelligence service of my country they do not leave any loose ends.

I had spent so much time infiltrated in different countries, in each of which I had a different name, profession and past, that sometimes I had trouble remembering who I was that day.

To avoid mistakes, as for the language or customs that I should use in that country, I tried to have a picture of me with the most typical costume or attire possible, so that with a simple glance at that photo I knew exactly where I was, what it was my mission and what identity I was with.

I was meticulous in my work, because although everything was appearance, I did not want to ruin the work of so many others who were looking for the destiny, the identity, a convincing story ... on one occasion, when it was required, I was a family man, in others a newly married or single, the most convenient way to avoid suspicion in the place where I was.

Likewise, I had to use the accents of the place of origin, sometimes forcing the tone to be clear, something that did not cost me too much, due to my ease for the languages and that they trained us with natives who helped us to get rid of the accent.

Hardly anybody knew anything about my true self or my past, since we changed partners in each mission and one of the rules was not to provide personal information about it, that, sometimes generated a great feeling of loneliness, but it was necessary for the work I was doing.

I was born in Poland, from an Orthodox Jewish family, that had allowed me to have ease in languages, because several were spoken in my house. Since childhood my mother insisted that I learn, British and French.

Although I did not understand why they wanted me to learn those languages from places I had not even heard of, that allowed me at ten years of age to master four languages, the previous two, plus Hebrew and of course Polish.

Later I became interested in Russian and Spanish, the truth is that possibly having started from a very young age to study different languages has made it easier for me to expand my knowledge.

Sometimes they have asked me if I don't get confused with so many languages and I tell them that for me it is something natural, that I do not have to do anything, when in a conversation in British someone asks me something in French, for example, I understand and I can answer without problems. An advantage in my life that opened many doors for me, and that allowed me to arrive to Israel.

My orders were always the same, to discover new coding codes and to send them to the command, and for the shipment to be safe I had developed a particular code, it was a family code, or rather referred to the family.

I was supposed to write home, commenting on my trip and asking for a relative, and according to who I was asking for, they could tell if I had found something or not. It was a very simple key, but thanks to that difficult to decipher, because for anyone who could see it, it was nothing more than a letter to a relative, of the many sent by the soldiers.

When I managed to get someone's code, then I did a special shipment, a small tourist gift wrapped in newspaper, and in it, indicated with invisible ink, the characters that formed the decoding key of the message discovered.

At the beginning the untraceable ink seemed complicated to transport, because it needed to be carried in a small bottle, which wasn't always easy, but then, and following old methods I learned how to do it with lemon juice. One spot on the paper, you couldn't see it or smell it, but when you hold it against the light, in front of a candle or a lamp it leaves an unequivocal signal of where the acid has been poured.

The intelligence training included a multitude of methods to receive and send all kinds of information, either together with objects or within them, of course I always expected that the one to whom it was sent to knew what to do when receiving it in order to interpret it correctly, and thus avoid misunderstandings or that the information submitted was lost, a method I used wherever they sent me to.

In England they had welcomed me, surprised at my problems in Spain, and surprised at my abilities to get there, so they told me.

After communicating with my command and waiting for a response for days, I was commissioned to be an assistant to a captain who should check the troops in one of the colonies near Egypt.

At first the idea seemed good to me, assuming I would have little work, because I did not know Arabic as a language, but when they told me that I was going to Israel, even my legs shook.

It's not that I am a radical, but I was raised as orthodox, and for us, it's like ... I don't know, like the Lincoln Memorial to the American people.

It is something so desired, that I couldn't imagine it, besides that would give me the opportunity to dust off my Hebrew, that since I had left my parents in America, I had not used it again, well, neither that language nor the Polish. I had not found myself in any situation to practice it.

A few days later we were in Israel, the captain, although a little insistent, took me from here to there, examining each checkpoint, and questioning every Jew who crossed the street.

I didn't know very well what he wanted or what he was looking for, but sometimes it became a tense situation, especially when I was questioned in Hebrew why I served these gentlemen.

I limited myself to being a translator, and asking them to answer the questions, even when one seemed out of place.

