

Comuna de Cumming

63 Days of Revolt

Text:
montoneras,
OPA Kolektiva,
Taller Fábrica

**“The story of a stream,
even the smallest one
that rises and is lost within the moss,
is the story of infinity.”**

Élisée Reclus

Illustration:
Loica
@_manu_li

On 18 October 2019 “Chile Despertó” (Chile Woke Up). As has been the case many times in recent history, it was high school students who started a massive movement in the Santiago subway, demanding lower fares. At the end of the journey, 41 stations were left inoperative and a revolt broke out with the slogan “It’s not 30 pesos, it’s 30 years”.¹ Behind the hike in transport costs, there were decades, or even centuries of deprivation. On 19 October 2019 “Valparaíso Despertó”. From the top of the hills, crowds moved down from shanties to take over the main streets of this port city. The surrounding neighbourhoods became the sites of long days of protests that included barricades and sit-ins. This is the case of Subida Cumming, where the

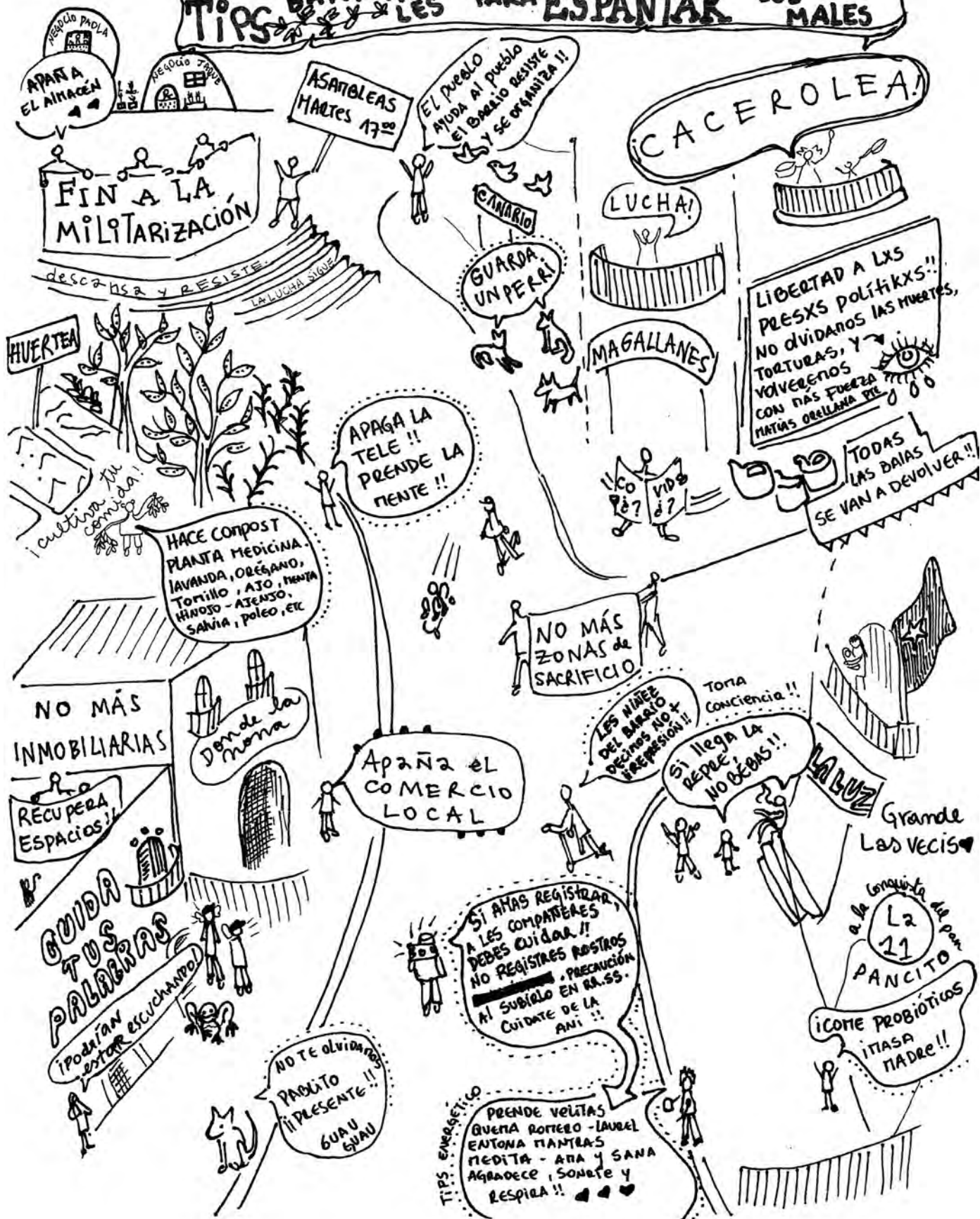
neighbourhood – organized with specific tasks for each block – resisted the militarized police force, producing a liberated space that, second by second, was built and constituted as a public (art) work.

