



“Things need to be done globally”: Vinka Jackson, author of *Derecho al Tiempo*, on centering survivor voices and advocacy to end statute of limitation laws.

Rollo Romig

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Rollo Romig: Could you introduce yourself and give an overview of what your work has been?

Vinka Jackson: I was born [in Chile] in '68, so I spent my childhood and teenage years completely during the dictatorship of Pinochet. I am a survivor of child sexual incestual abuse and rape—[my] father. Also, due to situations relative to his own alcoholism and his own mental health issues, he got in a lot of financial trouble, so a way for him to reduce his debts to mean people was to lend his daughter, me, to his creditors. It was not in the traditional sense of what we know as commercial exploitation of children, but it was an exchange where money was the background and a child was being used.

After that experience, which was mainly from when I was 4 years old to 14, I had very hard teenage years. I decided to study psychology, I got my degree, I did my therapy. I was a very young mom. I got pregnant at 19, and I never thought I was going to work on child sexual abuse. Quite the contrary. I made a definition that I was not working with children, because I felt it was the most delicate thing on earth. So as a therapist, I started working with social psychology. I did a lot of community work in very precarious places in Chile when democracy returned, mainly

with women and with youth, [including] youth with substance-abuse problems. I worked with youth on parole, most of them because of homicide or stealing.

Then I went to live in the States. Mainly I worked as a counselor, and I was responsible for designing the sexual-education program for kids, pre-K to eighth grade. Ironically, because of my work, in Chile I had been called by the Catholic Church and the Evangelical Church to work in this kind of program. I'm agnostic—no relationship whatsoever—but they called me because they liked the work I was doing in communities during the early 90's. They allowed me to work with youth and with church educators, always with a Catholic or Evangelical person by my side saying, "Okay, but the Church says..."

For many years, I dedicated myself to building my "nest." I was a young mother, I wanted to have a loving family for my daughter, a place where she could enjoy the experiences and tenderness and joie de vivre I had longed for during my whole childhood. I moved to the US with that horizon. And I kept working, teaching, raising my child and focusing on my path to recovery, or to learn how to cope or better coexist with trauma, its wounded memory so in need of shelter, or just grounding, something to feel less adrift and more connected to the life I wanted to live. After a decade in the US, in one visit to Chile, destiny took an unexpected turn for me. I was faced with making a decision to share my voice, something I had never thought or imagined myself doing. It was not an aspiration to write about what I had lived as a girl, and not even as a psychologist I would have considered such an immense task as writing about child sexual abuse, from a strict professional perspective. The idea was not mine, not at all, and it was extremely hard to come to terms with the first decision which was not to write a testimony, but only to make the attempt and see where that effort could lead. Perhaps "Agua fresca en los espejos" was meant to be, I feel less sure sometimes, I confess, but as my oldest daughter said "if it helps one person, it's worth the try". Almost twenty years have passed and the book is still alive, and it changed my life course, and it was the first step in building a path to change a law, who would have thought....

was the first testimony of child sexual abuse ever published in Chile. It was a suggestion of my therapist, actually. I always wrote and; I had my first publishing offer in my 20s, but I felt the priorities were to finish college, get my degree, take care of my child.. So I didn't pursue anything literary for years, although I kept writing. And when I finished my therapy, my therapist said, you could write a book. You should. "A first-voice testimony about more than just the abuse—about the possibility of recovery and getting back to life". *Freshwater in the Mirrors—Agua Fresca en los Espejos*— was born. It had the subtitle "*Child Sexual Abuse and Resilience*", although I truly

wanted to say “hope.” My editor thought that perhaps it was just “too much”, because child sexual abuse was so horrible, and I agree, and I knew, but I also knew that there was hope if you had survived, had poured your soul in rebuilding what was broken, and claimed life, and wanted that no child ever went through that in the world, so all that vitality -opposed to death and violence which I felt were what fed abuse- was pushing by and for hope.” Still, It ended up being “resilience”, and I guess it was right, if we understand resilience not as a solitary, intrinsic, or just individual force, depending on the victim to mobilize, but a force that became possible and helped in recovery because of the presence of others, the caring presence of others, a few or thousands, but others that enabled belonging, trusting.

The transit from an intimately lived experience to a shared one was a challenge. “Public survivors” were very few in those years, I’m talking early 2000s: one young man who had been abused by a senator, and two sisters who were actresses, all of them abused in their families. They were all known before they decided to speak up against their abusers, the stepfathers. It was very meaningful because, until then, the social conversation or debate was still a whisper, and the topic of child sexual abuse or any sexual violence, mostly avoided, frowned upon or judged as “tragic, distasteful”, unnecessary to be brought up in any context that was not the clinical one, or related to some distant case covered by the press.