My captain sometimes wanted to intimidate those people, prove that he was the boss, or at least he gave me that impression.

But in the afternoon, I was free, my captain barely left the base, if it was not with an escort, he almost always spent resting as he liked, he couldn't stand the weather, so in his rooms it was where he better was.

On the other hand, whenever I had the opportunity, I left that place to be with the people and to walk through those lands, it seemed so strange to be there!

I was once in my thoughts when I suddenly heard by my side:

– What?!, aren't you coming with your escort?

– What escort? – I asked a little surprised by his words.

– How do you work for them?

I turned around and found an older man with a long beard dressed in black from head to toe, he was certainly a rabbi or at least he seemed so.

– Excuse me sir, it's my job!

– And why do you do this job? There are others more worthy! – Excuse me, but that's how I feed my family, I've been working for years to be able to feed them.

– A noble purpose, although I believe that with inadequate forms,

You should think who you serve, men or your Creator!

I didn't know what to say at that time, because it has been a long time since I haven't practice Hebrew or Polish, same time without practicing my religion, regardless the big importance that my mother has always given to be scrupulous with the law and complying with it no matter what happened.

Looking up, I could see that the man had left without giving me the opportunity to respond, perhaps because he already knew the answer.

I was thoughtful wandering the streets aimlessly, I just wanted to clarify some ideas, that man had raised a single question, but for me it wasn't an easy matter.

After walking for a while I sat in a chair under the shade of a canvas that served as a sunshade in a cafeteria.

– What's it gonna be! – That young man told me.

– A tea, very cold, please! – I answered.

Soon he brought it to me and I was stirring the sugar with the spoon that he had added to sweeten it, while thinking about the words of that stranger.

If someone saw me with these military looks, they wouldn't recognize me. The first thing I had to do to when I entered the army was to shave my hair, especially symbolic was when they cut my Payot, those ringlets that following the Mitzvah, had never been cut off, thus losing my distinctive identity, thankfully my parents never saw me like this! They thought I would become someone important, not for men but for the Creator.

My mother always talked to me about how essential it was to fulfill our duties at all times, that they were always watching us, and that whatever happened, I should never lose the protection from above.

So many stories she had told me, how far in the past they seemed now! It could almost be the life of another person, where all those hours of study and discussion with other classmates or with a rabbi about the Talmud remained?, yes, that was one of my favorite things to do, to question everything and try to refute the rest with arguments.

Since I had entered the army everything had been different, my past life had been so far behind, always trying to fit in, not showing that I had a family and an origin so different from the rest, and instead now in Jerusalem, everything seemed that made some kind of sense.

Who knew I would be in these lands ?, treading where our ancestors did, where the history of our people was written, and instead, how unknown everything was to me, and how strange I felt!

I ran the palm of my hand over my face, and I was shaved, as the ordinances commanded, but that face did not show my true image, the one I had been educated to have, instead I now saw other Jews pass by respecting the Mishnah, Jewish laws, with the essential kippa, while those who come from Europe distinguished themselves by also wearing black caftan and steimel (a fur cap), and me, wearing only that military uniform of British regular.

I was absorbed in those thoughts when two women passed in front of me, one of them, I think after looking at me, she smiled.

I did not give more importance, but coming out of that moment of my self-absorption I got up and following an inexplicable internal impulse, I greeted them:

– Good afternoon ladies! Can you tell me what time it is?

–Ladies? They said laughing. What is the watch on the wrist for?

I just said the first thing that passed my mind and looked at it saying at the same time:

–Well, it is not working!

One of them took my hand and raising it to have a look at it said:

–Looks like is working now!

–But... thanks! –I managed to say, before they both left laughing.

I felt so strange, I didn't quite understand why I had stood up in front of them, and with an excuse as bad as that.

So many years of service and I had forgotten a part of me, the family man, my family. We all have the obligation to form one, in order to pass our knowledge and the lessons received to the new generations.

But the army had absorbed me so much and for so long, I barely limited myself to doing my job and nothing else.

But those women, I don't know! That incident had awakened something inside me, or maybe it was tea, or maybe that city.

I found myself very, very lost.