Each work was named as an act of liberation. Plaza Aníbal Pinto was renamed Plaza de la Resistencia.

Cumming Street was renamed Comuna de Cumming, echoing other popular revolts such as the Paris Commune. Beneath the asphalt was a torrent of water that retook its course in the streams released into the street as the people took it upon themselves to seek a more just and dignified country.

Here is a text written by twelve inhabitants of the Comuna:

TIPS BARRIALES PARA ESPANTAR LOS MALES



The revolt

At around 1 p.m. on 19 October 2019 a small cluster of people, animals, and/or things spontaneously yelled “general strike, general strike, general strike” through the streets of downtown Valparaíso.

As the chants arrived at the former Anibal Pinto square, which is adjacent to Cumming Street, the cluster encountered others, others, and others. A slogan was beginning to take shape. It started as a murmur and spread in the surrounding mountains: “No one and nothing is forgotten”.

Little by little, the clusters became a river of people, overflowing onto the streets and squares. Hordes of mannequins, televisions, and assorted items were coming out of the Ripley’s shopping mall, which began to burn, cutting off a main artery of the city.

Then the river became streams.

Comuna de Cumming overwhelmed the country as a space that was liberated from police-colonial-capital control for 63 days.

La comuna

The embryo grew. Its birthing cry was a wave that began to spread. The neighbourhood of Cumming opened its doors and streets to become a common house for the commune. On the edges of the commune and among the burning streets, amid a toxic fog of teargas, it was necessary to resist a compromised justice – exposed in ruins, with bodies shot, blinded, imprisoned. From sidewalk to sidewalk: living, dead, dreamed, inert, or unborn learned together in a sort of open code cooperative-school-workshop-cookery-barricade. A living collective work of mongrels, stones, neighbours, termites – mapped in cartographies, posters, potions, and other forms that still swarm the streets of Valparaíso.



The T-shirt

Instructions for use:

- a. take a T-shirt that fits three people and a roadblock
(we tailored it to fit the width of Condell Street, the main street of Valparaíso)
- b. sew three T-shirt collars on the top and a sleeve on each side
- c. print a flame pattern
- d. write “Gobierno asesino te estamos mirando” (Killer government, we are watching you), or “Escépticxs totales resentidxs letales” (Totally resentful lethal sceptics)
- e. release the T-shirt in an action entitled “Pasarela” (Catwalk)
(we released it on 18 December 2019, two months into the revolt)
- f. cut off traffic with the performance
- g. turn the T-shirt into a barricade – as in the Paris Commune,
we consider the barricade to be a public oeuvre
- h. repeat this action in marches, on 8 March and others
– it can reappear when you least expect it!

Cyklostyle

Sometimes from the Peña Folclórica El Canario terrace – a communal shelter – long parchments with sticky slogans were tossed out, launched from multiple pedalling hands to quickly pass from the outskirts to the central marches.

Cyklostyle appeared in the Comuna as a mobile device for mass production of pamphlets. It combined the reuse of a mimeograph with the pedals and sprockets of a bicycle to produce posters in the context of mobilization, 8 March, or communal food.

It was also a tribute to Monique Markowicz, porteña by choice and fighter for human rights, who in her youth used the mimeograph as a tool for clandestine agitation and propaganda.