My book emerged in that time, and I believe it helped to open a window. Not only for social awareness, but for survivors themselves who did not share their experiences -not as nowadays- and suffered their impact in silence. Silenced when they were children going through the abuse, and silent during adulthood due, in great measure, to stigma and a society unwilling to listen. I asked my editor if we could include an email address, even in a corner in tiny letters on the first pages of the book. Well, the book debuted, let’s say the 9th of May. By the 11th, my email had exploded with testimonies in the key of “me too” from a lot of people, a majority women. You immediately saw a very [clear] distinction. [The women] signed with their names. And a lot of men also wrote, but they didn’t sign with their names. As you can imagine, patriarchy and stereotypes and the pressures of being a boy or a man - fear of stigma, stoicism, “be strong”, etc- were active in the attempt of disclosure, so that even at that level, writing to another survivor, they didn’t add their names.

The book started getting a good reception. I didn’t want to, but [the publishing company] by contract, compelled me to go to the media to talk about the topic, and my life. Some media didn’t want to cover child sexual abuse—I got scheduled interviews cancelled on the spot—because they felt this wave was coming where very soon the child sexual abuse scandal

in the Catholic Church would explode in our country, and many did not want to touch that. Abuse is a tough truth to look at, in institutions, even more so when it happens in families, as incestual abuse. And it was unusual but also potentially stigmatizing and jeopardizing in those years to appear as a public survivor. Indeed, when the book won an award, my daughter—she was already 18 or 19— had to deal with a lot of people asking her, “But your mother looks very normal and put together?” She’s funny, so she just used to reply, “What did you expect, a goth attire, spikes, dark eyebags? No, I had a good childhood and a happy home and mom.” But beyond that, she was still processing the story she had just known close to her 18th birthday. I was, too. Disclosure to our children is not easy.

I studied about modulated disclosure a lot in refugee camps. Families who had gone through horrible things—because of human rights violations, climate disasters, wars—and had been displaced and suffered a lot in that displacement, didn’t tell their children the whole story, especially little children. I have seen it in testimonies of the Holocaust as well. Survivors of the Holocaust [might tell their kids], “Yes, I was a prisoner,” but the kids didn’t really know what a concentration camp like Auschwitz could be until later, because the story was told in parts, progressions. You don’t want to harm their psyche. I didn’t tell my daughter much, and the fact that my father was dead made it easier not to talk much. She knew during her last year of school, when she was 17, almost 18, because a Chilean writer who had known me when I was young had published a part of my story, without telling me that it was me, but my daughter knew. She read the book and she said, “This is you, and this is what you have not told me all these years, although I felt there was something in this family that didn’t quite add up.” She knew.

I also tried to protect the little one, my youngest daughter, born in my 40s. [But] when the law for ending the statute of limitations [for sex crimes against children] was enacted, there was a big ceremony with the president, and somebody told her at school, “It’s amazing what your mom did with these other survivors.” And she was like, “Yeah, for the children.” Because I didn’t say more, only talked about child protection, safeguarding, in general. And they told her, “No, for child sexual abuse victims, since she is one too: a survivor of child sexual abuse with her father.” I was aware since my book, and being a public survivor, that she would probably have to deal with the truth earlier than her sister. But she was 10 and didn’t know yet, so I had to make that disclosure under pressure while trying still to respect her time and talk about the past experience considering what she could understand at that age. Now she is 16, but still is a conversation in progress, and even with my oldest daughter there are aspects I have not discussed. Perhaps I never will. There are parts of these stories that are too painful, for children

and even for us, survivors, to verbalize. I know I do not want to listen to my own voice telling certain episodes out loud. As for the book, so far my youngest has been sensitive to my plea to wait, hopefully, until her twenties to read it.

Coming back to *Agua Fresca en los Espejos*, it was a huge change, in every way, emotional, psychological, even physical, moving from the safety and privacy of my home, to having to see and talk to hundreds of people and reaching maybe many hundred more through interviews in big media outlets. I tried to share a reality -child sexual abuse, nowadays, as we speak- and convey the message in several places, of what are we doing about this? I was living in the States, so I came on tour to Chile and visited other countries like Peru and Argentina. In Chile there were two main organizations working in child sexual abuse advocacy and helping victims, since the '90s with very little support. In 2007, when the book came out, I felt that from government institutions, like the child protection system, or Justice there wasn't much done, neither for the victims nor with the perpetrators. I found out that there were pastors or nuns, people mainly from churches, the ones trying to work with abusers in jail in an effort to somehow prevent recidivism, because most were going to come out of prison for sure.

To make matters worse, the sentences were very short. Only in the worst, most violent cases they would get twelve years, but the average was five years and many would have substitute sentences or suspended sentences with restrictions to travel abroad and the duty to see their parole officer and sign weekly. You would have the abusers on the street again, there wasn't an offenders registry in those years, and frequently most of the abusers, including incestual molesters and rapists, would go back to live with their families in some relative's home. In conversations with parolees in Chile in the early 2000s, several of them acknowledged that their fundamental, or solely source of support "out there, to resist temptation [of abusing children]" was their pastor, especially from the Evangelical church. There were hardly enough resources to support and protect child victims, and certainly, even less to sustain any significant work with perpetrators in order to prevent recidivism. In a new century, our society was just beginning to talk about child sexual abuse, and with resistance. Prevention was non-existent, nor the mandate to report child sexual abuse to the police if a child disclosed it. That would become a legal obligation in 2012, 2013.