Of course, I didn't know everything I know now, if I had known then, I would have preferred to go back to the United States, or even to England.

At least there I would have had a different life, not better, but possibly it would have been easier.

In England I would have recovered my classes at the University; In the US, they would have put me in charge of some intelligence or logistic support center, where they valued my years of experience, but staying in Israel was the most risky and strange thing that could have happened to me, and it happened to me.

After so many years, I can see how the circumstances began to lead me towards my destiny, if you could say so! At least that is what a non-believer can think, now with time, I am sure they guided my steps to fulfill a mission.

How different everything looks with the passage of time! So much nonsense done, so much wasted time when not trusting the Creator!

Now when I see a young man dressed as a military pass by, I feel sorry for him! So excited, so eager, and so lost, he doesn't know what his future will hold for him.

Very few from all those who get enlisted make a career in the end, they stayed a few years and a little more, some remain five or six years and that's it, and the rest leave it without thinking about it, although they have nowhere to go.

Even the army, when they have been some years, they discard them, especially for certain outposts, since the reflexes and enthusiasm that they show at the beginning are lost over the years.

On the other hand, in certain positions it is quite the opposite, the more years of experience, the better it is for you!, because you get promoted, the performance you can give to the army is better, among those positions, there are those of intelligence, to which I've dedicated my whole life.

Who knew ? A "simple mathematician," as my superiors called me, and what I became, and all for being at the right time, in the right place, Israel.

That was the place where my life really changed, in every way, a place so different from what I expected, with people who have always been fighting to survive.

Strangely, it was there where I discovered my roots, so far from my land or from my parents.

It seems like that it was yesterday when I said goodbye to them, almost without warning and after having thought about it a lot, during the long journey on that ship that took us to America, and then there, we had to go to register and from there, they picked us up.

At first everything was fine, in that growing community of Jews, they opened their doors, and shared what they had with all the newly arrived, including home and food.

My mother was very nostalgic, she hardly went out to the street, since she said that everything seemed very strange, she also had the difficulty of the language, so she feared that if some authority stopped her, she would not know what to answer, despite being already safe in a different country, she kept thinking about everything she had to leave behind.

My father, on the other hand, spent all his time outside, trying to find work, and although some of those new acquaintances had proposed him to work with them, he had rejected those proposals. I am not sure if it was pride, or not wanting to abuse more of the kindness of his brothers in the faith.

The problem is that neither of them spoke British, beyond a few words to greet, but not enough to develop their daily lives.

On the other hand, that didn't happen to me, my mother insisted since I was a child that I learn that language, which now suited me very well and served as an interpreter when needed.

That country seemed so different, there was a strange environment of diversity, it was not a culture, but a mixture of them, with people of different colors and beliefs.

Well, to what I was going, I had heard other young people on the ship about their intentions to enlist, some said it was the fastest way to get citizenship, or that they were trained in a job, but others, that was what interested me most, they talked about the army giving them a salary while they were there, apart from food and a place to sleep, that caught my attention, if I already received food and had my clothes and stay covered, why would I want the salary?

So I thought that this could be a good solution if my father couldn't get a job in this new country, as it was.

One morning, after completing my prayers, I went down to the dining room and there, the family gathered, I said:

– I'm going to join the American army!

– What do you say son? –My mother replied with a puzzled face.

– To the army? But have you lost your mind? –Asked my father.

– I have thought it very carefully, and I have decided it, I would appreciate you giving me your blessing.

–My blessing? Asked my father in surprise. You know that we cannot use weapons except to defend ourselves!

– But the army, isn't it precisely for that?

–But this is not your country, why do you want to do it?

– You have always taught me to do what I thought was most correct and this is what I believe should be done.

My father left that room without saying a word, my mother began to cry inconsolably.

Before that panorama and after waiting a little to see if my father returned, after a moment, I left that house and never returned.

This was undoubtedly one of the most bitter moments of my life, my father who wanted me to be a rabbi, saw that his son was not following the path, and also that I was going to something as inappropriate as the army. My mother, then, was her son, and I was leaving, practically overnight, without warning.

