



Background/Intro/Idea

I've always been curious about why we always worry about the people who leave but seldom, if ever, about the people who return.

It's been 24, almost 25, years since I left Chile. Over the years I've wondered what it would be like to go back and live there. For some reason it always stays in the realm of what-if and what would happen. I've never considered, much less done it.

I've been back once for a few weeks for the 1999-2000 Christmas break and it terrified me. It terrified me that it had changed enough for me not to recognize it. It terrified me how much I changed to not feel comfortable there, if I ever was, and it terrified me that I couldn't wait to come back to the comfort of the familiar.

But time has a way to make you look at things and wonder if you did the right thing. Not as a regret but as a constant re-evaluation of where you are, where you thought you would be and where you think you want to be (it's a mouthful, I know).

I turn 46 in September and it will be 14 years since my dad passed away this December (as I write this).

There are also things that I want to do as a foreigner who wants to explore memories of who he once was and one who remembers what the past used to be.

Four places have been in my mind a lot recently. The towers where dad used to live and the three houses of Pablo Neruda in Isla Negra, Valparaiso and Santiago. It's a bittersweet irony that Neruda's house in Santiago ("La Chascona") was less than 3 miles from my dad's apartment, yet I never visited it.

It is also bittersweet that I've never lived in Santiago as an adult. Don't get me wrong, ***I don't regret any of the choices I made in '94, both to leave Chile and then to stay in the US*** but I'm always evaluating where I'm at versus where I want to be and lately the "this is the place where I was born" has been nagging the back of my head.

The idea is to rent an apartment for between 6 and 18 months and then:

- Visit family in the north of the country
- Chronicle what Neruda is to me now, tour the houses and take shitloads of photos
- Reconnect with friends and people I grew up with
- If possible, find a short term job to keep the chops working :)

It's an easy thing to say but not necessarily an easy thing to do. I keep remembering the line from Poem 20: ***We of that time are no longer the same*** and it terrifies me. But, at the same time, I think I need to put those monsters to rest once and for all.

The older I get the more I'm coming to terms with the idea of being a tourist in the place I was born and grew up in. If it has changed so much that I'm not comfortable there, then perhaps being a tourist is the right frame of mind to be in.