But there wasn't much consciousness about it, and nobody wanted to talk. Indeed, I would write letters and reports, and friends here told me, "Don't talk about the suicide rates, don't talk about this, because then the stigma..." It was very ugly. If you went public as a survivor, people would assume that you were damaged goods. Your husband would be asked about intimate, sexual

things: everything ok? Can she do alright? Very, very tough for the families of the survivors. We were very much still in the fog. I tried to reach out to organizations to see if we could do something in Congress; I didn't get much support. It was the status quo. Sometimes it's hard to start moving, but I believe that one person can do something.

So I turned to what I knew, what I had at hand: my book, my truth. I bought a pack of them from my publishing group at a big discount, and I sent them to a group of representatives in [the Chilean] Congress, and I said, "I'm a survivor. This book tells the story of many people. I would like to talk about this, and the barriers of time to achieve justice." Frankly, my story could be a Disneyland in comparison to the horrors that other survivors and children live, but it was a starting point for the conversation I needed to have. One senator who had been worried about child sexual abuse since the '90s, his name is Patricio Walker—we are forever grateful—and two House representatives who were women were the only ones who responded to say thank you and organize a meeting, where I invited other survivors. The fundamental message was that we did not talk as a country about child sexual abuse, all abuses and trauma. That we lacked justice, and health support for recovery. That there were no prevention programmes in schools. And the statutes of limitations basically impeded justice because victims were children, and for most survivors it took years to disclose, if ever.

The SOL [statute of limitations], really, it's an absurdity. At that time, it was five to ten years from the age when the abuse happened or started. Later, the law was upgraded and the SOL countdown would begin at 18 years old, five to ten years—so 28 was the limit. And from that point you couldn't go to justice, not even to present the facts, aware of the impossibility of prosecution, but just to speak the truth. The wall was implacable to survivors, and time passed was used to favour the abuser. But trauma had not expired, and the delayed disclosure was not a matter of resignation to justice, or that victims neglected deadlines to make an accusation. You didn't even understand you were a victim, because you were little, because your development was incomplete, because sexual abuse trauma is an unbearable load for children to process, due to their age, defenselessness, along with their inevitable dependence of the adult world -to which the abuser belongs- for their survival.

Senator Patricio Walker understood this and he said, what if we start by studying the situation right now in other countries? Now, at that time, in Chile, to question the SOLs was sort of a blasphemy or heresy to our system of justice. Many schools of law opposed this, arguing that it was going to destroy democracy and the constitutional order and some other awful prophecies, but Senator Walker was a lawyer, and he was very brave, and persevered with us working on the

comparable law report to see how it could be done. Not “if”, but “how”: that was inspiring and full of hope. It takes one person, it’s true, at least here it was, to make change possible.

That change, though, was oriented to the law, but the law involved much more: being informed in evidence, and an ethic of care. We knew what we knew about child sexual abuse damages and devastation through testimonies of survivors, and thanks to what the psychology of trauma had been telling us, and what neurobiology was confirming. At the end of the '90s the CDC published a study, the ACEs study of Adverse Childhood Experiences, which helped providing substantial evidence of the damage and sequelae of child mistreatment and abuse during childhood, and its impacting vast aspects of living in successive stages of a human life cycle. Also, brain MRIs were showing the damages of abuse in images so it was impossible to deny what you were seeing with your own eyes.

Science was moving forward, and you could see some changes in society as well. For me, in the interaction with children, I saw some progress. Even more so, when I came to live in the US at the end of the 90s. So I felt less lonely and very reinforced in what I was trying to do during my first motherhood, with a lot of insecurities -since I had no parenting models during my childhood- and also reproach or questioning from others, isn’t this “overprotective”? Isn’t this a bit “paranoid”? Wouldn’t this give “too much power” to a child? In our family, everything was about care as a synonym of prevention, but also prevention as deliberate in many actions specifically targeted to send a message of “here, NO”, this child, every child must be respected .

So for everybody, if they said, “Do you want a kiss?” and the answer was “No”, it was perfect. “You want to give grandpa or grandma or mom a hug?” “No?” “Later?” To be polite, to greet others, has nothing to do with being obliged to physical interactions such as kisses or hugs imposed on children. That respect for their limits since the first day of life, has always been the norm with every child, starting with my daughters—the oldest is thirty-five and the youngest is sixteen— and now my grandson, he’s very conscious of that, and we reinforced it a lot. Those “no”s are golden.

Anyway, back to the SOL efforts for Chile, I saw the evidence in science, psychology, neurobiology, and indeed my daughter, who was at the time a law student with her friends, helped me do this study of comparative law of SOLs in different countries and continents. An important inspiration was what was happening in the USA, after the church abuses became public, in terms of pushing reforms to the SOLs -at least to initiate civil actions to claim damages-, at a state-level. We knew it was a different system, but it helped with our efforts to create consciousness in our country, and be more open to the idea that it could be done and no

constitutional apocalypse would follow. In my mind, no matter how many times I hear “this is, or this will be impossible”, I always hear “maybe now, but just wait, there’s always a way”. That kept me -and keeps me- going.