Whenever I have a difficulty in my work, I wonder if I did well or not that bitter day, when I left my house with only the clothes I was wearing. The rest was all easier, so to speak, I showed up at that recruitment office, which I already had located and when I arrived there I had no difficulty, there they told me to wait a few hours to fill the bus that would take me to the nearest military base to conduct my training.

While I waited, I saw families of all kinds, some proud that their children were in the army; other sad and upset by that; there were even those who didn't let go of their son's neck to say goodbye, but almost everyone came with their families, except me.

I never saw my loved ones again, despite being what I loved most in the world. Going to the army was precisely so that they did not lack of anything. In the enrollment registration I had left instructions to send my pay to my parents, something that seemed strange to the recruitment office, and even made me repeat it three times.

Sometimes, despite all the time that has elapsed, when I remember this event in my life, my stomach knots, after all, I'm not sure that was the best choice!

It was certainly a solution, the one that occurred to me at that time, but that caused so much suffering, or at least I think so, because I never got to receive news from my parents, although I wrote them almost weekly while I was in my training.

Then, when they moved us to Arizona, they told us that I couldn't do it, because that was a secret base, and from there I couldn't enter or leave any kind of communication.

What would have been of my life if I had stayed at home? I would probably now be a rabbi, taking care of my small community, complying with the precepts, and making others comply, answering the questions of the most restless and officiating the community ceremonies, a full life dedicated to the Creator.

And now, how much time wasted, trying to prove my worth, to others and to myself?! So much time away from my faith, believing in things as banal as luck. It has been my particular journey through life, wandering from one place to another, aimlessly, turning my back on everything I believed, with no more destiny than to stay alive one more day.

I have made many mistakes in my life, some without realizing it, others for lack of foresight, but the most serious, without a doubt, was going to the army, although strangely, my Creator has not abandoned me at any time and has stayed by my side leading my steps.

Now with time I see it clearly, but I would not have made it that far. No one could imagine what happened, even if someone had been determined to achieve it, that was more than luck, much more than destiny, they were my guided steps.

After a long time in gloom, I managed to recover my faith, and live it every day, that has helped me a lot to cope with any problem or difficulty, perhaps the greatest in my adult life was precisely the loss of my wife, the one who had become my better half, the mother of my children, my partner and friend.

So many years shared, so many experiences together!, and of course, also discussions, almost from day one, and all because of my work.

She did not want to accept what I was doing and for whom I was doing it, but I said it again and again, that that had brought me to Israel, and that I should continue with it, for me it was unthinkable to leave my job, after so much effort and dedication to it.

She did not like all that espionage and taking out the secrets of others, she thought it was a waste of time, because if the keys were changed, what was discovered today would not be useful for tomorrow.

I struggled to separate work from the family things so as not to have discussions, removing this point, the coexistence was very good.

She had opened the doors of her house and her community, one of the most hermetic of those lands, or so it seemed to me.

At first they looked at me suspiciously, but the decision to marry erased any doubt about my intentions, they no longer treated me like a stranger or a foreigner just as they did when I arrived.

They were very happy moments, forming a family in that land that became my home for a long time, until America claimed me back.

As a military man, when I received an order, I had to comply with it, even though it was not to my liking, since otherwise, they could stop me and even set up a war council to process me.

My wife, for no reason wanted to leave that place, her homeland, but I couldn't refuse, it was they who paid me and for whom I had been working for so long.

A change of government, had led to a turn in politics with respect to our allies, passing Israel from being a country of strategic importance, to lose interest in it "A country in the desert, there so far away from all", as I had heard some superior say.

Perhaps if I had consulted one of those who had spent some time on this earth, we could have given our reasons to remain there, and testify on how that desert had flourished with a modern and advanced nation, which was an example overcoming obstacles.

My mission changed dramatically overnight, now that there were computers, the spying I had been doing for years was no longer necessary.

Mathematicians like me, we were held in the calculation centers, as they were called, now we had to work through and for computers, so that they performed large operations thanks to our developments.

A great advance without a doubt, due to the rapidity of calculation, but that left our work relegated to a mere office work, and from there to home, where I met my wife's long face, angry because she had to live locked up in a military base, where the education that our children deserved couldn't be provided, according to her.