Alien upheaval

Around 4 p.m. on 26 November 2019, the Comuna was full of posters, slogans, and some mysterious fanzines left by aliens. On Peña Folclórica El Canario terrace, numerous greenish-gray mongrels and humans were carefully reading contributions by Paula Cometa de LASTESIS, Miguel Norambuena, Gino Bailey, Lucía Egaña, and many others.

Then came an ice-cream truck of Helados York – a well-known local brand; Tuga – a local mime and international star; the anti-riot tank also came while loudspeakers played the Portavoz song “Donde Empieza”: “No me hablen de violencia / como si no la conociera ...” (Don’t talk to me about violence / as if I didn’t know ...).

On the front line, activists chanted “El estado opresor es un macho violador” (The oppressor state is a macho rapist). In that moment, a can of blue paint fell on the anti-riot tank, turning it into a non-visibility UFO. We took shelter in Canario while someone murmured from behind: “Ay, no tener veinte años menos amigos míos...” (If only I were twenty years younger, my friends ...)



Molotov de Plata

The Gaviota de Plata (Silver Seagull) is the award given by the Viña del Mar music festival to the most cheered on participants, at the request of a demanding public that each year establishes a popularity ranking through shouting and applause.

As a parody of this contest, Comuna de Cumming decided to pay tribute to distinguished communards, giving them a Molotov de Plata (Silver Molotov) in recognition of their work.

Unlike the Gaviota, a small metal statue, we preferred to make our own trophy and ceremony: we prepared a glass bottle well wrapped in aluminium foil, placing cut-outs of flames on top; music from the festival was played through speakers and we invited anyone who wanted to present in the style of the purest daytime TV programmes. Some of these Molotovs were already roaming other streets and communes, igniting the rebellious hearts of those who received them.