I started traveling to Chile more often, and the Senator had the project ready so it could be presented to Congress as it was in 2010. That senator was a center-leftist, but something that was very surprising and unexpected to me, was that the only governments that supported this motion were the right-wing governments (only two periods since the return of democracy in 1990). That’s something that was very hard for us to understand: not to have allies in political forces that had always advocated for human rights, or during two periods with a woman president, Mrs. Michelle Bachelet, who was a medical doctor, and a human rights victim and advocate (and later on, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights 2018-2022). To our shock, we found out that an important opposition came from the Communist party -part of the center-left coalition during president Bachelet’s mandate- under the premise that “only crimes against humanity or [against] human rights could have no SOL”. Child sexual abuse was a matter of human rights, and to end all SOLs was, besides, an explicit recommendation from UN (under frames of the convention of children rights and against Torture). It was as painful as hard to process this kind of objection, as well as those brought up by many lawyers regarding child sexual abuse as a matter of the private interest of victims and not the public interest of society. So it was clear that we would need to start working a narrative to dissolve those prejudices and misunderstandings. I didn’t imagine then that this would come for me to think on the concept of the right to time, to make something that was intimate and old -a part of your inner voice as a child- take shape as a public plea, call to action, or a window not only to see trauma, but human time, and specially childhood.

In 2010, the project to end child sexual abuse crimes’ SOL, was formally introduced to Congress. Senator Walker -who signed it along with other four senators as co authors- was accompanied by the survivors of the Karadima case and I. As you may remember, the Karadima case had been published in the *New York Times*, and thanks to that coverage it exploded in Chile, and it is not that there weren’t cases of [abuse in the] Church before. Indeed, there was one priest that went to jail, one of the few who ever got a jail sentence. But the Karadima case [got] the most [media attention] because it was related to this church that was not only known for its association to the Chilean elites, but for its sympathy and support of the dictatorship. The presence of these survivors by the Senator’s side was very symbolic because we had all child sexual abuse represented: girls, boys, women and men survivors, intrafamilial abuse and institutional abuse. After this milestone, conversations with the government—the first period of President Piñera

were at the same time warm and heartbreaking. They were not opposed to the idea but believed that this law [to end the statute of limitations] would be impossible to achieve in Chile. At the DOJ -Ministerio de Justicia- they were convinced that an extension was viable, but “the most you can get is an extension from ten to twenty years from the majority of age. Even thirty years in a very ideal situation. But since the right thing to do is to end these SOLs for child sexual abuse, You must keep and pursue your aspiration.” I never forgot that. Because undoubtedly, we would appreciate any change, but the horizon always was and had to be the end of the SOL. No survivor could be left out. It was a matter of principle, human rights, care ethics and justice. and justice within restrictions: any change of legislation, would not be for every victim and survivor. If achieved, the end of the SOL would apply to future generations, but for most survivors it would only be -as it was- a symbolic change, due to the non-retroactivity of the law. Several alternatives were analyzed and proposed during the years of legislative debate -almost a decade- to find a way to compensate for this exclusion (again) of justice, but it was impossible; not even a constitutional reform or a new text -as we learned during two failed processes to write a new constitution in Chile, 2022 and 2023- would solve this conflict.

However, the government of President Piñera, in his second mandate (2018-2022) supported other measures. The public health system in Chile has a special program called AUGE—which grants full coverage, costfree, to a group of illnesses and health conditions—and we got a commitment from the government to include in AUGE post-traumatic stress syndrome due to child sexual abuse, with the first priority for children, and in time, also for adult survivors. The disposition, as well, was favorable to initiate a first stage, or sort of pilot plan, during a year, year and a half, for a commission of truth, recovery, care and justice -the name was to be defined- for survivors of institutional child sexual abuse, which would include the church and the protection system among others.

Those were very good, actually great commitments to needs and demands we shared. But the government added—it was their idea, not mine, not ours as Derecho al Tiempo—that private insurances should cover at least ten free psychotherapy sessions that could be used for psychological evaluation of child sexual abuse (it can take sometimes six to seven sessions to get a conclusive diagnosis), this in order to expedite attention in a country with long waiting lists of victims in need to be evaluated. It was an excellent motion and everything felt very promising for the period that would follow the enactment of the law. There was an opportunity supported by the Chilean Ministry of Justice, as well, to know the experience of early childhood courts in Florida, US -a project born and led by Dr. Mimi Graham, and inspired as well by retired judge Cindy Lederman- which we dreamed could be also developed one day in our country. Sadly, after

July of 2019, there wasn't much time or opportunity to move forward in any meaningful matter because Chile faced a major social revolt, and then the COVID pandemic interruption. But the seeds remain. I have confidence that the time will come to follow through and beyond. We just have to give it time.