If only she could have understood my position, I had to be there where they assigned me, and do the work that they required me, that is the life of the military, to obey orders.

Every day we had the same discussion about what those Americans could offer for the development of our children, and we just stopped arguing when one of them returned home from school.

According to her, the educational system was very questionable. To me, it seemed good to our children, since it was the only one I had ever known, although she always complained that it was not good enough.

She would have liked it if they had entered a yeshivá or study center of the Torah and Talmud, to learn from an early age to know the Creator, and His word; but in that place, it was completely impossible, because the only thing there was, was a single school, for all the children of the military who lived in that base.

As usual, our children's friends stopped by after class to go out to play, although she was not happy with all that "wasted time," as she said, because she understood that the playing was a children's thing, and that at that age they must be focusing on their development.

Although I tried to calm her down and comfort her, I know she was always missing her land, Israel, and although she was an immigrant there, "she felt at home and protected by her faith," as she liked to comment.

On the other hand here, being also an immigrant, she couldn't integrate, because she did not share the customs or the way of seeing the world of others, even though she spoke perfect British, so she could get a job if she wanted to.

But she refused to leave the home and her chores, arguing that she had been taught where her function was and that of working outside the home she considered it a modernity with which she disagreed.

Although it would not have been hard for her to find what to do on that base, either as a translator or even as a school assistant, she refused to devote herself to anything other than the house.

It took me time to realize how much she needed to be surrounded by her people, in that place that caused her so much fulfillment; such was her insistence that I even requested a change of destination, one as close as possible to that land.

Thus, on several occasions I had requested the transfer, but they always told me "It's not the time", and the years passed and passed.

My retirement was the turning point. I had not wanted to say anything about it, and our children had already made their lives, none of them had followed my steps within the army, and each one had moved to a different place.

We had been alone for a few years, well, with coworkers, on a military base, with their families, but alone in the sense that we did not share faith with others.

My wife had stopped the discussions, something weird about her, but it seems she had tired of protesting, and simply focused on reading, day and night.

That surprised me when I realized that I "lacked" the discussions. One day I woke up protesting, I had dreamed that we discussed as we always did, and instead, the house was now so quiet.

Sometimes I feel so sorry for those discussions, so much wasted time, so much misunderstanding, but instead, on other occasions, I miss them, being able to listen to her once again, being able to see her, so energetic and beautiful.

Many times it has been said that, "love makes people blind", but I think what it does is help us to see better those we love.

Despite the time that had elapsed, my wife still seemed so beautiful to me, so much that I kept telling her, although she had a hard time believing me, telling me that I was jokingly telling her; but it wasn't like that, my eyes not only saw beauty, but also love and gratitude.

I would not have imagined a fuller life than the one I had with that woman, and all thanks to a fortuitous encounter in a land so far from my country, if it can be called that.

Well, what I intended to say – I get lost in my thoughts – on the last day of work, my colleagues had prepared a party for me and asked me where I would like to go on vacation.

This was something like a tradition, among the officers a fund raiser was made to send the retired person to a beautiful destination, either to California or to Bora – Bora Island.

Personally I preferred one of those exotic islands, where to enjoy the beaches and palm trees, where to create beautiful memories that could accompany us the rest of what we had left to live, so my first choice was Hawaii, but in an act of love, or at least I remember that, I asked everyone to help me do something, I did not want a week trip, not even a month paid with the proceeds, I wanted to move.

A somewhat risky idea for all the changes that it implied, but that my colleagues and collaborators quickly accepted, and they were helping me find a house, I just needed to tell her.

That day was special, nobody in the office wanted to pass the opportunity to say goodbye to me. I, who was not very of that, bit the bullet and was as kind as I possibly could, distributing hugs, and shaking hands with everyone.

At noon I went out to lunch with some colleagues, and they all gave me the plane tickets and the keys to the new house. I was late that day, and when I opened the door she was standing there, with a surprise on the kitchen table, she had prepared one of her dishes that she knew I liked so much.

She had not cooked it in a long time, because she said that, "for two, she was not going to bother preparing it", because it took a lot of time and effort, but that day was special.

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