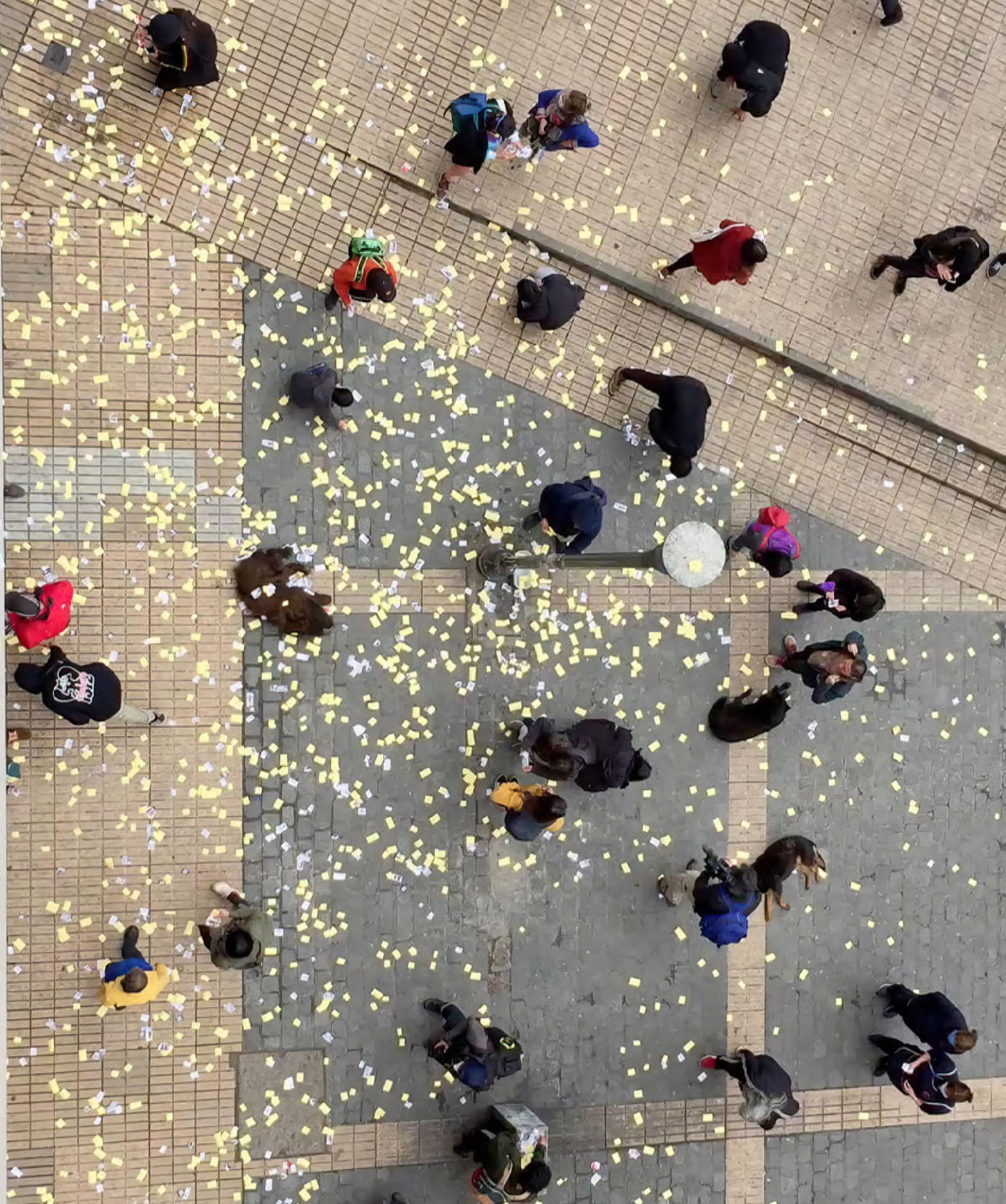
Moika

At around 1 p.m. on 31 December 2019, to the sound of the “Vals del obrero” (The Worker’s Waltz), a group of comunards set up a street beauty salon with the mission of preparing our bodies for the coming year: Moika-punk style haircuts, tattoos on mestizo skin, and graphic propaganda as a visual guerrilla.

A few hours passed and the police tried to put an end to the New Year’s Eve party. Teargas bombs were thrown into the Comuna, which we treasure to this day. We sometimes set them up like bowling pins and threw stones at them while shouting: “Hit and win!!!”

And what did we win? We won the luxury of thinking of our neighbourhood as a beauty salon: streets and monuments could be renamed. The former Plaza Aníbal Pinto – adjacent to our Commune – was re-named Plaza de la Resistencia by means of posters, a metallic plaque, and other signage. Only memories remain of the plaque, since it was stolen to reinstate the colonial order; but the comunards continue to call it by its real name: Resistencia.





Rain

At 12 p.m. on 16 October 2020, one year after the revolt, a heavy rain hit Plaza de la Resistencia. It was not water falling from the sky, but a cloud of stickers launched from the top of Cooperativa Vitalicia – the first skyscraper in the city – thanks to the collaboration of a resident.

Divina Tota – a queer/trans/punk friend of the movement – acted as master of ceremonies to the beat of Rocío Durcal's well-known song "La gata bajo la lluvia" (The Cat in the Rain). Through an open call, the graphics of La Ratattooille, Julietattoo, Danny Reveco, Mono Gonzalez, Niñxs Antifascistas Valparaíso, among others, were set alive through hundreds of falling stickers. The performance surprised the public in the square, but not the graphic content – this was already a common part of the words and actions of the Comuna. Dreams rained down, drenching us with future worlds.

Endnotes

1 See: Not 30 Pesos, 30 Years, p. 30.

Further reading

fabrikafabrika.com

**Porque fuimos
Somos y resistimos
Bajo nuestro pellejo
La colaboración como arma
Para germinar mundos
Y hacerlos lienzo, acorde,
refugio, salvavidas, sombra,
aliento, performance, soporte
y olla común**

**Because we were
We are and we resist
Under our skin
Collaboration as a weapon
To germinate worlds
And to make them a canvas,
chord, refuge, lifeline, shadow,
breath, performance, support
and common pot**

This poem is dedicated to Verdeplomo, a stray dog of the community who died during the revolt in the Comuna and to Pinela, an outstanding community member who passed away in the aftermath.