But to me the interesting observation is that this concept, the right to time, was so clear and yet it did not seem to help some leftist parties in seeing that the SOL [should end]. When a communist house representative, almost screaming, said to one of our lawyers that we "failed" to understand that only human rights crimes should not have SOL, I explained that not only in human rights violations children did not understand themselves as victims. If I as an adult had been arrested during the Pinochet years, I could foresee the perils for my life, and fear for my integrity. Not a child. Even with something as petty theft, especially young children don't see it as we do, they see it through their eyes. Children may tell you, "I lost my backpack", not "I was robbed" Not only is very hard for them to understand themselves as victims: due to their age, most of them will not have the capability for such comprehension or reading of reality, and even less in an overwhelming, unbearable and perverse dynamic like child sexual abuse. They cannot understand the crime, the threat, less so if abusers tell them that this "experience" or kind of interaction is "normal" or a part of childhood, or love. Many children are threatened or intimidated, forced into silence. But in any situation, it will be hard for them to even consider, much more to assimilate that somebody from the adult world, who are the ones who are supposed to be the caregivers, those to whom children depend on to their very survival or sustain in life, can inflict so much damage, deliberately.

As far as advocacy or activism go, you know that you have supported different causes, during your youth, or your adult years, along with others, in a sort of collective choir of voices. I did. I took part in social actions, movements, both in Chile, and later in the US. But it's not the same to think of yourself as an advocate, or activist, or a spokesperson or voice beyond your inner world, or your closest circle of loved ones who have been, my family and best friends, the biggest support in every step (and certainly my book would have not existed without them by my side). Looking back, I still wonder sometimes how this part of the story unfolded so fast or so steadily, after a book. I never imagined that through writing I would be compelled to embrace such a role, a public role. And the "public" part of it was problematic, it still is, as I have had stage fright my whole life, since my years of dancing ballet in a theatre, to the years of teaching classes, seminars, etc., where I am invited to speak. But to be called as a survivor's voice and one that wasn't going to be heard only as my own, but also as others', that was a much greater challenge and a huge and life changing step for me to take. That transition was a process, not deliberate

but more reactive in truth: a response to moments that started adding up until you realized you had become responsible for a meaningful and big commitment that would impact the lives of countless “others”. “Others” that were children, women, men, sisters or brothers or fellow survivors who had lived and suffered not only the trauma of child sexual abuse, but the revictimization of being denied fundamental human rights as access to justice, recovery. Or before that, to have just enough time, all the time that was needed to understand or assimilate a terrible experience, and then find the words to verbalize it, tell their story, and resort to justice if they needed and chose to. It was inhumane to be denied something so human as time and worse, to use time as a barrier that left victims more defenseless and wounded, while, on the other side, it would shield abuse perpetrators under SOLs that basically enabled their impunity.

After my book, I was invited to write as a permanent columnist in a Chilean outlet where I would focus on diverse societal issues, always through the lens of care ethics. In that space, I started writing often about child sexual abuse, health and justice (or lack thereof) and time, the denial and the right to time. This had an impact, and some people compelled me to use that voice to appeal to our Congress representatives so they would at least consider the remote possibility of SOL reform. And so I tried. But aside from some women survivors, my family and some dear encouraging colleagues, it was a pretty lonely path. So I kept writing, that’s all I knew. The written voice had been my faithful companion since childhood and that was my main source for perseverance. The columns at El Post led to being invited to speak on tv, radio, and each interview amplified into more opportunities to speak and being heard.

Knowingly or not, many people are threaded in an invisible net of stories of child sexual abuse, some spoken, some silenced, but it was more massive than anyone imagined. At least the numbers said one in three girls, and one in who knows how many boys (some data spoke of 5, 6) because they disclosed less. Probably there’s no one family where in some generation there’s not a story of child sexual violence. So in terms of the cause or advocacy’s standards, these had to begin with the respect for others’ time to allow processing, assimilating, even grieving. I would constantly remind myself “let’s go slowly, because we’re going to talk to victims and to families who have not even faced this, and to a country that has lived through historic trauma, and many other pains, and that may feel afraid to know and speak about this. You don’t want to see yourself as a community or nation where kids are abused every 30 minutes, every day. It’s hard.

Resistances, opposition, are a part of these processes. Even the most positive or promising changes could cause anxiety, even fear (of the unknown). Within the world of lawyers and

judges it was especially hard since the sole mention of "SOL" would awaken the defenses of many opposed to the idea as a matter of principle (bordering on dogma) that made it almost impossible to pursue a constructive dialogue or exchange of ideas. It was thinking of this particular resistance, wondering how to be more effective, more persuasive, that I came up with this concept or notion of "the right to time". The main narrative of course orbited around trauma and its needed time to process, to heal; and the time of childhood, interrupted and devastated by abuse, and the right to live this part of human lives -being a child- stage after stage without violence. But to me it was even a vaster notion in the sense that could be a lens to approach many other processes: education, learning at school, health recovery, for example after an accident or a loss, or during postpartum depression, having the time to recuperate without the pressure of employers or medical insurances, just to mention a few examples. The right to time crosses so many aspects of our human experiences, and we remember and live through our lives profoundly connected with time, its trinity past-present-future, its memories, the history (which we humans write and learn and pass one generation to the next). Nature gives us this. Plants grow [over time]. If you scream at them, they don't grow faster. Things have their process. I started talking about the right to time so lawyers wouldn't resist and end the dialogue before it started. And that notion started being effective, helping the interaction, the listening. We were not enemies, we just had different perspectives and still could share an understanding that time was fundamental for victims to find their voice, their lost voice.

I tried to explain how difficult it was to build this voice for abused children, even when years had passed and they had become adults. The neurobiology of child development and trauma, the psychological impacts, everything that made it so difficult to utter the first syllables of these stories, until growing a full voice, the one that was indispensable to make a disclosure that lead to justice, not just to speak your truth with your therapist or your family. How could justice receive and listen to these voices without hurting, or forcing them into silence once again? How could justice be inseparable from human care in its deliberations and decisions, in order to serve recovery instead of obstructing it or impeding it altogether? These were questions asked not to reproach but as an invitation to think together; to imagine at least, some ways to do things differently, to see, somehow, that an SOL reform was not a peril but a helpful means to serve justice, to protect, to avoid impunity, to build a better society.

The plea for the right to time was to enable disclosure and access to justice for victims, as any other citizen. To be heard, and to initiate a process. If that process proved difficult because of the investigation or the weight of the proof, that was a procedural aspect that would have to be resolved, but the law was about the right to justice for child sexual abuse victims, young or

older. It's not that I got my car stolen and said, "No, I'm not going [to report it] because they're never going to find it." It's that you couldn't disclose or go to the police or to a court because you were a child and because there was evidence supported by science that explained why there was a delayed disclosure in these cases. With two dear lawyers we wrote a comprehensive report about child sexual abuse, child victims, evidence based explanations about trauma dynamics, and the penal reasonability to end the SOL.

Along with the technical arguments, there had to be many other examples, analogies, stories and examples to nourish and amplify the social conversation and support to this cause. It was a storytelling exercise targeted towards a very measurable end result: the change of legislation. But pursuing the end of SOL was a lot more than a law: it was the embryo of a cultural change that was related not only to sexual violence against children but [also] to build or embrace an ethics of care as a basis for sustaining life and relationships, and for preventing suffering and wounds that could, indeed, be prevented. Some we can't. Earthquakes, volcano eruptions, there are so many situations and realities that escape our control. But some can be within our reach, as people, as communities, as democracies: the engagement to support one another, to respond to human needs, to prevent child abuse, or to respect the right to time of children and people to recover from hurt, be it a disease, a fracture or violent trauma.

The narrative of care and justice was growing, people were paying more attention and a will to support and even advocate for this cause in their own spaces, circles, social networks. However, since the legislation was presented to discussion in 2010, and until 2016, we had not seen much progress in Congress. To make matters worse, the year 2014 felt like a big defeat. Just soon after President Bachelet was starting her second period, the project was taken off the table and "archived". We later knew that the main reason had to do with lack of support from some politicians of her coalition.

This was unfortunate, she the first woman president in Chile, also a medical doctor, and she could have made history and left to Chile, the legacy of ending the SOL in sexual abuse crimes against children. It was not the case, although we kept expectations during her four years. Anyway, after the archive's setback, the focus was recovering the project and keeping the aspiration alive. Unexpectedly, in 2016, everything changed. A testimony was shared by a prestigious Chilean athlete –and member of Congress since 2018-, Mrs. Erika Olivera. As a girl, she had been abused by her stepfather, pastor of the Evangelical Church. Recently, she had tried to access justice, or at least to speak her truth and leave a report at the police or in a court. The SOL impeded it. Her story's coverage, amidst the advance of the #MeToo international

movement strongly resonated in our country. The day her interview was published in a very influential Chilean newspaper, I immediately called Senator Walker to beg him to request the project's unarchive, it was now or never. He met no opposition. After unarchiving the project, the stakes were higher. Congress would have to review it and decide its viability or its return to archive, suspending any further discussion for two more years. Time was pressing and almost accidentally, I ended up being the person responsible to defend the project's continuity in our Congress.

It was difficult for me, as it was for many of my colleagues, to understand the objections from justices and legislators to consecrate time as a right for the victims, and secure their due access to justice. SOLs for child sexual abuse had been mostly established in an arbitrary or incomplete fashion, without all the scientific evidence that was becoming available [for example about delayed disclosure in this trauma] since the XX and mostly during this XXI century. Why couldn't we as societies, humanity, benefit from these discoveries and make them a material to build better lives?

Our main argument was ACEs [adverse childhood experiences], neurology, the brain, science, comparative law, and some very precise testimonies of survivors, which are not ours only. [We'd talk about our own abuse] only if a very important decision-making meeting is being developed and we see we really, really need it. Because some people need proof of your pain to believe the survivors. It's weird. I said, if we see this situation, then yeah, we'll talk about our cases. Otherwise, no. They don't need that information. They need to know about the kids and the survivors who have not been able to come to justice. Indeed, they called us to a huge TV program and it made a huge impact, because when people heard the doctor, they were like, "Okay, this is really serious."

By March 2017, the law was finally on its way after the Senators of the reviewing committee unanimously voted in its favor. This was another major milestone. To me, almost ten years after the beginning of this path in 2007, 2008, it was a renewed source of hope. In addition, 2017 would be the presidential election, a perfect occasion to contact every candidate and political party to ask them "Are you going to include this law (the end of child sexual abuse SOL) in your proposals for our country?" Some of them didn't pay much attention or didn't even respond; others did immediately, like the team working with former president Piñera, now running for a second term.

President Piñera began his second term in March of 2018. By July 2019, the law was enacted.

Two major definitions had evolved along my years of advocacy in this: the narrative and that this was an activism based on care ethics and non violence principles. So violent means shouldn't be resorted under any pretext, not even words (and it's never "just words") or images or contents of child sexual abuse "to cause public impact and indignation", not at the expense of of retraumatization. It's not that I was not aware that many need "proof" of the abuse –beyond the legal-, of the damages and pain lived. As if recovery or resilience, or reclaiming a life, or being happy, were indicators of "not too bad a trauma", "not real abuse", so no urgency to act. But the central thing was not to create ephemeral impacts, but long lasting conscience and commitments.

At that time I was permanently working with three brilliant and brave lawyers who were further expanding the legal justification to the law, and along with a small group of 6 people, we would be the core-team for the remaining and most crucial period. Derecho al Tiempo was the name we gave ourselves, and to this day, there are authorities and people who are surprised to discover that we were not a hundred, but at most a dozen. A small and enthusiastic group of 6 to 10 people working regularly, creating reports, columns, sending senators studies, data, even a note to remind them what we –including them in that "we"- were active every day, adding sometimes forty hours a week (including weekends), on top of job hours, to make sure that the law would come to port. I guess it was truly in 2018, when I finally believed in my bones, that there was a movement in a more complete sense: a group of volunteers (Derecho al Tiempo), and a feeling of commonality as well as a disposition to loving action that showed around our country, in different places, by the most diverse people, from all venues of life.

Along with the work of going periodically to congress sessions, the activism was non-stop. Many activities required being there, others were done online. For example, we had frequent public letters addressed to our Congress, signed by thousands of citizens, but I knew there were rural areas, isolated places lacking connectivity in our country, so I called for help and it was amazing how survivors, families, colleagues, organized all kinds of actions to reach out. We were not tied to political parties or any other institutions; did not count with funds. We had to be very creative and willing to rely on one and another. Social networks were most helpful but also The traditional media had very committed journalists who supported the cause and amplified the social conversation about SOLs, abuse trauma and the right to time. We were invited to many radio and TV interviews in prime time, and one major tv network proposed to James and me to have sort of live-Ted talk and we prioritized the neurobiology and medical perspective, so James did it and it had a huge impact in understanding why it was so important to legislate and what was at stake.

Being part of a cause or a movement, involves a lot of vitality and emotions, and being marveled many times at what human beings and communities together can achieve. At the same time, it makes you question yourself, constantly, and examine everything. Humility has to be always present and is not just a saying, it takes effort and is not always easy to admit that we need to review, with raw honesty (even against what we think or esteem of ourselves), our practices, behaviors. Ask ourselves more than once if we are not acting poorly or unfairly, or how willing we are to improve, rectify, or apologize and repair relationships when possible (sometimes it isn't). I say this because we are just human and we have stories, frailties, or egos, that can get in the way. Advocacy takes a lot of personal work, mutual care, and being grounded both within yourself and with others. This means to be aware of possible shortcomings or interferences like pride (or resentments), power struggles, political or personal agendas, prejudices, beliefs of a cause being "morally superior" or ethically immune for being on the victims' side (or because we are the victims ourselves), and "that the end justify all means".

If we deal with trauma, there's a caution and imperative, I believe, to think about how we build advocacies related to human suffering caused by violence, without falling into adversarial, aggressive, offensive means to build adhesion or increase public support. It does matter how a purpose is achieved; how its trajectory is preserved at trying moments, and at any time. I don't know if I can convey this, but it's about respect and the safeguarding of human experiences, processes, a community, a country, a voice and narrative –how do we talk about child sexual abuse, what words we choose, what spaces for air or light in between? To me, it's at each step or task or dilemma, to go back to the question I came up with as a summary of care ethics as a deliberation compass: does this enable care or undermine it? Is this the most caring response now? How can I engage in this in the best possible way, the most responsible towards others and one-self?

It is not always easy, we fall and fail many times, but I still have the conviction that it is possible to engage in activism from an ethics of care. Care towards people, a cause, a community or country, and a team, each person, as individuals who have relationships and loved ones. I say this while thinking about potential oversights of body limits, health, emotional and psychological wellbeing (and courses of recovery, if we are survivors, that can be negatively impacted), while working and advocating for a cause. Countless survivors and their loved ones, and parents of children victims, were most generous in supporting the cause in Chile. That took a lot of courage and strength in voices and actions coming from spirits that knew hurt and wreckage, and many times, were still in the process of healing, and being resilient is not equal to invulnerable. Also, every person had loved ones, relationships, lives that could be impacted by

your engagement in a public cause. I think about this and still have questions halfway answered, that conflict me. Because as an adult, I know what advocacies could entangle risks. But your children cannot make any decision, not informed, not consented, anything, in the matter, and one's choices may have costs for them. During the last period of the legislation, for the time in my life I faced threats that were not for me, but included my youngest daughter who was 9, 10 years old at that time.

Rollo Romig: What needs to happen next to help stop child sexual abuse?

Vinka Jackson: On a global level, I see that the signs are in the right direction. Things need to be done globally, we need to strengthen those coordinations and collaborations. That's a good aspect of the internet and social networks: that you can reach out very fast and meet others, share purposes and make things happen in times that otherwise would be impossible. On a more somber side, it is precisely due to new technologies and tools that we have increasingly seen more forms of violence and abuse suffered by children. Right now, I feel that the magnitude of what's going on with child sexual abuse and exploitation, because of the internet and artificial intelligence, is finally making a lot of people to pay attention, and that has allowed that concrete, face-to-face abuse in homes and in the trafficking rings, become more visible as well. And a reality not "far away", that only happens to others, but one that is much closer and perilous than we thought, or wanted to believe, for years.

Another need relates to being able, together, as societies, to talk about incestuous child sexual abuse. This is a very hard, and elusive topic even nowadays. I feel that too many adults, including professionals in health and justice, lean towards avoiding this conversation, or engaging in the exchange of ideas or notions about incest, even in academic or clinical or legal circles. In Chile, we don't have a classification of crime or a definition of "incestual child sexual abuse" in our penal code, so rapists and abusers in a family –a majority are fathers, grandfathers, uncles, stepfathers, brothers, cousins- are usually tried as any other abuser and sentenced in similar ways. It's not the same. There should be distinctions. The experts know that [incest] is the abuse that shows in its victims the most difficult experiences of disclosure, recovery, very few initiate legal action against their abusers and less will follow through until sentencing. Damages are deep and long lasting, especially in victims of prolonged incestuous sexual abuse and incestuous rape in childhood. I remember that assisted suicide was first approved for a survivor of child sexual abuse and incest, in the Netherlands, many years now, because of a diagnosis of "incurable PTSD" and suffering unresponsive to any mitigation. She was in her twenties. It's extremely painful and complex, but we need to stop avoiding to face the

reality that adult human beings can deliberately molest, abuse or rape their young, and that we cannot remain passive and indifferent. I am fully aware that families can be deeply wounded, even torn apart, by the truths of incest revealed, but we cannot lose sight of the victims, the support to their recovery. They must not be abandoned or marginalized, as often happens, to make the lives of their relatives, close or distant, less uncomfortable or less painful.

Education is a key factor. Sadly, we still see considerable resistance to work on sexual education in schools because of the way that some programs have been [designed] not by teachers or professionals in the field but by activists who, regardless of their goodwill, are not specialists in the pedagogical aspects. The last survey on the topic (2024) reported that 71% of Chilean families can support sexual education, but not in their schools, not even for the sake of urgencies in child sexual prevention. They want to do it themselves, at home. These results are discouraging. I think immediately of child victims being abused in family settings and of course they are not going to receive any information.

One big hope for me is that our country would subscribe to the Council of Europe's Lanzarote Convention against child exploitation and abuse, which addresses the widest scope of actions –and possibilities of collaboration- to prevent and to enforce justice on these crimes, and shares all kinds of resources between countries. Again, we cannot do this alone, it really does take a village.

During the decade and more that it took to enact law to end the child sexual abuse SOL, I witnessed the power and impact of collective action, both local and international, firsthand. I still see it, for example, in the work we have shared with Miguel Hurtado in Spain, pushing for their own Ley de Derecho al Tiempo, and with Child USA and the global taskforce, CRINN, and the Brave movement, organization that was granted observer status for the Lanzarote convention. Sorry to insist on this, but it is of paramount importance. The Convention means having an historical access to resources, collaborations, legislation and justice coordinated efforts for changes, like ending the SOL for example.

I have lived through periods of anguish and hope in this path. In Chile, since the return of democracy, and the beginning of a whispered conversation about child sexual abuse to these days, more than 30 years have passed. You feel the impatience, both at a collective and personal level, because the lives of children are now, and absences in care and justice are not harmless nor ethereal: they are very real in how they hurt and destroy human lives. Of course you would want, I do want, to see changes faster, overnight if possible. And It's not that I don't understand the complexity of processes, but it's hard not to feel frustrated or tired with so much

indifference and no sense of urgency when it comes to violence against children, and this goes to us, citizens, and to key decision makers and authorities. We just have to continue pushing. Together though. Not alone. And we can keep ourselves in motion and even hopeful (this informed trust, not blind faith) by reminding one another that even when it seems or others tell us that some changes will be impossible, they are truly not.

Rollo Romig: Thank you Vinka, this has been really interesting.

Rollo Romig: (he/him) is a freelance journalist who writes most often for The New York Times and The New Yorker. He is the author of the book I Am on the Hit List: A Journalist's Murder and the Rise of Autocracy in India. He teaches writing at The New School in New York City. He was born and raised in Detroit.

***This conversation has been edited and condensed.*